Article

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Remembering Mayberry in White and Black: *The Andy Griffith Show*'s construction of the south

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Abstract

The 1960s situation comedy *The Andy Griffith Show* and its fictional setting, Mayberry, comprise a *lieu de mémoire*, a site of memory, with multiple and shifting meanings tied to history and identity. The series relied on sophisticated notions of nostalgia to invent a seemingly traditional yet unconventional American South. Although its lead character was a Southern sheriff during the volatile Civil Rights Movement, Mayberry eschewed racial tension by having no recognizable Black residents. Yet, the obituaries for its star, Andy Griffith, in 2012 not only illustrated the program's stamp on American and Southern identity and memory but also the ways Mayberry as a site of memory had been embraced, reinterpreted, and reimagined by a twenty-first century audience that includes African Americans. Decades after its prime-time run, *The Andy Griffith Show* is a beloved reconstruction of Southern history, memory, and identity that spurs nostalgic notions of community even from African Americans shut out of its original narrative.

Keywords

African Americans, American South, *lieux de mémoire*, nostalgia, obituaries, television

Introduction

The American South is abundant with *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory that Nora (1989) identifies as marking the interaction and tension between history and memory. These "material, symbolic, and functional" sites include antebellum plantations and their slave quarters, *Gone with the Wind* (the book and especially the film), the Confederate battle flag, and Civil War re-enactments. The memory of these real and imagined sites, Dixon (1994) contends, "becomes a tool to regain and reconstruct not just the past but history itself" (p. 19). On a smaller but perhaps more seductive scale, the situation comedy *The Andy Griffith Show* (*TAGS*) (1960–1968) and its fictional setting, Mayberry, North Carolina, comprise such a site of memory. Decades after its prime-time run, *TAGS* is a beloved reconstruction of Southern history, memory, and identity that spurs nostalgic notions of community even from African Americans shut out of the original narrative.

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TAGS, which starred Andy Griffith as Sheriff Andy Taylor and Don Knotts as Deputy Barney Fife, went off the air at No. 1, when Griffith decided the show had run its course (Kelly, 1985). The series has been scrutinized through the lens of popular cultural studies, a sign of its social significance (see Alderman et al., 2011; Alderman et al., 2012; Lipsitz, 1990; Vaughan, 2004). But the program deserves examination through the theoretical concepts of collective memory, especially given the media response to Griffith's death in 2012. Obituaries and tributes praised *TAGS'* sense of community and morality and often mourned America's perceived loss of those values. They admired Griffith's portrayal of a gentle sheriff who did not wear a gun and a loving widower raising his son. Griffith conveyed such a sense of justice that the headline for *The New York Times* obituary described him as "TV's Lawman and Moral Compass" (Martin, 2012). Equally remembered was Mayberry, which *USA Today* called "a place apart" and "a bucolic paradise" (Bianco, 2012). Griffith's death prompted journalists to embark on nostalgic tours of Mayberry, which was based on Griffith's hometown, Mount Airy, North Carolina. Readers were reminded of Mayberry's front porches; the town drunk, who locked himself into his jail cell; and the path to the fishing spot where Andy and his son, Opie, opened every episode. British coverage emphasized the town's role in shaping national identity, with *The Independent* describing Mayberry as "one of the most powerful evocations of the utopian myth called small-town America" (Cornwell, 2012) and *The Telegraph* calling it "a metaphor for any small community with values rooted in an age long gone" (2012).

But the obituary in *The Charlotte Observer*, North Carolina's largest publication, insisted that Mayberry's "psyche was rigorously, religiously, unabashedly Southern" (Washburn, 2012). Mayberry, though, was unlike most of the South seen on 1960s television sets. As still photography and television cameras captured the Civil Rights Movement's violent confrontations with Southern lawmen, Mayberry's sheriff had no Black residents to police or protect. African Americans were rare extras in street scenes, and only one Black actor had speaking lines in an episode (a Chopin-playing football coach in Season 7). After Griffith's death, *The New York Times* was among the publications that explained that "Mayberry was a very white town; no reminders of the gathering racial storm there" (Genzlinger, 2012). However, among the journalists mourning Griffith's death were several African-American commentators who mentioned the absence of Blacks in Mayberry only to dismiss the concern. Leonard Pitts Jr, the Pulitzer Prize–winning syndicated columnist, called Mayberry his hometown and defended the fact that no Blacks lived there; a website for Civil War buffs republished his column as part of its Griffith tribute. Crucially, instead of using Griffith's death to contest the collective memory of White Mayberry and its citizens, African Americans embraced *TAGS* as it was, or sometimes supplying their own "extra memories," or reinterpretations that explained, not countered, the show's significance to Black American identity. Indeed, the response to Griffith's death offers further proof that nostalgia is not solely a tool of the dominant and conservative (Tannock, 1995). The nostalgia for *TAGS* is fluid and multidimensional, even among Blacks.

Because fictional Andy's moral and gentle persona presents such a contrast with the image of his real-life contemporary, Alabama Sheriff Eugene "Bull" Connor, I have long wondered whether 1960s-era America watched the show despite the Civil Rights Movement or as a counter to it. Academia, the popular press, and the news media have merely suggested that *TAGS*' lack of blackness was neither accidental nor necessarily underhanded. Coverage of Griffith's death in 2012 brought the issue of whiteness to the forefront but rarely shed light on the program's racial motivations. More enlightening was learning that African Americans like me not only enjoyed the program but also identified with it. A question I had reserved for White America also had to be posed to Blacks: Did I identify with Mayberry despite its whiteness or as a counter to other memories and locations from which I could draw? Two ideas emerged from an engagement with the field of memory: (1) the program and Mayberry's significance as a *lieu de mémoire* constructing memory

and identity, and (2) the various ways that nostalgia inhabit this site of memory. In this article, I first discuss *TAGS* broadly in terms of collective memory, including notions of nostalgia and Southern identity. I then explain how the series invented a traditional yet unconventional South by relying on sophisticated notions of narrative nostalgia, which ensured a relevancy that has been enhanced, not diminished, by decades of reruns. Next, I discuss Griffith's obituaries, columns, and blog posts that centered on race to show how *TAGS* is a site of memory embraced, reinterpreted, and reimaged by today's audience, including African Americans as well as Southern apologists. Individual and collective memories transform Mayberry into what Kreyling (2010) calls a brand of Southern memory comprising "a Moebius-like strip of collective, social self-narration, self-revision" (p. 2). Mayberry is a *lieu de mémoire* that constructs a multiracial community because its invented Southern identity is open to interpretation.

Collective memory and *lieux de mémoire*

Mayberry as a site of memory may not hold the same meaning to everyone, but it is remembered collectively. This distinction is not contradictory; in fact, it is crucial to the understanding of collective memory. Halbwachs (1992) first outlined how individuals remember events they never experienced firsthand because of their membership in groups. But he also stressed individuals simultaneously are connected to a variety of groups and their memories. He gives agency to individual thought, which places itself within collective memory and social frameworks for memory.

Halbwachs (1992) connects the individual and the group, and their yearnings for the past, through the "retrospective mirage," which makes them nostalgic, in a traditional sense (pp. 48, 49). Burdened by the present, we make use of the past for our own purposes and join groups with whom we chose to identity: "We are free to choose from the past the period into which we wish to immerse ourselves" (Halbwachs, 1992: 50). Yet, even in using memory as self-defense, we can only shape our recollections in the discourse we have available. *TAGS* is ubiquitous in terms of television exposure, perhaps because its Hollywood version of the South is not only free of racism but also of regional caricature; it appeals to Southern Whites but not at the expense of other groups and individuals.

Crane (1997) is concerned with "relocating the collective back in the individual who articulates it" (p. 1375). Neither historical nor collective memory should speak for others: Collective memory ultimately is located not in sites but in individuals thinking historically. Building on Halbwachs' work in historical and collective memory, she notes that "lived experience and collective memory 'interpenetrate' each other through autobiography, the self-conscious memory of individual members of a group." But the result differs from historical memory in two ways: nothing is lost in the continuum "between the awareness of the past and its presence in the present," and collective memory houses "as many memories as there are groups within which to remember." History, on the other hand, is solitary and broken off from the present (Crane, 1997: 1377).

Nora (1989) also sees memory as a bond "to the eternal present," while history is a "representation of the past" (p. 8). Because "history is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to destroy it," there are sites of memory, *lieux de mémoire*, which are powered by a will to remember (p. 19). The fact that journalists longed for Mayberry as much as they grieved for Griffith articulates Nora's assertion that "memory attaches itself to sites, whereas history attaches itself to events" (p. 22). There are *lieux de mémoire* because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory: As Nora points out, "we buttress our identities upon such bastions, but if what they defended were not threatened, there would be no need to build them" (p. 12).

Nora's landmark study paved the way for scholars to mine for sites of memory within various fields and spaces. Fabre and O'Meally (1994) point out that when groups are threatened

by "discontinuity and forgetfulness, we seek new moorings and props" to reactivate ways to remember "who we are" and where we come from (p. 7). In their work on history and memory in African-American culture, O'Meally and Fabre see sites of memory as wide-ranging as Morrison's *Beloved*, segregated cemeteries, and Black commemorative ceremonies. African Americans in the eighteenth and nineteenth century also relied on sites of memory—for example, the Haitian revolution and constructed histories of Black Revolutionary War heroes—to forge a historical consciousness that bridged the tension between a lost past and an uncertain future (Bethel, 1997).

Brundage (2009) contends that the South rivals Nora's France for sites of memory, especially in terms of historical memory. Kreyling (2010), insisting the relationship between history and memory is organic, finds his evidence in novels, memoirs, movies, poems, and legal arguments in which Southern cultural memory is both direct and implied. He considers *Gone with the Wind*, the book and the film, "the reviser-in-chief" of the Civil War memory and operating most faithfully as a *lieu de mémoire* (p. 178). *Gone with the Wind* is proof that regional and national memories depend on a constructed, malleable Southern past, one whose past sins can't be blamed on "an inherently flawed structure (white racial supremacy) but rather by an event or personality quirk here or there that can plausibly be 'remembered' differently in an alternate narrative—for the time being" (p. 184). That narrative often depends on a traditional reading of nostalgia that is wedded to its Swiss medical origins: *nostos* (the return home) and *algia* (the longing). Exploring how Southerners materially remember the Civil War, Horwitz (2010) hears "echoes of defeated peoples I'd encountered overseas: Kurds, Armenians, Palestinians, Catholics in Northern Ireland. Like them, Southerners had kept fighting their war by other means" (p. 38).

Because Mayberry is a site of memory whose values align with White male Southern identity, some commentators assume that the appeal of *TAGS* rests on nostalgia for White supremacy or at least life without racial concerns. But closer scrutiny reveals that the program's intentions and audience reaction (including that of the news media) embody Tannock's (1995) assertion that nostalgia "responds to a diversity of personal needs and political desires" and its narratives "embody any number of different visions, values" (p. 454). Boym (2001) also notes nostalgia's "strange unpredictability" and that "the alluring object of nostalgia is alluringly elusive" (p. xiv), a concept thoroughly embraced by memory scholars who now approach it critically and reflectively (Atia and Davis, 2010). Boym, like Tannock, sees nostalgia turning more on time than place but points out that nostalgia's danger—especially ideologically—is conflating "the actual home and the imaginary one" (p. xvi). *TAGS* creates and prompts two forms of nostalgia that Boym calls restorative nostalgia (which stresses *nostos* and its reconstruction of the lost home) and reflective nostalgia (a focus on *algia*). Restorative nostalgia "does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition," while reflective nostalgia "dwells on the ambivalence of human longing and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity" (p. xviii). Reflective nostalgia "does not follow a single plot but explores the ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones; it loves details, not symbols" (p. xviii).

Research on White Southern memory has found restorative nostalgia (see Blight, 2001; Kreyling, 2010). Boyd (2008) also identified this symptom among African Americans suffering from what she calls "Jim Crow nostalgia," a reimaging of Black life and shared community roots that is as much an indictment of the contemporary situation as a wistful look back at the positives contained (and confined) within segregated Black America (also see Brundage, 2009). Examining where urban planning, politics, and identity intersect, Boyd asserts that African Americans rely on "experience, myth, history, and nostalgia" to form "particular notions of racial identity, specific notions of what it means to be 'black' that are linked by specific places and times" (p. 155).

But this research on *TAGS* will illustrate that Black nostalgia operates many gears—as does collective memory. Like Confino (1997) and Green (2004), Brundage (2009) stresses the

"reciprocal relationship" between collective and individual memory and worries that scholars who focus on collectivities risk "reducing individuals to passive recipients of a collective memory" (p. 753). As long as southern Blacks, Whites, Latinos, men, and women "imagine themselves within a southern historical narrative," Brundage (2000) contends, Southern identity will endure (p. 15). By examining the positive Black memories of *TAGS*, I follow his suggestion that memory be treated "as a central and enduring feature of the human condition that, like other constituents of identity, remains salient even when it is not contested" (Brundage, 2009: 754).

Constructing memory on *TAGS*

According to popular culture scholar Richard Thompson, watching *TAGS* today "goes down as smoothly now as it went down half a century ago" (Lynch, 2012). Viewers' enduring engagement with the show is no accident. Lipsitz (1990) notes the role that technology plays in memory because of the "infinitely renewable present of electronic mass media." Because electronic media like television disconnect from time and space, Lipsitz (1990) contends, consumers experience "a common heritage with people they've never seen; they can acquire memories of a past to which they have no geographic or biological connection" (p. 5). Weispfenning (2003) asserts that reruns construct and reinforce collective memory and identity by repeating culturally shared experiences that come to label certain groups and generations, by allowing the television industry to stockpile standardized memories, and by reifying the dominant culture's core values. Holdsworth (2011) labels this audiovisual assembly of memory and identities "collections and recollections." Kompare (2005), who locates the power of reruns in their reproduction of time, emphasizes that their repetition forms a "national memory of television via the construction of a 'television heritage'" (p. xi). In particular, he points out that *TAGS* benefited from a "cultural legitimation and generational nostalgia" born of this heritage (pp. 110–111). In fact, the 1986 commemorative special *Return to Mayberry* was an attempt by CBS to take advantage of its television roots (Sharp, 2006). *TAGS* is a staple of TV Land, the cable network dedicated to nostalgic television; as it has done for other iconic shows, the network erected statues of Andy and Opie in two North Carolina locations. But while Holdsworth (2011) contends that the way we remember television "is inescapably bound to how television remembers itself," this assessment may be too limiting in an analysis of *TAGS*. Reruns alone cannot account for its construction of Southern and national identity. More helpful is Cook's (2005) take on movies that invite imaginative and interactive as well as cognitive responses to the nostalgic narratives they compose (also cited by Holdsworth, 2011). Because the series crafted a strategic but muted nostalgia, as opposed to a historical or contemporary milieu, Americans equate *TAGS* with goodness, and not just with the good old days of television.

The simplicity of *TAGS* belied its sophistication; after Griffith's death, popular culture scholars called it "one of the best written, produced, and cast series ever on TV" and "one of the most exquisitely executed series of all time" (Lynch, 2012; Wood, 2012). The show was also "a creation of nostalgia" and barely tangentially contemporary when it debuted in 1960 (Morrison, 2012). Its producers, including a heavily involved Griffith, created a Mayberry that harkened back to another time and place, although the show first aired a month before John F. Kennedy's election and went off the air 3 days before the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr (Morrison, 2012). The series negotiated the turmoil of the South by employing what Graham (2003) calls the "powerful rhetorical tool" of historical displacement (p. 159). The program was CBS' prime-time answer to its evening newscasts, where Bull Connor exemplified officially sanctioned Southern violence. The series, as Graham puts it, "suggested a different kind of realism—one of selective memory, silences, and omissions" (Graham, 2003: 160).

The habits, manners, and rituals of *TAGS* reflect what Hobsbawm and Ranger (2012) call an invented tradition, in that its producers sought to "inculcate certain values and norms" of a small Southern town while also smoothing over its regional roughness was for mainstream America (p. 43). They used repetition and imagery to establish a "continuity with a suitable historic past," when the brutality of Jim Crow South was less visible, just like the series' Black residents. The show not only erased race but also time. As Vaughan (2004) explained, "In all 249 episodes, there are no mentions of fallout shelters, Vietnam, Cuba, Castro, Khrushchev, President Kennedy, the racial and student riots of the 1960s, the civil rights movement, or the Reverend Martin Luther King" (p. 398). Scriptwriters were directed to treat the program as if it took place in the 1930s and crafted a community that recalled the rural childhoods of Griffith and Knotts, from North Carolina and West Virginia, respectively (Graham, 2003). With the exception of the police squad car and sporty sedans driven by out-of-towners, vehicles on Mayberry's roads appeared to be decades old. Barney wore the same anachronistic bowtie and salt-and-pepper suit throughout the series. By "reconstructing the Depression as a kinder, gentler time for white America," *TAGS* was "of its time, yet charmingly frozen on a studio backlot" (Graham, 2003: 160).

The first five years of the program were filmed in black and white, when its production values also made *TAGS* other-worldly compared with other comedies. *TAGS* incorporated outdoor scenes that emphasized the rural setting of Mayberry, an expensive departure from iconic situation comedies such as *I Love Lucy* (1951–1957) and *The Dick Van Dyke Show* (1961–1966), shot on soundstages before live studio audiences. Filmed out of sequences because of the outdoor scenes, *TAGS* did not employ a studio audience, and its writers did not have to rely on laugh-out-loud jokes (Kelly, 1985: 8). The humor usually depended on the chemistry of the cast and was often written into conversational asides. With its slow pacing, one-camera work, exterior filming, and sophisticated use of music to advance the plot (Brower, 1998), *TAGS* deceptively was more cinematic than its sitcom contemporaries and as a result appears more timeless (literally) today than other black-and-white shows.

Although Griffith was the titular star, the show predated strong cast ensembles that would populate prime time a decade later (Himmelstein, 1984). The scriptwriters made the main characters individual and quirky, flawed but decent. They were rural working-class at best; residents often faced eviction from their homes because of hard times. Antagonists were rich or poor, from a big city, Mayberry, or the nearby hardscrabble hills. Most of the conflict involved maintaining Mayberry's social equilibrium through a "simple but appealing formula: characters would confront a problem, then resolve it by exercising honesty or some other virtue" (Martin, 2012). In fact, a cottage publishing industry that pairs Christian scriptures with situation comedies began with the book *The Way Back to Mayberry: Lessons from Simpler Times* (Smith, 2001).

As the show gained its footing, Griffith and Knotts toned down their more outlandish Southern mannerisms. *USA Today* noted that

> At a time when the urban North and the rural South often seemed to be two separate but equally angry countries, *The Andy Griffith Show* was neutral ground, where we all could indulge in a little nostalgia for a more leisurely paced life. (Bianco, 2012)

Unlike *The Dukes of Hazzard* (1979–1985), which emphasized its characters' Confederate roots, *TAGS* was mindful of the racially tense era in which it was produced. Episodes reminded viewers of North Carolina's contribution to the Revolutionary War as much as its participation in the Civil War. Mayberry became "a paradoxical town: localized in North Carolina and universal at the same time" (Kelly, 1985: 83). Even as it ignored the 1960s, *TAGS* was lauded for its realism, especially in comparison with two rural, fish-out-of-water sitcoms on CBS: *The Beverly Hillbillies*

(1962–1971), in which a dirt-poor mountain family strikes oil and moves to Beverly Hills; and *Green Acres* (1965–1971), in which a business executive and his glamorous wife leave Manhattan for a downtrodden farm.

Production values of *TAGS* declined in 1965, when Knotts left the regular cast to pursue a film career and the program switched to a color format. Less-adept cast members assumed more central roles, and plots were recycled; Griffith, missing Knotts as his comedic foil, became less playful and tolerant. Some characters appeared in a spin-off titled *Mayberry RFD* (1968–1971), but what remains powerful in American memory is the all-White Mayberry seen in black-and-white episodes. *The New York Times*' Neil Genzlinger (2012) noted that "the tumult and accelerated pace of the decade pushed *TAGS* aside, but not the notion that the moral center of the country lives somewhere in a small town." Indeed, television production and national identity values merged when the actor died in 2012, with The Associated Press asserting, "Listen to politicians talking about traditional values, and Mayberry is there" (Anthony, 2012). *The Times*' Genzlinger (2012) made a similar point: "Today, when you hear politicians and talk-show hosts spew platitudes about common sense and the wisdom of ordinary people, Andy Taylor is part of the collective memory they're invoking."

Mayberry in White and Black

Given the show's continuing popularity, the concept of race and Mayberry has drawn academic scrutiny. Flanagan (2009) deconstructs Utopian Mayberry by imagining its racial diversity. Seeking to "reconcile the racial exclusivity," he labels the program as an Other utopia, its text "rich enough to also reject its apparent exclusion of racial representation within its popular cultural genre." Thus, the characters' eccentricities are racialized, to be normalized by Andy's good deeds. But unlike blackness, this is "permanent otherness rendered temporary because Mayberry always redeems itself" (Flanagan, 2009: 315). This reading troubles me because it assumes blackness is not only an otherness but also in need of redemption and normalization. In contrast, Alderman et al. (2011) see Mayberry as a working-class Utopia, with the absence of race maintaining its ideologically favored status. They insist that Mayberry's idealized status deserves a more dystopian analysis, but they acknowledge that the program and the town satisfy "a growing public desire to reclaim traditional community values and attachments of the past, even if those values and attachments never existed exactly in the romanticized form presented on television" (p. 53). Even in the 1960s, the lack of race on *TAGS* was an open secret, with *The New York Times* noting that Mayberry had "no Negro problem" (Hano, 1965). Because of the show's popularity in reruns, articles in subsequent decades occasionally brought up the topic while careful to stay within the prescribed boundaries of Mayberry's sacred heritage. One website devoted to the Confederacy uses 46 screen images of Black extras in crowd scenes to prove that Mayberry was not racially isolated.[1]

TAGS never left the public consciousness, but the death of the titular star on 3 July 2012 triggered an outpouring not just for the actor but also for Mayberry and its values. This was expected because obituaries themselves are site of collective memory (Fowler, 2007; Fowler and Biesla, 2007; Hume, 2000). Even as Griffith was being mourned, however, the question of race and *TAGS* became a point of discussion. The *Charlotte Observer* reported that Griffith regretted that the show did not cast Black regulars:

> At that time black people didn't want to play subservient roles, to do maids and butlers and all that, and we were unable to make it so people would rush into a black doctor's office. And I'm sorry about it, too. (Washburn, 2012)

A Black blogger with *The Washington Post* noted that Jim Crow was the one problem "Sheriff Andy could not have solved in a half-hour" (Curtis, 2012).

Yet, many White journalists asserted that Mayberry's whiteness was part of its appeal because it dodged America's longstanding "Negro problem." *USA Today* called it a "calming, homespun refuge from the social and political struggles raging outside" its town limits (Bianco, 2012). The *Washington Post* noted that "during cultural turmoil, political assassinations and war in real America, [Sheriff Taylor] kept a comforting sort of order in Mayberry" (Langer, 2012). British readers were told directly: "With its entrenched racism and the brutalities of the civil rights struggle, those were not the finest years of the small-town South. But *The Andy Griffith Show* avoided all such unpleasantnesses—which is one reason why Americans loved it" (Cornwell, 2012).

But Black columnists also voiced their affinity with Mayberry. Surprised that many African-American journalists had praised *TAGS*, a columnist specializing in newsroom diversity wondered whether the series was post-racial although it was a half-century old (Prince, 2012). A closer reading of these columns finds historically grounded racial discourse central to their arguments for the show's universality. This conversation about race and *TAGS* illustrates that rather than contesting Mayberry's status as a Southern *lieu de mémoire*, some Black and White commentators and readers reinterpreted the site to accommodate individual claims. Instead of counter-memories of Mayberry, some African Americans evoked "extra-memories"—their own histories to complement, not contest—Mayberry's narrative. Rochelle Riley (2012), an African-American columnist for the *Detroit Free Press* who grew up in North Carolina, saw Mayberry as a physical site of memory, and her longing is for a lost homeland: "I lived in Mayberry. And for us, the residents of Mayberrys across the country, we've lost a member of our family." In reprinting part of a column she ran after Knotts' death in 2006, Riley contended, "For me, and for many generations before me, *The Andy Griffith Show* was about our lives, regardless of color or background." Riley wrote that her family didn't watch the program "to count black people." Instead, they watched "to see our way of life, one that included spending hours picking plums in the plum orchard, then sitting under a chinaberry tree eating them, or walking along ponds to collect cattails."

Leonard Pitts Jr, a nationally syndicated columnist who is African American, also claimed Mayberry as his hometown. Like White writers who see Mayberry as a race-free refuge, Pitts (2012) considers the Black freedom movement part of an unpleasant American past while comparing the omission of Blacks with the absence of time:

> Over the years, some have criticized our town for the things that made us different. It has been noted, for instance, that Mayberry somehow managed to be a town in the South in the 1960s without a single African-American citizen, much less a civil rights movement. But that's hardly the only thing that bypassed our town. Mayberry never heard about the Cuban missile crisis or the Vietnam War, never knew anything about birth control pills or LSD, Malcolm X or Betty Friedan, the Beatles or the Rolling Stones. President Kennedy being shot and killed in Dallas? That awful news never made it here.

Mirroring Halbwachs' explanation of nostalgia and "retrospective mirage," Pitts claimed that Mayberry was real: "as real as the desire sometimes to escape the Tyranny of What Is. It sat at a crossroads of nostalgia and need." His Mayberry, a Southern Brigadoon of a better place *and* time, is mindful of Rosario's (1989) imperialist nostalgia—is Pitts reflecting Black guilt for the Civil Rights Movement's destruction of utopian Mayberry? Still, some Whites posted online reader comments accusing Pitts and Riley of unnecessarily discussing race, evidence that some White readers are ready to pounce on the mere mention of race, regardless of its context.

Other Black commentators accepted Mayberry on more positive racialized terms reminiscent of Boym's reflective nostalgia that is not blinded by a fruitless search for truth. Blogger Gene Seymour (2012) called the universal "love" that Blacks expressed for *TAGS* "one of the more peculiar

anomalies of American popular culture." Calling it "a classic black sitcom," he theorizes why African Americans gave the series a "free pass":

> The laid-back—how to put this—southern-ness of the Mayberry vibe is something that everyone with roots to the region can relate to, Black, White or Other. And even with those aforementioned blank spaces where black actors should have been, there was something funky, occasionally spicy about the show's comfort food to make me wonder whether *The Andy Griffith Show* could plausibly be considered a precursor to the black family sitcoms that would start coming in waves in the 1970s. I'll even go so far as to proclaim this show as the pre-post-civil-rights-era-black-family-situation-comedy.

In his assessment, Black viewers could see themselves in the characterization of Mayberry's residents, if not their pigmentation. Instead of an African-American counter-memory of Mayberry that disputes its authenticity, this reinterpretation accommodates the spirit of the show, if not its actual practice. Seymour's take eschews Flanagan's (2009) implied pathology and embraces a memory/identity that is malleable, as Kreyling suggests, even as the program remains frozen in whiteness during its daily reruns.

On The Awl website, Shani O. Hilton embodied Tannock's (1995) assertion that longing depends on one's "present position in society, on her desires, her ears and her aspirations" (p. 456). Hilton (2012), a Black liberal frustrated by twenty-first century economic and political injustice, refused to attribute her affection for Mayberry to a yearning for a simpler time, which she called "shorthand for a time when white people didn't have to think about whether they were treating nonwhite people (or women) like humans." To her, the show's message about class trumped race:

> Sheriff Andy Taylor was better than Mayberry and that's the thing people don't get. People are nostalgic for Mayberry, but Andy spent most of the series… trying to improve it. To be nostalgic for it is missing the point. To be nostalgic for it is forgetting that Mayberry was based on a town where Griffith grew up on the wrong side of the tracks and where he was called "white trash."

Hilton admitted that her fondness for *TAGS* reflected her father's love for program. In her column, father and daughter talked about other 1960s programs that attempted "edgier storylines involving race or gender. At best they were ham-fisted; at worst, downright racist." She concludes that "all-white can sometimes be all right: *The Andy Griffith Show* didn't have a chance to be particularly racist because it didn't try for anything beyond sweet simplicity."

Hilton reached a wider audience when Ta-Nehisi Coates (2012), the influential African-American columnist, made her views the centerpiece of his *Atlantic* blog and agreed that sometimes "all white is all right." The 107 online comments he attracted provide a window into how readers of all races (albeit liberal) discussed *TAGS* and race. A few readers claimed that Hollywood and its sponsors would have prevented Blacks from appearing on the series, but others wished that such an attempt had been made. Two redefined "simpler times" for Mayberry: to one reader, "justice is the hard, tragic working through of passions" without resorting to guns; to the other, simpler times does not equal White consciousness but instead "a longing for a less complex world in the practical, day to day sense" in which "one's own aspirations don't pull one away from contentment with their present circumstances." Two other commentators claimed that Mayberry's whiteness reflected Mount Airy, the town on which the show is based and one with fewer Blacks than the rest of North Carolina. Three readers likened Sheriff Taylor to Atticus Finch, the lawyer protagonist of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the beloved civil rights novel and film. And two readers cited Martin Luther King, with one asserting, "MLK couched the language of the [Civil Rights Movement] in terms of an 'appeal' to the America of *The Andy Griffith Show*."

On the web, a number of White bloggers and readers insisted that the few Black extras and the one Black actor with speaking lines proved that Mayberry was not all White, if not fully integrated. To this group, blackness even at the margins ensures that the town is not diminished by accusations of exclusion. Certain websites with White audiences picked up the positive Black commentary as proof of Mayberry's inclusion, post production. Much of the Southern apologist commentary about *TAGS* can be read as restorative nostalgia employing twenty-first century norms of avoiding racist talk while deriding political correctness. A conservative column, praising the program's "timeless truths," extolled the libertarian values of Mayberry's citizens for pulling together and not demanding "more booty from other Americans" (Knight, 2012). The headline for Caffeinated Thoughts, a conservative Christian website, channeled the Old South: "Carry Me Back to Old Mayberry," a wordplay on the song "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny"—composed by a Black man longing for Virginia in slave times. Blogger Adam Graham (2012), expressing restorative nostalgia, noted that the "strongest criticism" was the series' lack of Black characters but contended that *TAGS* was "more about truths rather than the passing reality of the moment." He invoked Riley's column to defend the program against charges of racism. But on the Scholars and Rogues site, Jim Booth (2012) dismissed those who claimed the "tokenism" of Black extras signified a better Mayberry. He outlined the racism he saw as a White child in North Carolina but also described growing up with fictional Mayberry as a moral guide, claiming that the show taught him "about being a good person and doing the right thing":

> Its gentle, homespun wisdom has stuck with me … But it didn't tell me the whole truth about my South. But I suppose it did give me one of my earliest and best lessons in the difference between fiction and reality.

While still admired for its emphasis on gentle humor and moral bearings, *TAGS* conjured memories in which the absence or imagination of race did not diminish its construction of Southern identity for all races. TV Land statues of Sheriff Taylor and Opie in North Carolina became shrines after Griffith's death. No wonder the *Detroit Free Press* published a photograph of a Black father and son posing with the Raleigh statue to accompany Pitts' column in which he, an African American, claimed White Mayberry as his own.

Conclusion

Scholars usually are pointing toward more somber questions of Southern identity when they ask, as Brundage (2000) has, whether the "previously hidden memories" of Blacks, Latinos, and other marginalized groups can be incorporated into the public life of the South without their experiences being trampled by White dominance (p. 16). And Confino (1997) urges that memory scholarship not only pays closer attention to the individual but also looks beyond political realms to find collective memory at work. *TAGS* fits both scholarly calls through its ongoing construction of Southern identity and memory. Significantly, race—its presence and absence—plays a part in this construction. African Americans can claim (as oppose to reclaim) Mayberry and *TAGS* because unlike Plymouth Rock and Ellis Island, its fiction leaves room for what Knapp (1989) commends as authenticity—without a discourse of trauma. In addition, the absence of Blacks, rather than their stereotypical presence in fictional productions such as *Gone with the Wind*, leaves room for authentic imagination with a different setting, even if not a different time. "Extra-memory" becomes "extra-identity" in all-Black performances of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* on Broadway and *Steel Magnolias* on television (not coincidentally, both explicitly Southern). Seymour, the blogger who called *TAGS* a classic Black sitcom, predicted its "negative-image" remake, with original scripts

intact. A subversive "extra-memory" of *TAGS* is a 2008 online parody in which a Black man comes to Mayberry to live, but through creative editing of public domain images is murdered by the main characters.[2] Such reflective nostalgic productions may or may not call the past into doubt, as Boym (2001) puts it, but does restyle it in a different hue.

More broadly, the ubiquity of reruns and the media coverage of Griffith's death exemplify television's function in collective memory and national identity. *TAGS* went a step further by inventing a nostalgia rooted in the ideals that America favorably associates with rural Southern life. Memory is invented not just because it is a fictional production but because its group membership is formed around shared values like simplicity, decency, and fairness as opposed to practical factors like geography and White Southern heritage. This shared community among columnists, bloggers, and readers of all races tries to practice what Sheriff Taylor preached. *The Independent's* Cornwell (2012) explained to his British readers that these imagined citizens of Mayberry have turned their decency into a ritualized behavior that Southerners might call "downright neighborly":

> When a myth becomes really powerful, in some ways it ceases to be a myth. You can't live in the US without noticing a community spirit you never encounter in the UK … Here, the word "neighbourhood" means precisely that—in subconscious homage, surely, to an idealised small-town America whose obituary has been prematurely written a thousand times. Andy Griffith may have died last week, but Mayberry lives on.

Mayberry's collective memory is manifest in individual, ritualized acts of kindness that are mindful of Connerton's (1989) engagement with Mann, who convinces his readers to be "open to the resources of myth" at their disposal and which can be lived consciously as a "sacred repetition" (p. 62).

In these ways, Mayberry and *TAGS* formulate a *lieu de mémoire*. The Black reimaging of Mayberry and the universal affection for the program's morality, even by "liberal" publications such as *The New York Times* and *Washington Post*, also re-affirm that while nostalgia appreciates the past "as a stable source of value and meaning," its embrace for such stability "cannot be conflated with the desire for a stable, traditional and hierarchized society" (Tannock, 1995: 455). Hilton, Seymour, and other African Americans rely on individuality within collective memory to imagine a past "in which things could be put into play, opened up, moved about, or simply given a little breaking space" (Tannock, 1995: 456). Their reflections drive home that inquiries into memory, nostalgia, and identity should look beyond an examination of Black-on-Black memory to explore the inventiveness and fluidity of racial collective identity (or identities). Fabre and O'Meally (1994) point out that Black sites of memory constantly evolve "new configurations of meaning, and their constant revision makes them part of the dynamism of the historical process" (p. 9). Hilton's column illustrates such an ecosystem of memory: from individual to social to collective. Hilton (2012) wrote that she initially liked *TAGS* because she had watched it with her father; she later admired its sense of redemption and justice. But her father, reared in segregated Virginia, accepted the program's racial imbalance for a different reason, one attached to a memory she now appreciates:

> In one direction lay the self-contained black community that raised him and loved him. In the other direction was an all-white neighborhood.
>
> It may not have nurtured him, but it was familiar, and he said it's part of the reason why the dichotomy of being black and not seeing himself in what he watched never made him flinch.
>
> "My Mayberry's on the right side of me," he said.

Mine is, too, I guess.

Television industry analyst Betsy Frank says that viewers find on television what they cannot find in real life: "searching for surrogate family, coping with hard times, acceptance of individuality, the conflict between old and new social roles."[3] Indeed, *TAGS*, especially in black-and-white episodes when Mayberry is decidedly White, evokes a South that is both real and ideal for viewers of all races. Their longing occurs on different nostalgic terms and seeks to reclaim a time, a place, or both. As a site of memory, the program and its town allow Americans to remember a South that America wistfully prefers—perhaps because it never existed.

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Notes

1. African Americans in Mayberry (n.d.), http://bookguy.com/Mayberry/BlacksinMayberry.htm
2. David Bright, director, "Why Come There Ain't No Black People in Mayberry?" 2008. Among the sites posting the video is Funny or Die: http://www.funnyordie.com/
3. Originally quoted by Mary Alice Kellogg in "How America Really Watches Television," *TV Guide*, 29 July 1995, but cited in many critiques of television.

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