

Grinnell College

SOUTH OF THE CONFEDERACY: CONFEDERATE SYMBOLS IN ARGENTINE  
CLOTHING AND THE ERASURE OF HISTORY

Emma Cibula

History 314: U.S. Civil War in History and Memory

Dr. Purcell

Fall 2016

## **Introduction: COOK and Confederate Symbols Abroad**

While studying abroad in Buenos Aires, Argentina, I walked past signs advertising various popular fashion brands every day. After a few weeks in Buenos Aires, I had adjusted to seeing enormous billboards and posters plastered along the buildings of the bustling city. At first, nothing struck me as particularly odd or inherently different from the sort of advertisement one could find in the United States. In fact, for the most part, I felt very comfortable around this barrage of capitalism manifested in the form of 20-foot-tall posters. My level of comfort disappeared, however, upon seeing a giant billboard that featured a pale-skinned, blonde-haired model wearing a Confederate flag tank top outside one of the more prominent malls in the city. The photograph advertised a popular store for teenagers based in Buenos Aires called John L. Cook, or COOK, best described as an “Ambercrombie-esque chain.”<sup>1</sup>

Even though I witnessed a fair number of Argentines wearing COOK products throughout the course of my semester, it always felt jarring to see someone openly walking down the streets of Buenos Aires, Argentina, with a Confederate flag proudly printed on their baseball cap. One question continued to circulate in my mind whenever I witnessed a piece of COOK clothing: How did the American Confederate flag become the logo for a popular Argentine clothing company and what does the popular acceptance of this symbol in Argentina reveal about the globalization of the Confederate legacy?

As a symbol representing a very specific time and place in the past, the Confederate flag has endured in American popular culture remarkably well. The debate surrounding the meaning behind the flag and its place in the public sphere remains hotly contested and more relevant than ever in the landscape of the contemporary world. While the Confederate flag derives from a

---

<sup>1</sup> Alexandra Ilyashov, “How the Confederate Flag Has Become ‘Cool’ Beyond America’s South,” *Refinery29*, August 13, 2015, accessed November 30, 2016. <http://www.refinery29.com/2015/08/92278/confederate-flag-argentina-fashion-brand>.

region now inside the geographic confines of the United States, its presence in popular culture is not limited to America. The Argentine clothing company COOK features the Confederate flag, as an integral part of its brand. The logo, social media accounts, and many popular items of clothing promoted on COOK's website all invoke the Confederate flag. While the recognizable emblem remains an incredibly visible element of COOK's presentation to consumers, the company never directly addresses the history behind the flag or its relation to white supremacy or slavery. Indeed, many of COOK's social media posts display the symbol next to or underneath quotations from famous black Civil Rights leaders and President Abraham Lincoln. The brand's refusal to acknowledge the historic racism of the Confederate flag and its role in white supremacist ideology reveals an apparent erasure of the meaning behind the flag.

COOK's erasure of the flag's meaning seems especially intentional, given Argentina's focus on collective memory as a way of discussing and understanding national trauma. Due to the country's politically troubled history and years of a militaristic dictatorship, both Argentina's government and its citizens have produced literature, art pieces, and national museums dedicated to educating its citizens about the human rights abuses that occurred under the country's 1976-1983 dictatorship.<sup>2</sup> This shaping of collective memory suggests a culture informed by the idea of remembering history and confronting political or historical trauma.<sup>3</sup> COOK's rejection of the history of the Confederate flag, then, remains particularly striking.

The collective erasure of the meaning of COOK's Confederate symbols simultaneously fits and does not fit within Argentina's national legacies of memory preservation and historic

---

<sup>2</sup> Anne Dirks and Else Siemerink, "The Past in the Present: Hidden Places of Memory in Buenos Aires," *The Argentina Independent*, March 25, 2013, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://www.argentinaindependent.com/socialissues/humanrights/past-in-the-present-hidden-places-of-memory-in-buenos-aires/>.

<sup>3</sup> Amos Funkenstein, "Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness," *History and Memory* 1 (1989): 5-26; For more information on the shaping of national narratives around certain events or stories in history, refer to Funkenstein's work on collective memory within nations.

racism. In a country focused on the preservation of historical trauma and collective memory, COOK's failure to acknowledge the painful history associated with its logo of a Confederate flag represents a departure from the national narrative of remembrance. On the other hand, this erasure of the meaning behind racist symbols aligns with Argentina's own history of attempting to downplay the presence of people of color and failing to recognize their contributions to Argentine society. Argentina's embrace of COOK, a company that directly incorporates the Confederate flag into its logo as a means to connect to the United States, ignores the history of the emblem as a symbol of white supremacy and disassociation from the Union, demonstrating a level of irony in a nation dedicated to memory preservation. However, the combination of Argentina's own history of white supremacy at the exclusion and oppression of nonwhite individuals and COOK's profiting off of the presentation of the globalized Confederate flag as distinctly "American" without recognizing its racist roots contribute to the relative ease with which the company—and the country—erased the history of Confederate symbols.

While a number of secondary sources discuss the specific racism of Argentina, the racism behind the legacy of the Confederate battle flag, and the effects of the American Civil War on the rest of the globe, no work links all three ideas.<sup>4</sup> The following paper will address Confederate remembrance abroad through the case study of the teen clothing company COOK, connecting the racism present within Argentina with the racism of the American Confederate flag. This analysis grapples with the idea of historical erasure as a version of racism in the context of the Confederate flag, and explores why the denial of the meaning behind this symbol of the

---

<sup>4</sup> Karin Weyland Usanna, "The Absence of an African Presence in Argentina and the Dominican Republic: Caught between National Folklore and Myth," *Caribbean Studies* 38 (2010); Caleb W. McDaniel and Bethany L. Johnson, "New Approaches to Internationalizing the History of the Civil War Era: An Introduction," *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 2 2 (2012); Refer to Usanna and McDaniel and Johnson for scholarly work on the history of racism in Argentina and the influence of the American Civil War on the rest of the world.

Confederacy remains particularly unusual in a country in which the government and citizens make the conscious push towards remembrance.

### **The Undeniable White Supremacy of the Confederate Flag**

In order to fully comprehend the symbolic meaning of the Confederate flag in the context of its use in Argentine popular culture, it remains crucial to understand the origins of the flag and the efforts to preserve that memory in contemporary American culture. The Confederate flag widely recognized today, and the one used in the COOK logo, gained prominence for the specific ways it differed from the Union flag. As the Confederacy staked its claims for existence on a desire to separate itself from the United States, it required a battle flag that did not resemble the one it wanted to wholeheartedly reject.<sup>5</sup> The motivations behind the Confederacy's departure from the United States and its national symbols remain clear: the Confederacy seceded from the Union in the hopes of preserving its "peculiar institution" of slavery and the racist hierarchy that system undoubtedly encouraged.<sup>6</sup> The necessarily white supremacist motivations behind secession and the specifically Confederate intersection of nationalism and rejection of the United States, however, remain questioned in modern discourse surrounding the institution and its symbols.<sup>7</sup> Coates responds to these contemporary efforts to obscure the Confederate rationale behind its self-separation from the Union. In analyzing specific language that cites slavery as the reason for secession in individual states' declarations, Coates draws the conclusion that slavery always represented a main feature of Confederate values: "The Confederate flag is directly tied

---

<sup>5</sup> John M. Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag: America's Most Embattled Emblem* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2005), 15.

<sup>6</sup> Ta-Nehisi Coates, "What This Cruel War Was Over," *The Atlantic*, June 22, 2015, accessed October 7, 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/06/what-this-cruel-war-was-over/396482/>.

<sup>7</sup> Jim Webb, "Former Senator Jim Webb (D-Va.) Appears to Defend Confederate Flag," *The Washington Post*, June 24, 2015, accessed December 15, 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/virginia-politics/former-sen-jim-webb-d-va-appears-to-defend-confederate-flag/2015/06/24/ed0d162c-1a99-11e5-ab92-c75ae6ab94b5\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.9110235eb410](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/virginia-politics/former-sen-jim-webb-d-va-appears-to-defend-confederate-flag/2015/06/24/ed0d162c-1a99-11e5-ab92-c75ae6ab94b5_story.html?utm_term=.9110235eb410); In a statement following the Charleston shooting, Webb claimed that the Confederate flag was being misappropriated by racists. This inaccurate assessment, by an elected official, demonstrates the common fundamental misunderstanding of the history behind and meaning of the symbol.

to the Confederate cause, and the Confederate cause was white supremacy. This claim is not the result of revisionism...It is the plain meaning of the words of those who bore the Confederate flag across history.”<sup>8</sup> The Confederacy’s existence inherently derives from the desire for the preservation of white supremacy and the institution of slavery. Symbols associated with the Confederacy that remain relevant in popular culture, such as the Confederate battle flag, serve as representations of the racist ideals out of which the Confederacy grew.

While it began as a representation of the Confederacy on the battlefield in 1862, the Confederate battle flag soon became a representation of the Confederacy and the nationalist and racist ideals the collection of states espoused. As the Civil War waged on, there began a conflation of the Confederacy’s battles and the Confederacy’s values, as citizens of both the Union and the Confederacy eventually accepted the battle flag as the national flag of the would-be nation. As Coski explains, by 1863, the militaristic pride felt by citizens of the Confederacy contributed more to nationalist sentiment than did any political action, leading to the overall embrace of the flag as an emblem of the Confederacy and the ideals it hoped to represent:

For a nation that survived only as long as its armies survived, the flag of the soldier understandably became the flag of the nation. Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia, not the government of President Jefferson Davis, was the entity in which southern civilians placed their confidence and their hopes for victory...The exalted status of the battle flag associated most closely with Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia suggests that the Confederate battle flag was not only a soldier’s flag but a bona fide national symbol.<sup>9</sup>

According to Coski, the battle Confederate flag, steeped in militaristic nationalism, serves as a representation of not only Confederate battles, but also Confederate values, including the idea of sovereignty from the United States in order to preserve the racist institution of slavery.

---

<sup>8</sup> Coates, “What this Cruel War Was Over,” 2.

<sup>9</sup> Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag*, 14.

Historically, because the Confederate flag represents the Confederate “nation,” and the Confederacy strove to preserve slavery, the battle flag invariably connects to the white supremacist ideology behind the institution of human bondage.

The surrender of the Confederacy did not result in the end of the Confederate flag’s invocation in public expressions of racism. Rather, the flag’s legacy of white supremacy continued to grow and develop well after the Civil War. Immediately following the Civil War, many citizens of the former Confederacy continued to exalt the battle flag as a representation of the sacrifices deceased soldiers and veterans made to the Confederate cause, simultaneously promoting the flag as a symbol of remembrance of the Confederacy and divorcing it of its racist implications in upholding the legacy of the Confederacy.<sup>10</sup> This erasure of overt racism under the guise of Confederate commemoration and Southern restoration—known widely as the Lost Cause mentality—helped preserve the Confederate battle flag’s status as a key part of the culture detached from the idea of racism in the Reconstructionist Southern society.<sup>11</sup> Blight discusses the impact of Lost Cause mythology on Confederate memory: “For most white Southerners, the Lost Cause evolved into a language of vindication and renewal...Confederate memories no longer dwelled on mourning or explaining defeat; they offered a set of conservative traditions by which the entire country could gird itself against radical, political, and industrial disorder.”<sup>12</sup> The Lost Cause rhetoric, then, simultaneously represented a tool of conservatism and a vessel through which white Southerners rewrote the history behind the war’s causes, presenting the grandeur of the Confederacy instead of its overtly racist roots. The reimagining of the causes of the Civil War and the ideology of the Confederacy served to separate Confederate legacy from its white

---

<sup>10</sup> Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag*, 50.

<sup>11</sup> Coski *The Confederate Battle Flag*, 48-51.

<sup>12</sup> David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 266.

supremacist origins. This narrative of non-racist motivations for secession successfully spread throughout the South, impacting the post-war memory of the Confederacy.<sup>13</sup> Representations of the Confederacy, such as its battle flag, persisted in post-war popular culture because of the active campaign to simultaneously remember the glory of the Confederacy and separate it from its original ideology through the mythology of the “Lost Cause.”

The narrative of the Confederate battle flag representing a core, but benign, element of Southern culture under the Lost Cause mentality, however, shifted in public opinion throughout the 1930s and 1940s, as white supremacist groups began ardently embracing the Confederate flag as a symbol of racism and segregation. According to Coski, while there existed a desire in the former Confederate states to cling to the Confederate flag as an emblem and a representation of the past, most racist resistance groups, including the Ku Klux Klan, did not actively incorporate the flag into their events until the 1940’s.<sup>14</sup> The eventual adoption of the Confederate battle flag by segregationist groups such as the KKK solidified its symbolic status as a representation of white supremacy:

For many African Americans, the battle flag evokes a dark sense of physical threat, often because of actual experiences in which the flag accompanied groups of people intent on doing them harm...[On the other hand], since the mid-twentieth century, when the flag escaped the exclusive control of Confederate heritage organizations and entered American popular culture, it has been brandished by racist who believe that its meaning is, and always was, white supremacy.<sup>15</sup>

The public link forged between white supremacist groups and the Confederate battle flag served to disambiguate the symbol from public claims to any meaning the flag could retain beyond racism. Not until segregationist groups such as the KKK embraced the Confederate battle flag

---

<sup>13</sup> Jefferson Davis, *Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, vol. 1 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1881), 65-72; The prolific nature of the Lost Cause’s rewriting of the history of the Confederacy is evident in the way Confederate President and leader Jefferson Davis reflected on the causes of the war. Davis’s 1881 statement speak to the retrospective rebranding of Confederate ideology and the connection between both Confederate ideology and Confederate symbols.

<sup>14</sup> Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag*, 49.

<sup>15</sup> Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag*, 135.



did the general public—both those advocating for and against white supremacist policies—connect the Confederate flag clearly with racism.

### **The Confederate Flag in American Fashion**

Modern presentations of the Confederate battle flag in American popular culture acknowledge the troubled history and association given to the flag by the public, relying on Lost Cause rhetoric as a way to appeal to consumers of these Confederate flag products. While still an incredibly controversial symbol, the Confederate battle flags continue to appear on clothing items, often accompanied by phrases invoking rhetoric that clings to the notion that the flag represents history and heritage rather than racism. Several websites featuring Confederate flags on their clothing confront and embrace the idea of the flag as a manifestation of history. The website “Red Neck Nation Strong” displays one Confederate flag t-shirt with the phrase “Dixie Heritage/So Much History Has Died...But This Flag Hasn’t!” and another with the words “If This Flag Offends You/You Need A History Lesson.”<sup>16</sup> Another popular website selling Confederate battle flag clothing, “Be Wild,” touts many common expressions associated with the Lost Cause mentality, such as “It’s Not Hate/It’s Heritage,” and “The South Will Rise Again.”<sup>17</sup> These shirts and many others for sale on these websites present the idea of history and connections to the past as central to the message and consumption of the flag. Claims to a sort of history or heritage imply that the Confederate flag remains unwaveringly linked to the history of the South—and by extension, the nation.

---

<sup>16</sup> “Confederate Flag Shirts,” *Redneck Nation Apparel Co.*, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://rednecknationstrong.com/collections/confederate-flag>.

<sup>17</sup> “Rebel Flag T-Shirts and Confederate Flag Merchandise,” *Be Wild*, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://www.bewild.com/rednecktshirts.html>.



*Figure 1:* American clothing companies often draw upon an idea of “shared history” in their marketing of Confederate flags. The above T-shirt from the online retailer “Red Neck Nation” references historical connections to the Confederacy, demonstrating a concerted effort to associate its merchandise with an idealized vision of the past.

While the websites that mimic the Lost Cause assertion that the flag encapsulates Southern heritage overlook the historical realities of what the Confederacy represented and what the flag continues to represent, the appeal to the Lost Cause mythology itself constitutes a historical strategy focused on selective remembrance. In presenting and using the Confederate flag in fashion, many American companies, then, strategically connect the symbol to some semblance of the past, even if that presentation of history fails to provide consumers with the realities of Confederate ideology. While these clothing companies certainly erase some elements of historical presentation of the Confederate flag by refusing to talk about the root causes of the war or its history of representing the racism of the Confederacy, the fact that they invoke emotional appeals to history and heritage indicates that there is not a complete separation of the flag from the past.<sup>18</sup> American companies Red Neck Nation Strong and Be Wild offer

<sup>18</sup> Christopher Bates, “‘Oh, I’m a Good Ol’ Rebel’: Reenactment, Racism, and the Lost Cause,” in *The Civil War in Popular Culture*, ed. Lawrence A. Kreiser (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 195; Like the clothing retailers that use the Lost Cause mythology in advertising and selling their clothing, some contemporary Civil War reenactors draw upon romanticized references to the past in order to justify their portrayal of Confederate soldiers in these reenactment events. Lost Cause rhetoric, then, serves as a means to portray Confederates and brandish their symbols without openly embracing the racism and white supremacy directly associated with their history.

problematic and selective histories through their merchandise, which ultimately resonate more with the idea of remembrance than the Argentine company COOK's complete rejection of any connection to memory or the past.

### **The Legacy of Racism within Argentina**

In considering the racism of symbols in Argentine fashion and popular culture, it remains necessary to investigate Argentina's own attitudes towards race and racism through an analysis of the country's demographics and history. Like the United States, Argentina cannot escape a past directly linked to slavery and a society founded upon white supremacy. According to Cirio, slavery in Argentina spanned three centuries until its abolition in the country in 1853.<sup>19</sup> Black chattel slavery, then, and the simultaneous subjugation of individuals of color and privileging of white Argentines, distinctly intertwines with contemporary reflections of racism within the country. Although slavery officially ended in 1853, its legacy persists as a marker of historical racial inequality in Argentina. Argentina's extensive association with slavery implies a nation governed by and founded on white supremacy and racism against black Argentines. After understanding Argentina's connection to the racist institution, it remains particularly unsettling to consider COOK's refusal to accept or acknowledge symbols of white supremacy, racism, and slavery. While it remains rooted in the specific context of the United States, the Confederate flag speaks to a history of white supremacy that the United States shares with Argentina.

In addition to Argentina's oppression of black individuals through slavery, the country also struggles to confront a history marked by the racist treatment and erasure of indigenous

---

<sup>19</sup> Norberto Pablo Cirio, "Black Skin, White Music: *Afropuerto* Musicians and Composers in Europe in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Black Music Research Journal* 35 (2015): 26; Although Argentina's Constitution of 1853 called for an end to slavery within the nation, it was not until 1861 that the abolition of the institution became universal. Slavery came to a complete end in Argentina in 1861 after the Buenos Aires province accepted referendums outlawing slavery passed by other provinces.

peoples. According to Lewis, the immigration of white Europeans to Argentina led to widespread deaths and forced migration of the nation's indigenous people:

Native American peoples lived throughout what became Argentina before the arrival of the first European settlers... Warfare, the spread of European disease, the disruption of community life, and the recruitment of laborers for work in mines and haciendas beyond Argentina reduced the Native American population...After military campaigns all but eliminated Native American settlements in the center and southern regions, Argentina began to grow rapidly as a result of immigration from Europe.<sup>20</sup>

The history of Argentina, then, remains connected to a history of indigenous persecution at the hands of white Europeans. In this sense, Argentine society's roots directly connect to a history of racism leading to the murder of Native Argentines in the country. The combination of large numbers of European immigrants flooding to Argentina—70 percent of whom settled in Buenos Aires—and the devastating impact of European settlers' actions on indigenous peoples contribute to contemporary understandings of racial identity in the city and the country as a whole. Lewis asserts that, in a country of around 37 million people, about 85 percent of the population considers itself white.<sup>21</sup> The narrative of European settlers killing and seizing Native land only to have that land fill with more European immigrants does not represent a unique one—this scenario occurred countless times in the Americas alone. It remains significant, however, to acknowledge how Argentina, much like the United States, retains a history based in racist origins. Argentina's own problematic past may serve as an explanation for the success of racist American symbols in Argentina's popular culture.

Beyond representations in the media and fashion campaigns, contemporary Argentina draws upon a history plagued with racism, contributing to the ease with which Argentines accept

---

<sup>20</sup> Daniel K. Lewis, *The History of Argentina* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001), 6.

<sup>21</sup> Lewis, *History of Argentina*, 7.

COOK's use of the Confederate flag in its products and logo. Much like the erasure of the history behind the Confederacy and the meaning of Confederate symbols, the exclusion of black and indigenous Argentines from popular culture reveals the erasure of nonwhite peoples from the national narrative. While Argentines of European descent had reduced the presence of indigenous and black peoples since the first settlers arrived in the country, white Argentines still called for the further minimizing of the Native presence well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>22</sup> The promotion of white Argentines through the exclusion of Native and black Argentines, then, provides a precedent for historical erasure in the country.

Argentina's history of racism often refers to the removal of individuals of color from public spaces, creating the illusion of a completely white society by erasing the presence of nonwhite individuals. This racist rhetoric sometimes presents itself in very explicit ways, calling for the literal exclusion of individuals of color from Argentine society. Curtoni and Politis analyze the overt racism in Argentine archaeologist Milciades Alejo Vignati's 1960 article in which he advocates for the ejection of Native Argentines from the Buenos Aires province, referring to indigenous peoples as societal "weeds."<sup>23</sup> While Vignati's derogatory statements certainly demonstrate racist attitudes individual Argentines retain towards Native peoples, the official support of these claims remain a more problematic and concerning indication of the continuation of racist ideas in the country. According to Curtoni and Politis's piece, major government-funded academic establishments distributed Vignati's article, showing the subtle approval of racist rhetoric in the Argentine public realm: "[T]he article was published in the *Anales de la Comisión Científica de la Pcia. De Buenos Aires*, the official scientific institution of

---

<sup>22</sup> Lewis, *History of Argentina*, 6.

<sup>23</sup> Rafael P. Curtoni and Gustavo G. Politis. "Race and Racism in South American Archaeology." *World Archaeology* 38 (2006): 98.

the main province of Argentina...[I]t is important to note that there was not even one public (oral or written) reaction against Vignati's...view of the Indians in Argentina."<sup>24</sup> The governmental endorsement of racist calls to remove Native peoples from Buenos Aires demonstrates the historical acceptance of racism in Argentina. By promoting the exclusion of Native Argentines from the Buenos Aires province, both individual Argentines and the government demonstrate racist attitudes that advocate for the erasure of the presence of individuals from Argentine society. The exclusion of nonwhite individuals from public spaces marks a lack of historical memory for the contributions and presence of Argentines of color.

COOK's promotion of white supremacist symbols mirrors the rejection of people of color from popular culture throughout Argentina. The subtle white supremacy of Argentina's beauty standards and representations in the media involve the active erasure of the history of Argentines of color from the collective Argentine identity. Usanna explores the expulsion of black individuals from Argentina's national narrative: "Argentina as a nation shares the myth that Blacks have vanished from [its] past and are no longer part of our present or future. This myth is even more paradoxical when we analyze deeper the 'invisibility' of Blacks within Argentine popular culture."<sup>25</sup> The failure to include black people in Argentina's collective identity speaks to the country's obsession with whiteness in popular culture. According to Usanna, while black Argentine citizens created or contributed to several staples of contemporary Argentine culture, such as the tango and milonga dances and Argentine slang, they receive very little recognition in Argentine society.<sup>26</sup> Instead of including Argentines of color and their stories in representations of popular culture, the national history of Argentina erases their presence, focusing instead on

---

<sup>24</sup> Curtoni and Politis, "Race and Racism in South American Archaeology," 99.

<sup>25</sup> Usanna, "The Absence of an African Presence in Argentina and the Dominican Republic," 108.

<sup>26</sup> Usanna, "The Absence of an African Presence in Argentina and the Dominican Republic," 108.

presentations of a national whiteness in the media.<sup>27</sup> The intersection of historical erasure and racism within Argentina remains clear. Like COOK's erasure of history, Argentine society's dismissal of indigenous and black people from public spaces and popular culture demonstrates the rejection of collective memory, constituting a clear departure from other national efforts to remember the history of the country and the stories of the individuals within it.

### **Argentina's Collective Memory surrounding National Trauma**

While Argentine society ignore its history of racism and white supremacy, it boldly embraces the county's past political struggles and human rights abuses, demonstrating a sort of collective memory around this national trauma. COOK's dismissal of historical trauma associated with the Confederate flag becomes all the more baffling when considering Argentina's troubled history and its intense efforts to preserve collective memory in contemporary society. In the last several decades, the government and people of Argentina have undergone incredible political changes that undoubtedly shape the ways in which the nation understands its contemporary culture. In 1976, following years of political instability, Argentina's military successfully staged a coup, overthrowing governmental figurehead Isabel Perón. Under strict control, Argentine citizens lived under a military dictatorship from the coup until 1983, when intense public pressure from protests and a failed campaign to reclaim the Falkland Islands from Great Britain led to the demise of the regime.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Jess Cotton, "Mediated Women," *The Argentina Independent*, May 3, 2012, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://www.argentinaindependent.com/socialissues/urbanlife/mediated-women-female-representation-in-the-argentine-media/>; In her article, Cotton describes how the majority of media outlets focus on and offer presentations of white Europeans as representatives of all Argentine citizens.

<sup>28</sup> Lewis, *The History of Argentina*, 149; Ralph Buchenhorst, María Paula Daniello, and Sela Bozal, "Los desaparecidos de Argentina: localizaciones multiples de un discurso de la memoria," *Iberoamericana (2001-)* 9 (2009); These authors explain that throughout the dictatorship, the military staged a *guerra sucia*—or "dirty war"—against anyone it suspected of retaining ideals that challenged the dictatorship's rule. The *guerra sucia* resulted in the kidnap, torture, and murder of upwards of 30,000 people throughout the seven years the military retained governmental power. The impact of the dictatorship and the results of the *guerra sucia* continue to plague contemporary Argentine society and the collective memory of Argentine citizens.

In its movement towards democratization since the Argentine dictatorship, Argentina has focused on active remembrance of its national trauma rather than ignoring its past.<sup>29</sup> Efforts made by both the government and citizens, such as the opening of museums and parks in commemoration of those affected by the dictatorship and the persistent protests by family members of the disappeared peoples, preserve the collective memory of the effects of the dictatorship in Argentine culture.<sup>30</sup> The emphasis Argentina places on preserving its internal history in contemporary society establishes a national narrative regarding its past—also known as “collective memory.”<sup>31</sup> The political challenges Argentina faced in the last several decades of its history have yielded a culture of memory in which modern Argentines strive to preserve historical trauma in order to remember the victims of the past and learn from its mistakes. Argentina’s collective memory surrounding this history, then, represents a markedly different approach to remembrance than COOK’s erasure of the historically racist roots of the Confederate flag.

### **COOK: Embracing the Confederate Flag without Embracing its History**

The Confederate flag symbols used by the Argentine company COOK, in an attempt to connect to American fashion, demonstrates an anomaly in the country’s conscious efforts to preserve memory and encourage remembrance of historical trauma. From its founding in 1975, COOK embraced symbols specific to the United States without acknowledging the actual history

---

<sup>29</sup> Dora Schwarzstein, “Memoria e historia,” *Desarrollo Económico* 42 (2002): 471; In her article, Schwarzstein asserts that countries with national histories of trauma often cling to the past as a means to heal through collective remembrance. Through its efforts to address its past political and governmental crises, Argentina has committed itself to actively remembering its own history.

<sup>30</sup> Jens Andermann, “Showcasing Dictatorship: Memory and the Museum in Argentina and Chile,” *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society* 4, 2: 69-93, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.berghahnjournals.com/view/journals/jemms/4/2/jemms0400205.xml>; Vladimir Hernandez, “Argentine Mothers Mark 35 Years Marching for Justice,” *BBC Mundo*, April 29, 2012, accessed 15 December 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-17847134>; Andermann’s and Hernandez’s articles speak to the efforts made by citizens and the government in Argentina to continue to address the horrors of the 1976-1983 dictatorship, preserving it in popular memory. Andermann discusses the inauguration of historical museums and Hernandez mentions the continued marches and rallies held by las Madres de la Plaza, a group of women whose children or grandchildren were “disappeared” by the government, demonstrating the visible and active presence of the history of political turmoil in Argentina.

<sup>31</sup> Funkenstein, “Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness,” 7; Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam, “Collective Memory—What Is It?,” *History and Memory* 8 (1996): 35.



behind them. Mimi Dwyer's piece "Why Do Argentine Teens Wear Confederate Flags?" discusses how the adoption of the Confederate flag by the Argentine brand stemmed from a desire to "Americanize" the company:

Ramiro Fita, [COOK]'s founder, first picked up a rebel flag in Baltimore...[Ramiro and his wife] talked of opening a label together, sensing an appetite in [Argentina] for the cultural products of the United States. They picked out the name John L. Cook, an American-sounding mantle of mysterious provenance. For its logo, they'd use the old flag from Baltimore.<sup>32</sup>

The original creation of the franchise now known as COOK stemmed from a desire to connect a fashion brand to American culture through symbols the company associated with the United States. COOK's website yields a number of allusions to both the American flag and the Confederate flag in clothing items.<sup>33</sup> The brand's logo consists of a square version of the Confederate battle flag, marking the company's commitment to its original inspiration.<sup>34</sup> Nowhere on COOK's website is there a mention of the history behind the Confederate flag or its association with white supremacy or American slavery. The brand's incorporation of the Confederate flag into their products without any historical context offers an incomplete and inaccurate understanding of its meaning, contributing to the historical erasure of the Confederate symbol.

COOK's social media presence further suggests a sort of erasure, as its account often uses the flag—steeped in a history of white supremacy—as a backdrop for famous quotations admonishing racism and slavery. COOK's Twitter account preaches about the values of tolerance and love, and often posts pictures of iconic quotations speaking to these ideals along with its Confederate flag logo. As Dwyer points out in her article, many of these lines come from

---

<sup>32</sup> Mimi Dwyer, "Why Do Argentine Teens Wear Confederate Flags?," *Aljazeera America*, August 9, 2015, accessed November 30, 2016. <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/8/why-do-argentine-teens-wear-confederate-flags.html>.

<sup>33</sup> "John L. Cook," John L. Cook, accessed November 11, 2016, <http://shop.johnlcook.com.ar/>.

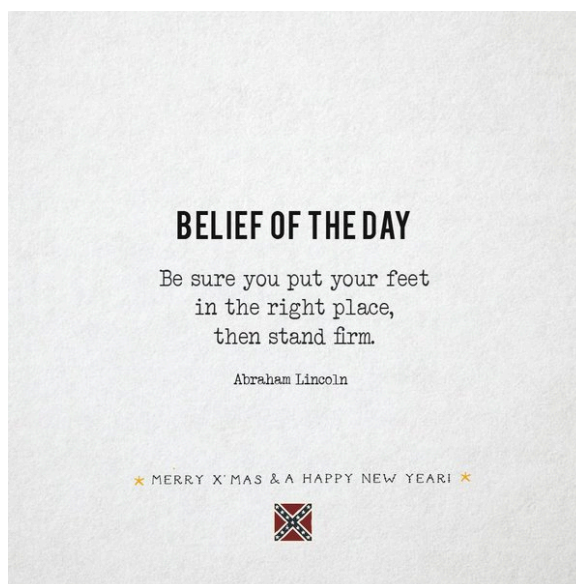
<sup>34</sup> "John L. Cook."

individuals “who resisted white supremacy,” such as Martin Luther King, Maya Angelou, and Abraham Lincoln.<sup>35</sup> One tweet in particular juxtaposes the Confederate flag with the Abraham Lincoln quote “Be sure you put your feet in the right place, then stand firm.”<sup>36</sup> The idea evoked by this quote reflects the morality associated with believing in and fighting for just causes. The company’s use of Lincoln’s famous quip, then, remains ironic in contrast with an image of the Confederate flag, which represents the racist, necessarily degrading ideology of a collection of states that sought separation from the United States during Lincoln’s presidency. COOK’s promotion of the words of Abraham Lincoln, the Confederacy’s central political enemy, over their logo incorporating the Confederate flag represents a sort of lapse of historical understanding of the Confederate flag. The brand’s message of acceptance and rejection of hatred on its Twitter account remains an ironic one, as the Confederate flag represented a collection of states that waged a war in order to protect the institution of slavery and groups dedicated to white supremacy and segregation, such as the KKK. COOK’s participation in historical erasure of the meaning of the flag remains evident in its Twitter posts that juxtapose crusaders against white supremacy with its ultimate symbol.

---

<sup>35</sup> Dwyer, “Why Do Argentine Teens Wear Confederate Flags?”

<sup>36</sup> John L. Cook, Twitter Post, December 17, 2014, 4:10 AM, [https://twitter.com/cookoficial/status/545189219866394624/photo/1?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw](https://twitter.com/cookoficial/status/545189219866394624/photo/1?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw).



*Figure 2:* COOK’s Twitter account often posts quotations of famous people with their brand’s insignia—the Confederate flag. In this case, the choice of a quote by Abraham Lincoln represents an ironic one when juxtaposed with the Confederate flag logo.

Beyond COOK’s willful dismissal of the ideology of the Confederacy on its Twitter account, the company’s Instagram page reveals attempts to invoke Lost Cause mythology without addressing any history of the Confederacy or its symbols. Through direct presentations of the Confederate flag and less obvious hints at the Lost Cause rhetoric of the Confederacy, one constant remains clear: references to the Confederacy constantly adorn COOK’s Instagram. The company’s Instagram account mainly features the clothing it sells, displayed in artistic ways in front of backdrops or worn by models, often with the Confederate flag printed on its t-shirts, sewn as a patch on its jeans, or hung up in the picture’s background.<sup>37</sup> One image in particular of two white models posing in front of a giant, crudely painted Confederate flag backdrop is especially striking.<sup>38</sup> This emblem is difficult to miss in the photograph, suggesting that representations of the Confederacy remain integral to the brand and serving as a constant reminder of the would-be nation without addressing the realities of its history.

<sup>37</sup> John L. Cook, Instagram Post, <https://www.instagram.com/cookofficial/>.

<sup>38</sup> John L. Cook, Instagram Post, <https://www.instagram.com/p/4Ux0HVJYIr/>.

Other nods to the Confederacy are subtler, such as the picture of a model with mittens that resemble the Confederate flag design and a blue knit beanie with the word “REBEL” stitched in red across the front.<sup>39</sup> While slightly less obvious than the picture of models in front of a giant Confederate flag, this Instagram post also relies on references to the Confederacy in order to frame COOK’s brand—directly around the symbol and indirectly around Confederate ideology. The linguistic evocation of the word “rebel” by a brand so deeply entangled with Confederate imagery represents an intentional choice by the company to connect its clothing with Lost Cause language from 1960s, 1970s and 1980s American popular culture.<sup>40</sup>

The colors of the cap and the distinctly Lost Cause language of “rebellion” constitute another connection between COOK and representations of the Confederacy. The account incorporates the Confederate flag and symbols of the Confederacy into the fashion of their brand, appropriating the flag for capitalistic gain. Missing from COOK’s presentation of these Confederate representations, however, is the history of the Confederate States of America or the underlying racism behind the inclusion of Confederate symbols in their logo. The brand’s marketing of the Confederacy normalizes its symbols for a mass audience primarily of teenagers in Argentina.<sup>41</sup> COOK’s rejection of the meaning behind the Confederate flag and Lost Cause rhetoric contributes to the erasure of historical memory and white supremacist ideology associated with the Civil War, sending an inaccurate message to the Argentine teens that buy these clothes that these symbols are devoid of meaning.

---

<sup>39</sup> John L. Cook, Instagram Post, June 5, 2015, <https://www.instagram.com/p/3U3amFJYBn/>.

<sup>40</sup> Jim Cullen, *The Civil War in Popular Culture: A Reusable Past*, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 111; For a closer look at the rhetoric used in popular music and culture in the United States from the 1960s-1980s, see Cullen’s work.

<sup>41</sup> Dwyer, “Why Do Argentine Teens Wear Confederate Flags?”; Dwyer mentions in her piece that the brand remains especially popular among Argentine teens, indicating this demographic is the most influenced by Confederate symbols and rhetoric.



*Figure 3:* COOK’s Instagram often reveals explicit references to the Confederacy and the Confederate flag, as evidenced by the backdrop of this image.



*Figure 4:* COOK’s Instagram also displays less obvious references to Confederate symbols and ideology, such as this picture of a “Rebel” hat with gloves featuring the Confederate flag.

The apparent embrace of the Confederate flag by COOK represents the company’s erasure of the symbols behind the Confederacy and its Lost Cause ideology while willfully selling its meaning

to Argentine teens. For a brand profiting off the presentation of Confederate history, there exist no connections to the past or the historical trauma endured by those affected by these symbols.

The distancing of COOK's logo from any relation to its history or even an acknowledgement of its origins by both those making and purchasing COOK clothing represents not only the complicating of the symbol's legacy common with American brands that display the Confederate flag, but also the complete erasure of history altogether. While Emiliano Fita, the current CEO of COOK and the son of the founders of the company, claims to know of the history behind the Confederate flag, he dismisses calls to address the logo's white supremacist roots. When pressed for comment on the associations between the Confederate flag and racism in the United States by Dwyer, Fita reveals he finds the meaning of the flag irrelevant for the purposes of his company's logo: "It's just the brand's logo."<sup>42</sup> As a representative for COOK, Fita's statement clearly outlines the brand's desire to dissociate from any history of racism, white supremacy, or slavery. Rather, Fita desires COOK's logo to exist as its own entity, far from the history associated with the Confederate symbol. By actively rejecting the meaning behind Confederate symbols, the producers of COOK clothing imply they would rather their consumers remain ignorant about the white supremacy behind the Confederate flag and all representations of the Confederate States of America. COOK's failure to acknowledge the controversy surrounding their brand's use of the Confederate flag and Lost Cause ideology in its brand, clothing, and general marketing result in the active erasure of the history off of which it profits. Through its simultaneous presentation of Confederate symbols related to the specific history of the United States and its failure to provide context for these representations of American white supremacy, COOK contributes to an erasure of culture for its own capitalistic gain.

---

<sup>42</sup> Dwyer, "Why Do Argentine Teens Wear Confederate Flags?"

Like the owners of the COOK Corporation, most young Argentine teens buying COOK clothing appear to find the historic origins of the popular brand's logo unimportant. Most fans of COOK products do not understand—nor, it appears do they want to understand—the gravity of the Confederate battle flag's legacy. Many Argentines interviewed about the brand's logo by Dwyer remained ignorant of its origins, and when given information about the use of the flag by the Confederate States of America and its connection to the states' racist ideology, some Argentine consumers seem unbothered. Dwyer's interview with a young teen from the Buenos Aires province whom she informs about the flag's history reveals the apathy from some Argentines have towards the racism the flag represents: "She'd never heard of the Confederacy. I told her that in the States the logo was controversial, that for many it represented slavery. 'I think that if a person likes their clothes, then they like them,' she said. 'The logo is just a logo and that's that.'"<sup>43</sup> Individual consumers' ignorance and apathy about the meaning behind the symbols of the Confederate legacy in COOK's brand demonstrates the success of the company's efforts to convince the general Argentine public that the history behind these manifestations of white supremacy remain irrelevant. Although Argentina claims to remain dedicated to memory preservation, COOK's popularity within the country and some customers' lack of interest in learning about the meaning behind the Confederate flag result in the historical erasure of the white supremacist emblem.

### **Argentine Beauty Standards and COOK's Presentation of Whiteness in its**

#### **Marketing**

While both the company and its consumers purposefully attempt to distance themselves from the racism behind the brand's logo, COOK's hiring of mostly white or white-presenting

---

<sup>43</sup> Dwyer, "Why Do Argentine Teens Wear Confederate Flags?"

models further associates its marketing strategy to the idea of white supremacy. While COOK has many store locations throughout Argentina, the vast majority of them are in Buenos Aires, a city comprised mostly of white European immigrants.<sup>44</sup> The company's choice to employ pale-skinned models then as representatives of its brand respond to a city in which most citizens appear white and where the presentation of European whiteness remains the dominant beauty standard. In "Why Do Argentine Teens Wear Confederate Flags?," Mimi Dwyer discusses COOK's intentional marketing of whiteness in its brand: "Cook caters to white teenagers. Its models are white. It has draped itself a banner of Confederate white supremacy, whose symbolism helps sell the idea of rebellion and freedom."<sup>45</sup> According to Dwyer, COOK's presentation of white models as representatives of the brand constitutes a deliberate choice subtly hinting at the Confederate legacy and Lost Cause rhetoric without explicitly linking the company to white supremacy or the racist history of the Confederacy.

Although COOK remains unique in its direct connection to white supremacy through its incorporation of the Confederate flag in its logo, the company's use of white models in COOK's fashion campaigns represents a fairly standard marketing choice for an Argentine brand. In general in Argentina, society views lighter skin and more "European" features as manifestations of the ideal beauty standard.<sup>46</sup> Cotton also speaks to the promotion of European whiteness as the ideal standard of beauty throughout the country. In citing the prolific presence of "white, fair-haired, western figures" common on Argentine magazines and billboards, she argues that Argentine standards of beauty closely align with white European features: "[T]he predominance

---

<sup>44</sup> Lewis, *History of Argentina*, 7.

<sup>45</sup> Dwyer, "Why Do Argentine Teens Wear Confederate Flags?"

<sup>46</sup> Barbara Sutton, *Bodies in Crisis: Culture, Violence, and Women's Resistance in Neoliberal Argentina* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 84; Reference Sutton's work for more academic information about the adoption of European whiteness as the ideal standard of beauty in Argentina. Sutton's assessment provides cultural context regarding COOK's choice of white models for its campaigns and advertisements.



of advertising in this country is intimately related to the propensity of Argentines to look to Europe as its cultural mirror.”<sup>47</sup> COOK’s choice of white models in its advertisements conforms to the general conflation of whiteness and beauty in Argentina, revealing the subtle racism of the nation’s presentation of beauty standards in the media.

The aesthetic characteristics upheld as the idealized standard of contemporary Argentine beauty reflect those praised among young women in Confederate Southern culture.<sup>48</sup> This association of whiteness and beauty in both modern Argentina and the Confederacy during the Civil War links the two distinctive societies in their promotion of white supremacy. While the CEO of COOK claims the history of its logo retains no relevance to the brand, the company’s use of national tropes related to the presentation of white beauty directly correspond with the racism of the Confederacy and the brand’s adoption of Confederate symbols of rebellion and independence.

### **Confederate Symbols as “American” and the Globalization of the Confederate Flag**

While COOK draws upon specific Confederate emblems and rhetoric, the brand still retains a strong association with the United States and American politics, demonstrating a conflation between the Confederacy and the United States of America. Since COOK’s establishment, the company has presented itself as a bastion of Americanness in Argentina. Its name and logo, in fact, were intentionally chosen to represent the United States.<sup>49</sup> COOK’s choice of the Confederate symbol as a representation of American values, however, is ironic, as it constitutes the very same emblem constituted a deliberate dissociation from the Union during

---

<sup>47</sup> Cotton, “Mediated Women.”

<sup>48</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 220-233; In her book, Faust discusses the idealization of whiteness and hyper-femininity among Confederate women.

<sup>49</sup> Dwyer, “Why Do Argentine Teens Wear Confederate Flags?”

the American Civil War. While the Confederate flag's meaning, steeped in white supremacy and racism, originally represented a point of departure from the United States and the Union, COOK's adoption of the symbol as a means to Americanize the brand has been successful, as many Argentines themselves view the flag not a representation of Confederate values, but American ones. One young woman Dwyer interviews claims to reject COOK's use of the Confederate flag—not for its history of racism but, she argues, because it symbolizes the United States and, subsequently, America's militaristic intervention in Latin America.<sup>50</sup> The brand's Confederate flag, then, represents the insertion of American neoimperialism into Argentine culture. While this interpretation of the flag remains ironic and erases the history of separationism from the Union associated with its origins, COOK's capitalization on the conflation of American and Confederate culture proves effective.

The Americanization of the Confederate flag through the appropriation of a symbol conceived out of the desire to dissociate from the United States follows a pattern of historical erasure—both within the United States and outside its borders. Cullen's work demonstrates that one of the most visible associations between the Confederate flag and American values in popular culture was by Southern country and rock musicians from the 1960s through the 1980s. While standing in front of Confederate flag backdrops and invoking Lost Cause rhetoric during their concerts, musicians such as Charlie Daniels continued to tout American nationalist ideals.<sup>51</sup> This connection between the United States and the Confederacy persists in modern American culture, as evidenced by the “Be Wild” and “Red Neck Nation” retailers, which regularly invoke American “patriotism” and nationalism in their Confederate flag T-shirt designs.<sup>52</sup> Claims of

---

<sup>50</sup> Dwyer, “Why Do Argentine Teens Wear Confederate Flags?”

<sup>51</sup> Cullen, *The Civil War in Popular Culture*, 109.

<sup>52</sup> “Rebel Flag T-Shirts and Confederate Flag Merchandise.”

loyalty to both the Confederacy and the United States from inside American borders encourages the inaccurate international perception that the two are inherently linked, further promoting the erasure of the history of the flag.

America's perception of the Confederate flag sets a precedent for international interpretations of the symbol, as globalization over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century has led to American influence in worldwide understandings of fashion. An increase in interactions between nations has produced a world in which countries exchange and share trends in popular culture and fashion. In particular, The United States' hegemonic control of popular culture influenced other nations throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, with trends in American fashion spreading globally.<sup>53</sup> Teenagers from other countries especially tend to accept Americanized versions of popular culture and fashion, as major American brands targeted young consumers in their efforts to globalize American style.<sup>54</sup> The persistent branding of the Confederate flag as a bastion of Americanness and its prominent appearance in fashion, then, translates to international audiences as well as domestic ones. The normalization of the Confederate flag by certain sects of the American population through online store that sell the symbol of white supremacy and racism influence global fashion trends and general acceptance of the flag. American companies like "Be Wild" and "Red Neck Nation," have converted the Confederate flag into a representation of America and an acceptable expression of "American" values through clothing, allowing countries outside the United States that lack historical context to embrace the flag as an "American" product as well. Indeed, as Coski asserts in his chapter titled "The Second American

---

<sup>53</sup> Bonnie English, *A Cultural History of Fashion in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 78; English's book explores the transformation of fashion trends throughout the world over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and further discusses the globalization of American and Western fashion.

<sup>54</sup> Suzana Carmen Cismas, "The Impact of American Culture on Other Cultures: Language and Cultural Identity" (paper presented at the AIKED'10 Proceedings of the 9th WSEAS International Conference on Artificial Intelligence, Knowledge, Engineering and Data Bases, Cambridge, UK, February 20-25, 2010); Cismas's conference paper also details the adoption of American culture—and especially fashion—throughout the century. She contends that, whether conscious or subconscious, the globalization of fashion in the 20<sup>th</sup> century led to the worldwide embrace of American trends.

Flag,” “[f]rom a vantage point beyond [American] shores, the Confederate flag is an American symbol.”<sup>55</sup> International perceptions of the Confederate flag as a symbol of the United States and Americanness do not solely belong to COOK or Argentina. However, the explicit erasure of the history associated with the Confederate flag does align with Argentina’s national pattern of ignoring white supremacy and racism. COOK’s adoption of the Confederate flag as a symbol of the United States, then, gained popularity due to a combination of the conflation and subsequent globalization of the symbol within American culture and Argentina’s deliberate erasure of historical racism.

### **Conclusion: Reasons for the Resilience of the Confederate Flag in Argentina**

When returning to the question of why the Argentine clothing company uses the Confederate flag in its logo and what its popularity in Argentina represents about Confederate commemoration abroad, a number of factors explain this phenomenon. Over time, the Confederate flag, a direct representation of white supremacy and secession from the Union due to its historical association with Confederate values, began to gain widespread acceptance in the United States as a symbol of American nationalism. The perception of the flag within the boundaries of the United States changed from a symbol endorsing the continuation of slavery and separation from the Union to one of Southern “heritage” and American patriotism. The combined efforts of the Lost Cause mythology and the Confederate flag’s presence in popular culture—particularly country and rock music concerts of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s—contributed to the normalization of the Confederate flag inside the United States and its conflation with American culture as a whole.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag*, 293.

<sup>56</sup> Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag*, 48-51; Cullen, *The Civil War in Popular Culture*, 109.

The gradual embrace of the flag in the United States remains apparent when examining American fashion retailers that sell Confederate flag T-shirts that emphasize Lost Cause mythology. The prominence of the flag within American popular culture and fashion undoubtedly has an influence on the global reception of the Confederate symbol. Due to the globalization of fashion over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, American products remain incredibly popular and prolific in countries around the globe, with international designers and companies attempting to model their products on American fashion trends.<sup>57</sup> The misguided, internal acceptance of the Confederate flag within the United States, then, led to the international conflation of the Confederate States of America and the United States of America, serving as an explanation for COOK's adoption of the flag as a means to "Americanize" its brand.

While domestic historical erasure of the Confederacy and the subsequent globalization of its flag in international fashion explains one of the reasons for the flag's appearance in the Argentine brand, Argentina's own history of ignoring historical racism accounts for the symbol's enduring popularity in the nation. Through the explicit rejection of indigenous Argentines and the symbolic failure to acknowledge the contributions of black Argentines to its popular culture, Argentina, a country mostly comprised of people that identify as being of European descent, retains a history of rejecting the history and presence of nonwhite individuals. The erasure of Argentines of color from mainstream society and popular culture in many ways mirrors the erasure of history associated with COOK's use of the Confederate flag. White supremacy in Argentina and the presentation of the country as homogenously white, then, serve as the dominant narrative within the country. The popularity of a symbol of white supremacy in a country with a history of national, government-endorsed racism is unsurprising. Because of the racism already present within Argentina, the legacy of the Confederate flag and its connection to

---

<sup>57</sup> Cismas, "The Impact of American Culture on Other Cultures."

racism in the United States remains insignificant or irrelevant for many Argentine producers and consumers of products brandishing the Confederate symbol. Simply put, historical memory associated with racism is not a main focus in Argentina. COOK's use of the Confederate flag aligns with Argentina's general expression of white supremacy by rejecting historical trauma associated with racism or the presence of nonwhite individuals within its society.

Argentine society's acceptance of the Confederate flag in the COOK logo certainly fits into the country's national promotion of white supremacy. However, the erasure of the history behind the Confederate flag still remains ironic in Argentina, a country dedicated to the preservation of collective memory and historical trauma. Over the past several decades, the Argentine government and society have opened parks and museums and commissioned art pieces and literature relating to the country's 1976-1983 dictatorship and its enduring effects on Argentine citizens. In addition to government action, ongoing calls for answers by the family members of those disappeared during the military regime reveal the governmental and societal focus on preserving the past in public memory. These efforts demonstrate a strong emphasis on remembrance and actively preserving Argentina's past, conflicting with its rejection of the historical context associated with the Confederate flag. COOK's popularity in Argentina despite its use of the Confederate flag and disregard for the history of white supremacy behind the symbol represents a point of discrepancy in Argentina's self-presentation of a society in which memory preservation remains a priority. While Argentina has made efforts towards addressing history through openly discussing the effects the military dictatorship had on Argentine culture, these collective attempts to remember remain selective and fail to recognize how racism and white supremacy shaped Argentine popular culture and the Confederate symbols citizens proudly tout.

The Argentine company COOK and the brand's use of symbols associated with territories now belonging to the United States blends cultures and nations together. In order to unpack COOK's popularity within the South American nation, it remains crucial to analyze the historical and popular context of both Argentina and the United States of America, demonstrating the transnational connections forged by one clothing retailer. The memory and legacy of the Civil War extends far beyond the boundaries of the United States. Historians such as W. Caleb McDaniel, Bethany L. Johnson, David T. Gleeson, and Simon Lewis speak to the importance of understanding the American Civil War outside the context of the United States.<sup>58</sup> However, these analyses, while important, are tethered to the past and fail to recognize the enduring impacts of the U.S. Civil War on the international community. In order to truly comprehend the impact of the Confederate legacy, it remains crucial to study the influence of this Civil War memory in contemporary cultures beyond America's borders.

In the context of understanding the legacy of the Civil War abroad, the Confederate flag's appearance on a popular Argentine clothing brand seems less odd than it did when I originally came across it on the streets of Argentina. In fact, because of Argentina's combination of white supremacy, historical erasure, and globalization, the popularity of American Confederate emblems and the rhetoric present in COOK's branding make sense in an ironic way. No other symbol besides that of the Confederate flag can encompass these concepts all at once. While it is still shocking to witness the white supremacist symbol of the Confederate flag on billboards and adorned on T-shirts throughout Argentina, the reasons behind its continued existence are anything but surprising. The power of the flag and its complicated legacy, even thousands of miles from their place of conception, remain palpable.

---

<sup>58</sup> McDaniel and Johnson, "New Approaches to Internationalizing the History of the Civil War Era; David T. Gleeson and Simon Lewis, *The Civil War as Global Conflict* (Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press), 2-3.

## Works Cited

- Andermann, Jens. "Showcasing Dictatorship: Memory and the Museum in Argentina and Chile." *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society* 4, 2: 69-93. Accessed December 15, 2016, <http://www.berghahnjournals.com/view/journals/jemms/4/2/jemms0400205.xml>.
- Bates, Christopher. "'Oh I'm a Good Ol' Rebel': Reenactment, Racism, and the Lost Cause." In *The Civil War in Popular Culture*, edited by Lawrence A. Kreiser, 191-221. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2014.
- Blight, David W. *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Buchenhorst, Ralph, María Paula Daniello, and Sela Bozal. "Los desparecidos de Argentina: localizaciones multiples de un discurso de la memoria." *Iberoamericana (2001-)* 9 (2009): 65-84.
- Campbell, Duncan. "Kissinger Approved Argentinian 'Dirty War.'" *The Guardian*, December 5, 2003. Accessed December 15, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/dec/06/argentina.usa>.
- Cirio, Norberto Pablo. "Black Skin, White Music: *Afroporteño* Musicians and Composers in Europe in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century." *Black Music research Journal* 35 (2015): 23-40.
- Cismas, Suzana Carmen, "The Impact of American Culture on Other Cultures: Language and Cultural Identity." Paper presented at the AIKED'10 Proceedings of the 9th WSEAS International Conference on Artificial Intelligence, Knowledge, Engineering and Data Bases, Cambridge, UK, February 20-25, 2010.
- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. "What This Cruel War Was Over." *The Atlantic*, June 22, 2015. Accessed December 15, 2016. <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/06/what-this-cruel-war-was-over/396482/>.
- "Confederate Flag Shirts." *Redneck Nation Apparel Co*. Accessed December 15, 2016. <http://rednecknationstrong.com/collections/confederate-flag>.



- Coski, John M. *The Confederate Battle Flag: America's Most Embattled Emblem*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2005.
- Cotton Jess. "Mediated Women." *The Argentina Independent*, May 3, 2012. Accessed December 15, 2016. <http://www.argentinaindependent.com/socialissues/urbanlife/mediated-women-female-representation-in-the-argentine-media/>.
- Cullen, Jim. *The Civil War in Popular Culture: A Reusable Past*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995.
- Curtoni, R., and Gustavo G. Politis. "Race and Racism in South American Archaeology." *World Archaeology* 38 (2006): 93-108.
- Davis, Jefferson. *Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, vol. 1. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1881.
- Dirks, Anne, and Siemerink, Else. "The Past in the Present: Hidden Places of Memory in Buenos Aires." *The Argentina Independent*, March 25, 2013. Accessed December 15, 2016. <http://www.argentinaindependent.com/socialissues/humanrights/past-in-the-present-hidden-places-of-memory-in-buenos-aires/>.
- Dwyer, Mimi. "Why Do Argentine Teens Wear Confederate Flags?" *Aljazeera America*, August 9, 2015. Accessed December 15, 2016. <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/8/why-do-argentine-teens-wear-confederate-flags.html>.
- English, Bonnie. *A Cultural History of Fashion in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. Oxford: Berg, 2007.
- Faust, Drew Gilpin. *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.
- Funkenstein, Amos. "Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness." *History and Memory* 1 (1989): 5-26.
- Gedi, Noa, and Yigal Elam. "Collective Memory—What Is It?" *History and Memory* 8 (1996):

30-50.

Gleeson, David T., and Simon Lewis, eds. *The Civil War as Global Conflict: Transnational Meanings of the American Civil War*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2014.

Hernandez, Vladimir. "Argentine Mothers Mark 35 Years Marching for Justice." *BBC Mundo*, April 29, 2012. Accessed December 15, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-17847134>.

Ilyashov, Alexandra. "How the Confederate Flag Has Become 'Cool' Beyond America's South." *Refinery29*, August 13, 2015. Accessed December 15, 2016. <http://www.refinery29.com/2015/08/92278/confederate-flag-argentina-fashion-brand>.

John L. Cook. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/cookoficial/>.

John L. Cook. Instagram Post. June 5, 2015. <https://www.instagram.com/p/3U3amFJYBn/>.

John L. Cook. Instagram Post. May 4, 2016. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BE4giTvJYNm/?taken-by=cookoficial>.

John L. Cook Instagram Post. May 28, 2016. <https://www.instagram.com/p/4Ux0HVJYIr/>.

*John L. Cook*. "John L. Cook." Accessed December 15, 2016. <http://shop.johnlcook.com.ar/>.

John L. Cook. Twitter Post. December 17, 2014, 4:10 AM. [https://twitter.com/cookoficial/status/545189219866394624/photo/1?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw](https://twitter.com/cookoficial/status/545189219866394624/photo/1?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw).

Lewis, Daniel K. *The History of Argentina*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001.

McDaniel, W. Caleb and Johnson, Bethany L. "New Approaches to Internationalizing the History of the Civil War Era: An Introduction." *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 2 2 (2012): 145-150.

- Murray, Rheana. "Argentinian Fashion Brand John L. Cook's Confederate Flag Logo Stirs Outrage." *Today*, August 11, 2015. Accessed December 15, 2016.  
<http://www.today.com/style/fashion-brand-john-l-cooks-confederate-flag-logo-stirs-fury-t38041>.
- "Musculosa All American Short Flag II." *John L. Cook*. Accessed December 15, 2016.  
[http://shop.johnlcook.com.ar/511-1443-musculosa-all-american-short-flag-ii.html?cook\\_color=Blanco](http://shop.johnlcook.com.ar/511-1443-musculosa-all-american-short-flag-ii.html?cook_color=Blanco).
- Nunez, Alanna. "Why Are Argentine Teens Wearing the Confederate Flag on Their Clothes?" *Cosmopolitan*, August 11, 2015. Accessed December 15, 2016.  
<http://www.cosmopolitan.com/style-beauty/fashion/news/a44623/argentine-teens-john-l-cook-confederate-flag/>.
- "Rebel Flag T-Shirts and Confederate Flag Merchandise." *Be Wild*. Accessed December 15, 2016. <http://www.bewild.com/rednecktshirts.html>.
- Schwarzstein, Dora. "Memoria e historia." *Desarrollo Económico* 42 (2002): 471-482.
- Sutton, Barbara. *Bodies in Crisis: Culture, Violence, and Women's Resistance in Neoliberal Argentina*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010.
- Usanna, Karin Weyland. "The Absence of an African Presence in Argentina and the Dominican Republic: Caught between National Folklore and Myth." *Caribbean Studies* 38 (2010): 107-127.
- Webb, Jim. "Former Senator Jim Webb (D-Va.) Appears to Defend Confederate Flag." *The Washington Post*, June 24, 2015. Accessed December 15, 2016,  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/virginia-politics/former-sen-jim-webb-d-va-appears-to-defend-confederate-flag/2015/06/24/ed0d162c-1a99-11e5-ab92-c75ae6ab94b5\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.9110235eb410](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/virginia-politics/former-sen-jim-webb-d-va-appears-to-defend-confederate-flag/2015/06/24/ed0d162c-1a99-11e5-ab92-c75ae6ab94b5_story.html?utm_term=.9110235eb410).