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Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South

Tara McPherson

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The South has long played a central role in America's national imagination—the site of the trauma of slavery and of a vast nostalgia industry, alternatively the nation's moral other and its moral center. *Reconstructing Dixie* explores how ideas about the South function within American culture. Narratives of the region often cohere around such tropes as southern hospitality and the southern (white) lady. Tara McPherson argues that these discursive constructions tend to conceal and disavow hard historical truths, particularly regarding race relations and the ways racial inequities underwrite southern femininity. Advocating conceptions of the South less mythologized and more tethered to complex realities, McPherson seeks to bring into view that which is repeatedly obscured—the South's history of both racial injustice and cross-racial alliance.

Illuminating crucial connections between understandings of race, gender, and place on the one hand and narrative and images on the other, McPherson reads a number of representations of the South produced from the 1930s to the present. These are drawn from fiction, film, television, southern studies scholarship, popular journalism, music, tourist sites, the internet, and autobiography. She examines modes of affect or ways of "feeling southern" to reveal how these feelings, along with the narratives and images she discusses, sanction particular racial logics. A wide-ranging cultural studies critique, *Reconstructing Dixie* calls for vibrant new ways of thinking about the South and for a revamped and reinvigorated southern studies.

Reconstructing Dixie will appeal to scholars in American, southern, and cultural studies, and to those in African American, media, and women's studies.

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