

Public Abstract

First Name: Summer

Middle Name: Hill

Last Name: Vinson

Adviser's First Name: Earnest

Adviser's Last Name: Perry

Graduation Term: SP 2011

Department: Journalism

Degree: PhD

Title: Whitewashing *Southern Living*: The Sociocultural Significance of the 1966 Magazine Launch in Birmingham, Alabama

The purpose of this study was to examine Progressive Farmer Company's 1966 launch of *Southern Living* magazine in Birmingham, Alabama, in its sociocultural context. Birmingham in the 1960s was deeply divided along racial lines and was at the epicenter of the civil rights movement. The publisher of the largest magazine in the South, *Progressive Farmer*, launched *Southern Living* during the most contentious months in Birmingham's history. *Southern Living* became one of the most successful American magazines. The primary research question was: How did *Southern Living* magazine reflect or reject its sociocultural environment? This study examined more than one thousand documents, including company memorandums, reader letters, and audience information, and reviewed *Southern Living* magazine's first four years of content. It found that *Southern Living* magazine was the result of extensive preparation to target a new audience of affluent urban and suburban southerners. Struggles between company leaders at Progressive Farmer Company over *Southern Living*'s content mirrored tension between white southerners in the region. Overall, the magazine was a rejection of the significant societal change in the region. It represented a way to reconfigure white southern identity in a nostalgic way that allowed readers to escape the tension of the 1960s, but it also negated the place of African Americans in southern culture. This research extends scholarship on the role of magazines in American culture, contributes to the understanding of Birmingham, Alabama, during the civil rights movement, and is the definitive history of *Southern Living* magazine's launch.