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“Press Agents of the South” – *Gone with the Wind* and the United Daughters of the Confederacy

Abstract: This paper seeks to provide a broader context for contemporary viewership of the film *Gone with the Wind* (1939) by focusing on the role of the organization The Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), one of the most vocal adherents of the Lost Cause ideology, in shaping the ideological framing narrative for the film’s early reception. The introductory section examines the recent debate surrounding the film, triggered by John Ridley’s op-ed in the *LA Times*. The following sections analyze the key ways in which the film perpetuates Lost Cause sentiments, establish *Gone with the Wind* as a new kind of Confederate monument within the UDC’s agenda, and explore the UDC’s role in publicly promoting the film and utilizing it as a cultural tool to advance their own platform.

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1. Introduction

The 2020 Black Lives Matter protests sparked an unprecedented reexamination of how the American Civil War is remembered in the collective visual memory.¹ While this wave of protests marked the watershed moment for the large-scale removals of the Confederate monuments from their civic pedestals, it also signaled a shift in which more scrutiny was placed on the portrayals of Civil War history in other fields of visual culture, including in Hollywood films.

One of the key public discussions in this field was set in motion by a June 8, 2020, *LA Times* op-ed written by director and screenwriter John Ridley, titled "Hey, HBO, 'Gone with the Wind' romanticizes the horrors of slavery. Take it off your platform for now."² In this article, Ridley urged WarnerMedia streaming platform HBO Max to remove the controversial Civil War film off its curated list in the highly sensitive moment, until it can be reintroduced within the proper context. Ridley, who won an Oscar for his screenplay for the film *12 Years a Slave* (2013), went on to criticize the film for displaying the full tapestry of Lost Cause tropes, from downplaying the horrors of slavery, romanticizing Southern pre-war society, to portraying harmful stereotypes pertaining to African American characters in order to legitimize the idea that: "the secessionist movement was something more, or better, or more noble than what it was, a bloody insurrection to maintain the "right" to own, sell and buy human beings."³

A day after the online publication of Ridley's article, HBO Max responded to the controversy by placing the film on a temporary hiatus. The platform issued a statement acknowledging the film's entrenched racism, though its language leaned heavily on relegating the issue to the ash heap of history rather than addressing it as a historically undisrupted political concern:

Gone With the Wind is a product of its time and depicts some of the ethnic and racial prejudices that have, unfortunately, been commonplace in American society. [...] If we are to create a more just, equitable and inclusive future, we must first acknowledge and understand our history.⁴

In another statement seemingly meant to sidestep criticism, WarnerMedia chairman Bob Greenblatt addressed the absence of a disclaimer on SiriusXM's *The Jess Cagle Show*, while managing to stay deliberately evasive, offering praise of the film, and

¹ In the wake of George Floyd's murder by Minneapolis police in 2020, the Black Lives Matter movement galvanized nationwide protests against police brutality, systemic racism, and white supremacy. A key focus was the removal of pro-Confederacy symbols from public spaces, challenging their role in glorifying slavery and racist ideologies and prompting a broader reckoning with the Civil War's legacy. See *Confederate Statues Attacked by Protesters After George Floyd's Death* 2020.

² See Ridley 2020.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Lang 2020.

hinting that other issues warrant more scrutiny.⁵ Greenblatt described *Gone with the Wind* as “a complicated film, undeniably one of the most watched films of all time, and most award-winning,” vaguely added that “it has these issues which are not insignificant,” before concluding that, however, “there are many darker moments on film that we need to talk about.”⁶

After a brief pocket of time, the platform reintroduced the film with a disclaimer, an explanatory talk by Jacqueline Stewart, professor of media studies, and an accompanying panel discussion from the TCM Classic Film Festival in 2019.⁷ Unlike the statements and disclaimer, the talk offered a more nuanced and in-depth analysis, contextualizing the film’s racist depictions.

In light of the renewed debate, this paper focuses on an issue that has largely remained undiscussed: the direct role of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), the most vocal Southern conservative organization, in shaping the film’s reception. It is structured around the question of how an external Southern organization influenced the film’s messaging beyond Hollywood’s PR offices, aligning it with its own agenda. The first section of the paper examines the film through the lens of the Southern memory thrust. The second section explores the role the UDC played in the film’s release to the public. Within this section, the first subchapter explores the organization’s broader agenda and its shift toward Civil War films in response to the decline of monument-building activities. The second subchapter examines how the organization strategically orchestrated the premiere of *Gone with the Wind*, aligning itself with the film’s narrative and harnessing the wave of national attention its release generated.

By exploring how the film’s reception was shaped by the UDC, this paper aims to demonstrate that the harmful stereotypes at the center of the contemporary debate were not consumed in a vacuum but were part of the revisionist ideology baked into the film’s narrative, advanced by these interest groups, and presented to the public as such. To fully “understand our history,” the racist depictions in *Gone with the Wind*, and its role in today’s culture, it is important to broaden the scope of the ongoing conversation to include the Southern strand of Civil War memory and the ideological setting of the film’s premiere.

⁵ See D’Alessandro 2020.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See Turner Classic Movies: *The Complicated Legacy of Gone With the Wind: Panel Discussion*.

2. The Lost Cause on Film: Ideological Contours of *Gone with the Wind*

David O. Selznick's epic almost certainly has been the single most powerful influence on American perceptions of the Civil War.⁸

Gone with the Wind is a screen adaptation of the best-selling novel of the same title by Margaret Mitchell. Set in Georgia, it chronicles the life of Scarlett O'Hara, a strong-willed yet deeply flawed protagonist, as she navigates the transitions from the *antebellum* South through the Civil War to the Reconstruction era. The American Institute of Public Opinion (known today as the Gallup Poll) estimated that by 1938, 14 million people had read the novel, either in whole or in part. Based on this information, the institute predicted that there was a significant chance that nearly two-thirds of the moviegoing public would flood theaters to see the film.⁹ Following the suggestion from Katharine "Kay" Brown, head of Selznick International Pictures' story department, producer David O. Selznick acquired the rights to the book and began the production of the elaborate epic.¹⁰ Released in 1939, the film was directed by three filmmakers, Sam Wood, George Cukor, and Victor Fleming, and starred English actress Vivien Leigh as Scarlett O'Hara alongside Clark Gable who portrayed Rhett Butler.

One useful framework for analyzing Civil War narratives comes from the classification of four primary strands of Civil War memory: (1) the Unionist Cause memory, (2) the Lost Cause memory, (3) the Reconciliation Cause memory, and (4) the Emancipationist Cause memory, devised by Civil War historians and later adopted by film historians.¹¹ The Unionist memory emerged immediately after the war among those who supported the Union's perspective. It emphasized preserving the United States and abolishing slavery as central achievements of the conflict. The Southern memory, meanwhile, coalesced around the postwar Lost Cause ideology. This perspective portrayed the South as defeated by a superior force, attributing the war's outbreak to 'Northern Aggression' and framing it as a fight for states' rights rather than slavery. Slavery's central role was downplayed, reframed as a benign institution that was supposedly benevolent and protective toward the slaves, while the South was recast as noble, victimized, and justified. The Reconciliation memory arose after Reconstruction as an effort to bridge divisions between North and South. Shaped largely on Southern terms, this perspective prioritized reunification while sidelining contentious issues such as slavery and its enduring legacy to deescalate sectional tensions. The Emancipationist memory, the most marginalized strand, reflects the African American experience by centering slavery as the war's defining

⁸ Gallagher 2008: 45.

⁹ See Cox 2011: 90-93.

¹⁰ See *The Literary Maker of Hollywood History* 1986: 43.

¹¹ See Blight 2001: 2-3, Gallagher 2008: 2-4.

issue and exposing its brutal realities. In the case of the film *Gone with the Wind*, its narrative fully embodies the Lost Cause memory strand. It is not insignificant to note that *Gone with the Wind* was often compared to *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), including by David O. Selznick, who viewed it as the project that came closest to matching the cultural impact of Griffith's film in its era.¹²

Much like the novel, the film is embedded with Lost Cause tropes. From the opening titles the film mourns the loss of the culture of the old South based on the institution of slavery:

There was a land of Cavaliers and Cotton Fields called the Old South... Here in this pretty world Gallantry took its last bow... Here was the last ever to be seen of Knights and their Ladies Fair, of Master and Slave... Look for it only in books, for it is no more than a dream remembered. A Civilization gone with the wind.¹³

Building on this sentiment, the film begins in pre-war Georgia with a romanticized depiction of the white Southern elite, basking in the grandeur of white-columned plantations and coexisting in supposed harmony with their slaves. Scarlett, brimming with petulance, is seen dismissing Mammy's lectures, all while attempting to charm the love of her life, Ashley Wilkes, within the familiar comfort of her family plantation, Tara. The declaration of war brings disarray to this perfect picture. As the war sweeps through Georgia, Scarlett finds herself engulfed in a transformed world. She works as a nurse helping wounded soldiers, and struggles in the face of tragedy, poverty, and helplessness. In time, she resolves to take control of her life by rebuilding Tara. Her determination guides her as she engages in manipulative schemes, fights off a Northern soldier who attacks her home, and marries for financial security. With the advent of the Reconstruction era, the film further veers into historical distortion, first popularized in cinema by *The Birth of a Nation*, portraying the South as being dominated by Northern 'carpetbaggers' and newly freed slaves. Scarlett and Mammy share a disdain for this new order, as illustrated in the scene where they walk past a group of newly freed African Americans laughing while gathered around a Northern newcomer who explains to them that each will receive a piece of land and voting rights.¹⁴

In each period, the harmful stereotypes of African Americans are depicted in accordance with different parts of the Confederate myth. The attitudes of slaves living on the Tara, such as Mammy and Prissy, serve to discard slavery as an issue. Mammy seems to be fully acquiesced to the order of things, as she has no interest in participating in the abolitionist struggle, which is significant as it comes from a character painted as particularly observant and intelligent. Prissy, on the other hand, embodies a different set of stereotypes, encapsulated in a performance that Malcolm

¹² See Selznick 1936: 204.

¹³ *Gone with the Wind*: 00:02:00.

¹⁴ *Gone with the Wind*: 02:45:00.

X famously said made him feel like “crawling under the rug.”¹⁵ Her exaggerated naivety and infantilization render her helpless and entirely dependent on Scarlett for protection. Further, when entering into the Reconstruction era, the film portrays stereotypes of former slaves who either remain loyal to their masters, like Mammy and Prissy, depicted as doing so out of wisdom or incapacity to choose otherwise, or aligns with a perspective reminiscent of *The Birth of a Nation*, where those who embrace freedom are shown in collaboration with Northern opportunists, reveling in newfound power. In reality, the postwar South saw the rise of Jim Crow laws and Black Codes, which sought to strip newly freed slaves of equality and reintroduce them to forms of slavery.¹⁶

While the film does not follow the traditional setup of the plantation myth narrative, which paints the Confederate cause with admiration, both Scarlett and Rhett find a way to connect with it through personal transformation. Rhett initially avoids the draft, but after witnessing the burning of Atlanta, he decides to join the Confederate soldiers for their final stand. Scarlett, on the other hand, does not seem to care for the war, or the soldiers, but her connection to the Southern land gives her strength and instills in her a hatred toward the Northern characters who want to take it. Throughout the story, the symbolic bond she shares with her home, and by extension, a version of the old Southern way of life, invests her with motivation to endure and build a version of the New South in the image of the old one. After Rhett Butler leaves her with the iconic “I don’t give a damn” line, Scarlett finds her purpose by setting her future on Tara.

While Selznick ensured that the production adhered to Southern standards, as per Mitchell’s requests, by enlisting prominent Southern historical buffs Susan Myrick and Wilbur G. Kurtz as technical advisers, the premiere largely fell under the jurisdiction of those who upheld and spread the very interpretation of the war that the film promoted, the members of the UDC.¹⁷

3. The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Legacy of *Gone with the Wind*

As guardians of Southern memory and gatekeepers of the Southern market, the UDC was entrusted with staging the premiere of the epic Civil War film in Atlanta, Georgia.¹⁸ Acting as cultural custodians, they played a pivotal role in organizing premieres across the region, using these events to align the film’s portrayal of the Civil War with their own ideological narrative.¹⁹ Through these orchestrated

¹⁵ Cripps 1993: 3.

¹⁶ See Cox 2021: 51.

¹⁷ See Cox 2011: 90–93.

¹⁸ See Bridges, 1999.

¹⁹ See Scarlett, Party Flee From City 1939: 10, Venet 2020: 122-123.

premieres and promotional efforts, the UDC helped solidify *Gone with the Wind* as a cultural monument to Southern memory, embedding its ideology into American historical consciousness.

3.1 United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Heyday of Civil War Cinema

Founded in 1894, the UDC was established as a Southern women's organization composed of members who were direct descendants of Confederate soldiers and benefactors. The UDC's platform was built around three key objectives: providing care for Confederate veterans, educating future generations about what they saw as the "true" history of the Confederacy, and erecting public monuments to commemorate the Confederate cause.²⁰ Over time, the UDC members became the chief proponents of the Lost Cause ideology.

The promotion of the Southern narrative is closely tied to the monument-building efforts spearheaded by the UDC. The UDC is estimated to have been responsible for constructing 500 of the approximately 750 Confederate monuments.²¹ The earliest monuments were erected in Confederate cemeteries and were typically constructed for specific occasions, such as Memorial Day commemorations.²² After the end of the Reconstruction period, this practice expanded significantly and grew more celebratory in tone, with monuments increasingly appearing in public squares and on government properties.²³ The majority of the Confederate monuments sponsored by the UDC were erected between 1900 and 1920, with nearly 200 monuments built between 1903 and 1910, and another 205 constructed between 1910 and 1920.²⁴

The peak of monument activity can be understood as a strategic response to an era when reconciliation dominated public discourse.²⁵ During this time, the UDC and their monuments played a crucial role in dictating the terms for national reunion, infusing key elements of Confederate mythology into the emerging collective memory. In 1914, as a hallmark gesture of reconciliation, the UDC unveiled a monument at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia, under the national spotlight.²⁶ This monument succinctly demonstrates the terms the South presented for this reunion. A broad relief on the monument depicted Confederate soldiers marching off to war, followed by a mammy figure entrusting a child into one soldier's arms, along with a few "faithful" male slaves who had decided to go to war with them. The latter image, that of the African American Confederate soldier, was

²⁰ See Cox 2003: 2-3, Constitution of the United Daughters of the Confederacy 1895: 2.

²¹ See Cox 2021: 7.

²² See Cox 2003: 9.

²³ See *ibid.*: 11-13.

²⁴ See Cox 2021: 51.

²⁵ See *ibid.*, Blight 2001: 6-9.

²⁶ See Cox 2003: 69.

proven to be a fabricated myth designed to undermine abolitionist arguments. Atop the monument, a personification of the South crowned the ensemble. By eschewing slavery and its horrors from the conversation, many Americans came to accept the idea that the South was populated by genteel masters, Confederate generals were noble figures, and that although there were some horrific acts against slaves, they were mostly treated well by their masters. By the 1920s, most Confederate monuments had been constructed, the UDC had established a firm grasp over Southern textbook production, and the number of veterans requiring the UDC's care declined significantly.²⁷ In the same decade, the Lost Cause ideology had become so mainstream that the Southern term "War Between the States" far surpassed the Northern term "War of the Rebellion" in common usage.²⁸

The UDC played a crucial role in mainstreaming the Lost Cause narrative, which permeated other areas of visual culture. While Confederate monuments were the dominant visual expression of the Lost Cause agenda in the early 20th century, by the 1930s, this role was overtaken by film. According to a survey cited by Bruce Chadwick, 75 Civil War films focusing on the South were produced between 1929 and the release of *Gone with the Wind* in 1939.²⁹ This revival of the theme began with musical comedies such as *Hearts in Dixie* (1929) and *Dixiana* (1930). Over the decade, films such as *The Littlest Rebel* (1935), *The Little Colonel* (1935), *Mississippi* (1935), *So Red the Rose* (1935), *Show Boat* (1936), *My Old Kentucky Home* (1938), *Jezebel* (1938), *Way Down South* (1939), and *Gone with the Wind* (1939) charted the genre's progression toward a more overt glorification of the *antebellum* South.

Interestingly, as the production of Confederate monuments decreased during this period, as previously noted, the UDC seemed to have taken notice of the golden age of Civil War narratives emerging in the film industry and embraced cinema as a tool for historical reinterpretation. Notably, a key precedent to the UDC's *Gone with the Wind* campaign was the one orchestrated for the premiere of *So Red the Rose* (1935), a film directed by King Vidor, leaped from the pages of Stark Young's novel, that prominently featured the plantation myth and the 'ruined home' myth.³⁰ According to historian Nina Silber, the UDC actively embraced the film's interpretation of Civil War history, distributing sixty thousand promotional letters in support of its release.³¹ Furthermore, Silber notes that Paramount's publicity director, Robert Gillham, leveraged the UDC's influence to secure an agreement for a simultaneous premiere across the eleven state capitals of the former Confederacy.³² Many of these events married film promotion with memorial activities. In Nashville, for instance, the UDC integrated the premiere with a wreath-laying ceremony at the Confederate

²⁷ See *ibid.*: 157.

²⁸ See Widmer 2013, War Between the States vs. War of the Rebellion (n.d.).

²⁹ See Chadwick 2002: 306-307.

³⁰ See Justus 2004: 22-23.

³¹ See Silber 2018: 55.

³² See *ibid.*, *So Red the Rose* Opens in 11 Cities 1935: 44.

memorial, attended by the theater manager and the state governor.³³ The general outline of the premiere, which consisted of speeches, public displays of Confederate insignia, and public celebrations, mirrored the ephemeral spectacles the UDC typically organized for Confederate Memorial Day and ceremonial unveilings of Confederate monuments.³⁴ Just as *So Red the Rose*, in UDC's treatment *Gone with the Wind* transformed into a new kind of Confederate *monument*.

3.2 Premiere – *Gone with the Wind* as a Confederate Monument

*Every thought and action must be directed toward spanning the chasm of time which separates the glorious achievements of the Confederacy from the irresistible call of the ever-ascending march of progress. Can we not, as Daughters of the Confederacy, be wide-awake press agents for the South?*³⁵

While the film was still in production, Southerners were flooding Selznick International Pictures with letters, including members of the UDC. In 1936, the Atlanta chapter wrote to Selznick, saying: “[*Gone with the Wind*] is unique, Atlanta was unique at the period depicted in the book, and if this is brought out in the picture (...), you will have something that will go over big, just as the book has.”³⁶ UDC members had high hopes that the film would put Atlanta and its history on the map. In time for the film’s premiere, they seized an opportunity to provide a springboard for its public debut.

The pre-premiere event, which launched the premiere festivities, took place in Jonesboro, Georgia, on December 11, under the direction of the local chapter of the UDC. On this day, Mrs. W.G. Travis, president of the Jonesboro UDC, and Mrs. C.B. Lyle, chair of the *Gone with the Wind* arrangements committee, organized a reenactment of the escape following the munitions explosion in Atlanta. Local actors portrayed key characters such as Scarlett, Melanie, baby Beau, Prissy, Rhett, and Wade Hampton (a character omitted from the film), recreating the flight from Atlanta. This event was dubbed by the Atlanta mayor as “the biggest day in Jonesboro’s history.”³⁷

The premiere was planned to take place in Atlanta, where the story originated, on December 15, 1939, at Loew’s Grand Theatre.³⁸ The celebrations in Atlanta began two days before the premiere, as stars and notable film professionals started arriving

³³ See *So Red the Rose* Openings 1935: 91.

³⁴ See Cox 2003: 4.

³⁵ Minutes of the Thirty-second Annual Convention of the United Daughters of the Confederacy Incorporated 1925: 287.

³⁶ West 2018: 201-202.

³⁷ Scarlett, Party Flee From City 1939: 10.

³⁸ See Bridges 1999: 29-38.

in the city. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's director of advertising and publicity, Howard Dietz, Ann Rutherford (Carreen O'Hara), Vivien Leigh, Olivia de Havilland (Melanie), Ona Munson (Belle Watling), Evelyn Keyes (Suellen O'Hara), and the film's producer David O. Selznick, were all noticed arriving. On the same day, December 13, Rutherford visited Margaret Mitchell's former offices at *The Atlanta Journal* and was appointed Mayor of Atlanta for five minutes.

The day after, on December 14, with the guests settled in, the UDC organized a program for the day with the ceremony of the lighting of the "Eternal Flame of the Confederacy." On this occasion, the UDC Atlanta Division president, Mrs. T. J. Ripley, lit a gas lamp dating back to the Civil War period.³⁹ Technical advisor on the film, painter and native of Georgia, Wilbur G. Kurtz, delivered a speech emphasizing the significance of the lamp, which was allegedly hit by an artillery shell during Sherman's march on Atlanta. This same shell was said to have killed Solomon Luckie, one of the few free Black Southerners living in Atlanta. To complement the film's messages, Kurtz aimed to deliver a story deliberately intended to undercut the abolitionist sincerity of the Northern army.⁴⁰ The event was followed by a parade, led by Mrs. T. J. Ripley herself. Later, Ann Rutherford visited the Confederate Soldiers' Home, while the stars, joined by newly arrived Clark Gable and Carole Lombard, attended a luncheon hosted by the Atlanta Junior Chamber of Commerce.⁴¹ That evening, the Junior League hosted a ball, where a children's slave choir performed, among them, a young Martin Luther King, Jr.⁴²

On the day of the premiere, Kurtz once again participated in a UDC-hosted event, escorting the film's stars to the *Cyclorama* in Grant Park, a historical mural he had painted with the support of the UDC.⁴³ The start of the premiere was signaled by a motorcade and gathering crowds, eager to catch a glimpse of the stars as they arrived at the theater, which was decorated for the occasion with all the pomp and Confederate paraphernalia. The front of the theater was transformed to resemble Tara's white-columned facade, the scent of magnolia blossom perfume filled the air, and the usherettes wore crinoline dresses. African Americans were again reduced to servile roles, as they wore uniforms and catered to guests. Due to segregation policies that barred Black audiences from attending whites-only theaters, this was the only way African Americans were present that evening at Loew's Grand Theatre. For the same reason, Hattie McDaniel, the actress who portrayed Mammy, was unable to attend the premiere.

Apart from the main premiere, the UDC played a key role in orchestrating the Philadelphia premiere, which they tied to a Robert E. Lee birthday luncheon.⁴⁴ The

³⁹ See Lamp Lighted 1939: 13.

⁴⁰ See Venet 2020: 123.

⁴¹ See Bridges 1999: 42-43.

⁴² See Hale 1995: 60.

⁴³ See Heide, Gilman 1986: 181.

⁴⁴ See First-Time News Breaks Mark Dates on Wind 1940: 56.

Philadelphia premiere was attended by actress Alicia Rhett (India Wilkes), and for the occasion, the UDC lent their collection of rare Confederate battle flags to be displayed in the theater lobby. In Pittsburgh and Columbus, UDC members were guests of honor.⁴⁵

The premiere was registered as a great success among its organizers. Dorothy Blount Lamar, president of the Georgia Division of the UDC, said that the film was “wonderfully done” and “marvelous adaptation of the book,” declaring that “the South has every reason to thrill over it.”⁴⁶ Newspapers reflected the audience’s enthusiasm following the premiere. One article from *The Knoxville News-Sentinel*, “South Won’t Secede from Hollywood – Applause Rolled Clean to Stone Mountain,” waved in reference to the UDC’s Confederate memorial and described the enthusiasm of the audience attending the premiere in the following manner:

“Rebel yell, this time of satisfaction, reverberated over Atlanta after last night’s world premiere of *Gone with the Wind*. Sherman’s cannon never roared more loudly, nor did the hoofbeats of his cavalry cause more clatter, than did the Confederate audience of 2300 as if watched the three hours and 47 minutes unreeling of the cotton slave and carpetbag era that is gone forever.”⁴⁷

Both during the premiere, and in its aftermath, the prevailing voice that continues to define the film, its role in American memory, and its overall impact, came from the South. However, it was not only Southerners who embraced this narrative. *Gone with the Wind* became the most successful Civil War picture to date, and when adjusted for inflation, it also holds the title of the highest grossing film at the global box office.⁴⁸ Despite facing opposition from African American activists, most notably the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and Union veterans, the film became entrenched in American public memory as the definitive Civil War film.⁴⁹

Steeped in historical revisionism, the film remained a valuable asset in the UDC’s propaganda toolset long after its premiere. Over the following decades, the UDC kept staging the screenings of the film, and balls with *Gone with the Wind* themes. On one of those occasions, the Richmond UDC chapter hosted a ball in the hall decorated with Confederate flags and a painted landscape showing plantation life, that featured an orchestra with a choir of children performing in blackface.⁵⁰ The film presented a unique opportunity for the UDC to incorporate it into their multifaceted agenda as the guardians of “true” history, using its nationwide success to elevate their platform.

⁴⁵ See Pittsburgh 1940: 61, Theatres Report Gross on *Wind* 1940: 32.

⁴⁶ Heide, Gilman 1986: 181.

⁴⁷ South Won’t Secede from Hollywood - Applause Rolled Clean to Stone Mountain 1939: 2.

⁴⁸ See Highest box office film gross (inflation-adjusted) (n.d.).

⁴⁹ See Sees Row Over ‘Wind’ As Too Much Puffing 1939: 68, Talk of Ban Adds To Publicity for *Gone with Wind* 1939: 58.

⁵⁰ See Coski 2021: 90.

4. Conclusion

In relation to the HBO debate, this paper seeks to offer an additional lens essential for contextualizing the film's contemporary consumption. To move beyond historical distancing, it expands the discussion to consider the role of external organization, the UDC, in shaping the film's early reception. *Gone with the Wind* is a layered production, rooted in Margaret Mitchell's Confederate sympathies and her ambition to present a "truthful" portrayal of the Civil War era, adapted into a film at a time when Lost Cause mythology, largely due to the efforts of the UDC, had gained significant cultural traction. All these elements, including the film's general release in the South under the watchful eye of the South's *press agents*, shape the film's palimpsest of meanings, and knowing these perspectives is crucial for a critical and informed viewing experience. The circumstances surrounding its reception and premiere are integral to understanding its controversial legacy, offering crucial insights into why *Gone with the Wind* remains a problematic cultural artifact today.⁵¹

⁵¹ This paper is part of an ongoing doctoral research project at the Goethe University Frankfurt, in the field of film studies.

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