

## **Defining Dixie: Southern Political Discourse in Country Music**

**Phoebe Strom**

**2013Rhodes Institute for Regional Studies**

“The country in ‘country music’ is America.”  
--President Jimmy Carter, October 1979<sup>1</sup>

Country music stands out among American musical genres in that it has become uniquely associated with very specific and polarizing politics: racist, right-wing, backwards, and perhaps most importantly, Southern. While these stereotypes are not new by any means, they have only gained momentum in recent years with the surge of interest in country music politics generated by the Dixie Chicks’ scandal in 2003 and the recent release of Brad Paisley’s “Accidental Racist.” By purposefully ignoring more liberal or progressive moments, songs, and artists in favor of painting the industry and the music as a largely impenetrable bastion of Southern conservatism, this narrative overlooks the complexities of country’s love affair with the South and assumes that neo-Confederate sympathies are and have always been an integral part of the genre. In reality, country music’s preoccupation with Southern pride, and thus to some extent the Confederacy, could not have become as omnipresent as it is today without the confluence of political developments from both sides of the aisle and both halves of the nation. Moreover, the use of Confederate symbolism and references in country music was not the inevitable

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<sup>1</sup> Jimmy Carter, "Country Music Gala Remarks at the Fundraising Performance for Ford's Theatre," October 2, 1979 in Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=31467>.

product of the genre's Southern origins or the result of a static musical tradition, but rather was influenced by and influential in larger political, economic, and social changes in the nation as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Hillbilly Origins of Country Music**

Often cited as evidence for neo-Confederate ideology's consistent presence in country music, the earliest iterations of country, promoted in sharply-defined racial terms as "hillbilly" music (in opposition to "race" music e.g. gospel, jazz, blues), designed for a primarily regional audience, and emerging from a South still scarred by the Civil War, demonstrate an unsurprising fascination with the Confederacy. Many early country musicians, for that matter, had close family connections to the fighting. Further, opportunities for success as a musician in the South following the Civil War necessitated involvement on some level with Confederate veterans' associations and the Klu Klux Klan. These groups were the primary force behind the fiddlers' conventions and barn dances that were so crucial for early country artists. For example, Fiddlin' John Carson, one of the first well-known hillbilly musicians,

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<sup>2</sup> While few discuss Confederate sympathies extensively or specifically, other important works that have addressed the racial and political history of country music include: *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music*, ed. Diane Pecknold (Duke University Press, 2013); David Cantwell & Bill Friskics-Warren, *Heartaches by the Number: Country Music's 500 Greatest Singles* (Vanderbilt University Press & the Country Music Foundation Press, 2003); Charles Hughes, "'Country-Soul': Race and the Recording Industry in the U.S. South, 1960-1980." (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2012); Peter La Chapelle, *Proud to Be an Okie: Cultural Politics, Country Music, and Migration to Southern California* (University of California Press, 2007); Bill C. Malone, *Don't Get above Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class* (University of Illinois Press, 2002); Bill C. Malone, *Country Music U.S.A.: A Fifty-Year History* (American Folklore Society, 1968); Diane Pecknold, *The Selling Sound: The Rise of the Country Music Industry* (Duke University Press, 2007); Chris Willman, *Rednecks & Bluenecks: The Politics of Country Music* (New York: The New Press, 2005)

leveraged his performances at Confederate reunions and Klan rallies into the sales that caused the music industry to recognize the market potential of hillbilly music, a potential implicitly tied to the genre's Southern roots. Thus, Civil War songs like "Dixie," "Just Before the Battle Mother," and "Lorena" remained staples of hillbilly repertoires despite the intervening years and were recorded over and over by hillbilly bands in the 1920s and 30s.<sup>3</sup>

However, the preeminence of these songs in the beginnings of commercialized country is less evidence of tradition and more evidence of outside manipulation. While songs idealizing Southern values and independence were undeniably included in most hillbilly repertoires, their ascendance over other songs like altered English folk ballads and coopted Negro spirituals reflected marketing choices by music industry executives, who saw Confederate battle songs as a credential that affirmed the authenticity and, even more importantly, the whiteness of the music they promoted. With advertising copy that glorified the prewar South and painted hillbilly music as authentic Americana, the music industry created an "idyllic white rural Mountain South that existed outside of modern urban America, a closely knit, socially homogeneous and harmonious world free from flappers, foreigners, and African Americans," an image of what America should be to many cultural conservatives.<sup>4</sup> In an era of industrial expansion, urban migration, and

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew K. Smith & James E. Akenson, "The Civil War in Country Music Tradition," in *Country Music Goes to War*, ed. Charles K. Wolfe & James E. Akenson (University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 5-7. James Charles Cobb, "From Muskogee to Luckenbach: Country Music and the 'Southernization' of America," *Redefining Southern Culture: Mind and Identity in the Modern South* (University of Georgia Press, 1999), 79-80.

<sup>4</sup> Patrick Huber, "Black Hillbillies: African American Musicians on Old-Time Records, 1924-1932," in *Hidden in the Mix*, 24-27.

social change, pandering to fears of modernization could be a highly lucrative tactic, one the promoters of hillbilly music hoped to capitalize on.

Accepting this manufactured image at face value supports the idea that country's later embrace of neo-Confederate symbolism was the natural conclusion of a trajectory that harkens back to the genre's very beginnings; indeed to do so plays into what Bill Malone identifies as "the most enduring romantic myth concerning southern folk and their music," the idea of not just racial and ethnic, but also cultural purity. The Southern identity of hillbilly music was much more complex than its promoters let on, and therefore, the songs about the antebellum South and the Civil War in the 20s and 30s were hardly a coherent collection. Rather, as early hillbilly musicians drew upon "a large and floating body of music that reflected Old World, American, religious, pop, and diversely ethnic origins" and rarely wrote their own material, it is exceedingly difficult to pinpoint a clear pro-Southern political statement in the music itself.<sup>5</sup>

The true extent of this diversity is most evident in the racial attitudes of hillbilly music. While the music industry attempted to split Southern music along racial lines, they could not undo years of black-white interaction and the development of a certain amount of shared musical heritage. Indeed, many of the hillbilly songs that seem the most racist at first glance, including "Run, Nigger Run," recorded by at least four different hillbilly acts, originated in slave songs; the lyrics of course take on an entirely different connotation when sung by a white man in the

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<sup>5</sup> Malone, *Don't Get above Your Raisin'*, 19-20.

post-Civil War South, but the cultural heritage cannot be ignored.<sup>6</sup> Other songs recorded by hillbilly artists were blatantly sympathetic to slaves and even the Union. “Those Cruel Slavery Days” recorded by Fields Ward and His Buck Mountain Band in 1929 recounts the tragic separation of families during the “agonizing cruel slavery days” when slaves were “sold for silver and gold.”<sup>7</sup> In a similar vein “Darling Nelly Gray,” written by an abolitionist in 1856, fit perfectly into the hillbilly canon with its account of lost love but somewhat awkwardly in terms of political views espoused.<sup>8</sup> Even more overtly political was the version of “Kingdom Coming” (also known as “Jubilo,” “Year of Jubilee,” or “Massa’s Gone Away”) recorded by the McGee Brothers in 1927 under the name “Old Master’s Runaway;” the song, which celebrates the end of slavery, was popularized primarily by Union soldiers and expresses positive views of Northerners in contrast to the cowardly plantation master.<sup>9</sup> This is not to say that hillbilly music was a haven of progressive racial thought, as any number of ‘coon songs’ and songs glorifying the plantation lifestyle can disprove, but it nonetheless undermines the belief that hillbilly and country were inevitably linked to Confederate values and the particular brand of racism that necessarily accompanies.

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<sup>6</sup> Henry Parker Eastman, *The Negro, his origin, history and destiny* (University of Michigan Press, 1905), 394. Dorothy Scarborough, *On the Trail of Negro Folk-Songs* (Harvard University Press, 1925), 23-25.

<sup>7</sup> Lyle Lofgren, “Remembering the Old Songs: Those Cruel Slavery Days,” *Inside Bluegrass*, May 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin Hanby, “Darling Nelly Gray Sheet Music” (Boston: Oliver Ditson Company, 1882) in Ohio Civil War 150 Collections & Exhibits, Item #1942, <http://www.ohiocivilwar150.org/omeka/items/show/1942>.

<sup>9</sup> “Kingdom Coming,” *Traditional Tune Archive*, last modified February 2, 2013, [http://tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Kingdom\\_Coming](http://tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Kingdom_Coming). Lyle Lofgren, “Remembering the Old Songs: The Faded Coat of Blue,” *Inside Bluegrass*, August 1998.

Regional affiliations further complicate the issue of hillbilly music and the Confederacy. While the sheer amount of Civil War songs recorded by hillbilly artists suggests lingering Confederate sympathies, the origins and content of these songs defy such convenient categorization. Many of the most popular Civil War songs said little about specific loyalties, but instead addressed the hardships of war, the sadness of families fighting each other, the difficulties of being far from home, and the longing to reunite with a lover. These songs, then, were able to transcend the boundaries of North and South and speak to people on both sides, sometimes with a few lyrical changes (which could be as simple as switching the word ‘Southern’ for ‘Northern’ or vice versa), but often completely intact. The implications of this are obvious in early recordings of hillbilly music that utilize songs written and enjoyed by those in both armies, rather than focusing solely on the music of the Confederacy. While few were blatantly pro-Union, many were written in the North or were popular primarily with Union soldiers. It is also worth noting that border states like Kentucky, Missouri, and West Virginia, caught in between North and South, inherited and amalgamated conflicting musical traditions, producing songs like “Faded Coat of Blue;” familiar in style, but diverging in message, this song and others like it problematize the assumed set of values underlying early country music.<sup>10</sup>

In actuality, then, hillbilly music was far less overtly pro-Southern than the mainstream music of the time. Beginning with the “plantation songs” of those like Stephen Foster in the mid-1800s, the music of vaudeville and blackface minstrelsy idealized the antebellum South; the spread of these songs to the rural south via

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<sup>10</sup> Smith & Akenson, “The Civil War in Country Music Tradition,” 2-6.

traveling shows and the appropriation of many, including the quintessential Southern anthem “Dixie,” to rally Confederate troops explains their presence in early hillbilly music.<sup>11</sup> That this “obsession with the South in American popular culture” gained momentum in the post-war period is counterintuitive, but by painting a romanticized picture of the South, Northern composers and lyricists attempted to mediate deep societal rifts along economic, racial, and regional lines.<sup>12</sup> Popular music idealizing the prewar South aligned neatly with renewed American sentiments of racism and nativism. In the most literal sense, the longing to return to Dixie evident in so many of these songs likely expresses a wish for the first Southern migrants, especially black migrants, to leave the North. Moreover, portraying the South as a veritable paradise--prosperous, beautiful, peaceful, wholesome, and racially harmonious yet under white control--enforced a narrative that located black activism firmly in the radical and justified a paternalistic style of racism. The songs’ stereotypes of “coons” and “mammies” also functioned to build common ground between Northern and Southern whites through their assertion of “Anglo-Saxon supremacy.”<sup>13</sup> This theme of sectional reconciliation manifested itself explicitly in songs like “Wedding of the Blue and Gray” and “The Dixie Volunteers,” in which the icons and imagery of Dixie (most notably Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee) are deployed for American ends.<sup>14</sup> By obfuscating the devastation, economic decay, and

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<sup>11</sup> Karen L. Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 10-13.

<sup>12</sup> Malone, *Don't Get above Your Raisin'*, 57.

<sup>13</sup> Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie*, 13-25.

<sup>14</sup> Harry Ruby & Edgar Leslie, “The Dixie Volunteers,” (New York: Waterson, Berlin, and Snyder, Co., 1917) in University of Mississippi Libraries Digital Collections, <http://clio.lib.olemiss.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/sharris/id/1458/rec/15>.

social upheaval of the South following the Civil War, these popular tunes symbolically absolved the North of responsibility for the conflict and affirmed American domination of Dixie; the reconciliation depicted in this music was not an equal exchange, but a way of channeling Southern fervor in a patriotic direction and reaffirming the superiority of white culture.

The emphasis on Southern identity in hillbilly music derives from the way that hillbilly's first promoters tried to shoehorn it into this pre-established and widely popular conception of tradition. Emboldened by the way hillbilly musicians had incorporated earlier vaudeville and minstrelsy favorites into their repertoires, record companies and radio stations somewhat disingenuously characterized hillbilly music as the natural embodiment of the messages espoused by the songwriters of Tin Pan Alley. Invoking the same self-conscious rhetoric of antebellum nostalgia and Civil War pride that accompanied popular music, they overemphasized both the extent and the political stance of such themes in actual hillbilly songs. While names like "Old Southern Tunes" or "Songs from Dixie" were technically accurate, the implications of such word choice went beyond geographical location.<sup>15</sup> However, while lumped into the same category via their marketing, the two genres never quite agreed on the South they both discussed.

Although both shared a sense of nostalgia and old-fashioned morality (albeit diluted in popular music due to its stylistic pursuit of modernity), their superficially similar approaches to the South were in fact very different. Hillbilly did not shy

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George M. Cohan, "The Wedding of the Blue and the Gray," (New York: F.A. Mills, 1906) in *Historic American Sheet Music*, Duke University Digital Collections, [http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/hasm\\_b0165/](http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/hasm_b0165/).

<sup>15</sup> Huber, "Black Hillbillies," 24-25.

away from the social and economic conditions of the South in the 1920s and 30s; a product of these conditions, hillbilly music's very existence called attention to this aspect of the South that Tin Pan Alley tried so hard to ignore. With its associations to a poor white underclass, hillbilly music spoke with a voice purposefully absent from popular music's caricatured discourse on Southernness and whiteness. The diversity of sound, subject, and message within hillbilly music also served to undercut the romantic uniformity of popular music's monolithic South.<sup>16</sup> That hillbilly music circumvented the traditional economic structures of the music industry, offered a relatively cheap and plentiful alternative to popular music, and attracted, not just Southerners, but those seeking a simpler, more wholesome music than that offered by the urban-based popular music industry solidified it as a threat deserving of exclusion and vilification.<sup>17</sup>

Music professionals "mobilized cultural condescension" in response to the emergence of commercialized hillbilly music.<sup>18</sup> Building off a long history of derision towards Southern "plain folk," this type of criticism was predicated on a fundamentally classist framework that became particularly relevant in the postwar period. As popular music and other cultural forms fetishized the antebellum South, they created an unstable dual conception of Southern identity. In this conception, the postwar South, supposedly controlled by "white trash" and rife with poverty, bigotry, ignorance, and violence, acted as an unspoken and subversive other to the

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<sup>16</sup> Malone, *Don't Get above Your Raisin'*, 18-20, 22-24, 57-58.

<sup>17</sup> Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 25-28. Malone, *Don't Get above Your Raisin'*, 27, 61-62.

<sup>18</sup> Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 24.

'true' South populated by happy slaves and benevolent planters.<sup>19</sup> When hillbilly music disrupted this paradigm and bucked popular music's narrow definition of Southernness, it became a site of cultural controversy. The mainstream music industry's patronizing approach, granted much attention by the press, strove to delegitimize hillbilly music as a valid art form and especially as a valid Southern art form. An article published in the music magazine *Etude* in 1933 marginalized hillbilly musicians and their Southern fans as a "great, unnumbered, inarticulate multitude" of "childlike" individuals existing within "a sort of subterranean musical world of their own."<sup>20</sup> Even harsher was the indictment of hillbillies as a "type of illiterate white whose allegiances are to the Bible, the Chautauqua, and the phonograph...of 'poor white trash' genera'...illiterate and ignorant, with the intelligence of morons" by *Variety* music editor Abel Green in the trade publication's 1926 retrospective.<sup>21</sup> Article after article questioned the quality and respectability of hillbilly music and thus implicitly the genre's ability to represent the South.<sup>22</sup> This criticism pervaded American thought to such an extent that the Klu Klux Klan began to strategically eschew hillbilly music. Given the longstanding connections between early hillbilly artists and the Klan, this was a conscious, tactical move intended to aid the organization's "quest for national respectability."<sup>23</sup>

### **Mainstreaming Country**

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<sup>19</sup> Malone, *Don't Get above Your Raisin'*, 17, 26-27.

<sup>20</sup> Arthur Smith, "Hillbilly Folk Music," *Etude* 51, no. 3 (March 1933): 154, 208.

<sup>21</sup> "Hill-Billy Music," *Variety*, December 29, 1926, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 24-25. Don Cusic, *Discovering Country Music* (New York: Praeger, 2008), 103-110.

<sup>23</sup> Malone, *Don't Get above Your Raisin'*, 121.

Southern migration in the 30s and 40s ushered in new trends in hillbilly music. Scattering the genre's primary fan base across the nation, migration out of the South only increased hillbilly music's importance to its transplanted Southern listeners. As the displaced Southern rural working class moved West or North, they brought their musical traditions with them, exposing hillbilly music to more non-Southern and urban audiences. While this process indubitably facilitated the spread of country music in the long run, it initially exacerbated negative perceptions of hillbilly music. The mass influx of poor Southern whites and their cultural products strengthened the already established belief systems characterizing hillbillies as inferior, degenerate, and backwards by placing the communities they entered on the defensive.<sup>24</sup> In California, for example, the extremely hostile stereotypes surrounding Okies portrayed them as barely white, genetically problematic, culturally stagnant, and un-American, all elements of the cultural criticism hillbilly music encountered earlier. Moreover, given the economic uncertainty of the time and their own fears about falling into poverty, members of the new middle class did everything they could to distance themselves from the migrants by accentuating differences that supposedly linked Okies to "depravity and a racialized Otherness." The hillbilly music that accompanied migrants out of the South, already implicated as a symptom of broader Southern social decay, provided the perfect tool for this "ethnic and cultural scapegoating."<sup>25</sup> Perceived invaders of both the "physical and

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<sup>24</sup> Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 45-52.

<sup>25</sup> La Chapelle, *Proud to Be an Okie*, 23-29, 33-38.

cultural space” to which they moved, Southern migrants were kept firmly on the outside.<sup>26</sup>

As a result of such exclusion, seemingly contradictory impulses towards distinctiveness and assimilation surfaced in migrant communities and the hillbilly music they liked. On the one hand, these former Southerners simply missed the South, especially given the enmity they met with in their new homes. The familiar sounds of hillbilly music fulfilled this need and mediated the disparate identities within migrant communities, forming the basis of a common culture.<sup>27</sup> On the other, as migrants strove towards middle class respectability, they wanted their music to do the same. Reconciling these two impulses in hillbilly music caused a move away from traditional Southern tropes and a move towards the West. Given the Southwestern heritage of many migrants and the Western location of the large number in California, the Western style of hillbilly music first popularized by Jimmie Rodgers and Gene Autry was deeply embedded in the social and musical context of Southern migration. Although the romantic image of the West had long been a part of American thought, its lack of a lengthy musical tradition meant that it was necessarily less caught up in the type of conflicts over identity that characterized musical depictions of the South; North and South, East and West all seemed to subscribe to a similar, albeit largely artificial, image of cowboy culture. The relatively sophisticated presentation of the “singing cowboys” also subtly distinguished them from the poor Southern white milieu, shielding them from accusations of backwardness and making them more palatable to cosmopolitan

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<sup>26</sup> Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 48.

<sup>27</sup> Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 44-49.

consumers.<sup>28</sup> The proliferation of groups and individuals invoking the place names and heritage of the West, including a near-absurd number of performers taking the stage name Tex, points to the prevalence of a Westward shift in hillbilly music even among those with no credible connection to Southwestern culture.<sup>29</sup> The diverse musical traditions of white rural-to-urban migrants synthesized with the music of their surroundings and coupled with the widespread American interest in the Old West produced musical forms like honky-tonk, western swing, and cowboy ballads. By softening the stark politics of most hillbilly music but still offering migrants the familiar sounds they craved, the Western subcategories of the hillbilly genre moved the music away from its most polarizing conflicts without losing the sense of regional uniqueness so important in this era of demographic flux.

As World War II loomed on the horizon, then, hillbilly music had just begun to move away from its Southern roots, but had not yet emerged in any significant way as a national phenomenon. The war and concurrent changes in the music industry worked together to disprove the claim that—in one writer’s words—people “from the cotton lands...have never understood what America means.”<sup>30</sup> In 1941, the broadcasting boycott and eventual breakdown of ASCAP’s (American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers) essential monopoly on music licensing granted the largely unlicensed hillbilly music more airplay in the short term and the protections it had long been denied in the long term. The success of BMI (Broadcast Music Incorporated) in challenging ASCAP decentralized the music

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<sup>28</sup> Malone, *Country Music U.S.A.*, 145-154.

<sup>29</sup> La Chapelle, *Proud to Be an Okie*, 81.

<sup>30</sup> Alice Reichard, “California’s Adult Children,” *Country Gentleman* 110, no. 2 (February 1940): 35.

industry, which was hugely beneficial for producers of “so-called grass-roots material” like hillbilly and race music. The musicians’ strike less than a year later and the early acquiescence of the smaller, independent record companies specializing in race and hillbilly music to the musicians’ demands again catapulted hillbilly recordings to national heights due to the shortage of popular music. This chaos in the popular music industry gave hillbilly music the foothold it needed. As its traditional Southern audience migrated across the U.S. in even greater numbers than before and went overseas to fight, hillbilly music was perfectly placed to reposition itself as the genre of America.<sup>31</sup>

From 1941 to 1946 hillbilly music removed itself from expressions of Southern sentiment and instead adopted an unwavering and entirely American patriotism. In message, these songs diverged little from wartime popular music, expressing a wide range of emotions, but little Southern pride. “Cowards Over Pearl Harbor” vocalized the tangible shock and anger that the attack and the U.S.’s subsequent entry into the war engendered in the American people.<sup>32</sup> “Smoke on the Water” traced this anger to its logical conclusion with lyrics incongruous to the pleasant two-step melody:

For there is a great destroyer made of fire and flesh and steel  
Rollin’ towards the foes of freedom; they’ll go down beneath its wheels  
There’ll be nothing’ left but vultures to inhabit all the land  
When our modern ships and bombers make a graveyard of Japan<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Malone, *Country Music U.S.A.*, 184-190. Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 54-57.

<sup>32</sup> Fred Rose, “Cowards Over Pearl Harbor,” Decca 6008, Denver Darling, 1942.

<sup>33</sup> Zeke Clements & Earl Nunn, “Smoke on the Water” Decca 6102, Red Foley, 1944.

Other hillbilly songs like “1942 Turkey in the Straw,” “We’re Gonna Have to Slap the Dirty Little Jap (and Uncle Sam’s the Guy Who Can Do It),” “When Mussolini Laid His Pistol Down,” and “The Devil and Mr. Hitler” took an equally aggressive but more lighthearted approach while affirming the inevitability of American success and the rightness of American values. The most successful WWII hillbilly songs, however, demonstrate the genre’s origins in the balladeer tradition; chronicling tragedy and poignancy, especially within the context of war, remained a strong suit of hillbilly singers and songwriters in the 40s. Songs of this type include “Searching for a Soldier’s Grave,” “Gold Star in the Window,” “Send This Purple Heart to My Sweetheart,” “Stars and Stripes on Iwo Jima,” “The Soldier’s Last Letter,” “Are You Waiting Just For Me?,” “White Cross on Okinawa,” and the most successful WWII-themed song in any genre, “There’s a Star Spangled Banner Waving Somewhere.” Transcending the bounds of musical genre, the first recorded version of this song sold almost two million copies and inspired numerous other artists to record it in both popular and hillbilly styles.<sup>34</sup> By the end of the war, the genre once regarded as a “specialty product marketed in the Deep South” enjoyed national attention and sales.<sup>35</sup>

However, as the genre gained more national popularity and acceptance, it also attracted new levels of derision. While national publications covered and recognized the spread of hillbilly music across the nation, their reporting was

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<sup>34</sup> Malone, *Country Music U.S.A.*, 198-200. Willman, *Rednecks & Bluenecks*, 148-149. *The Billboard Music Year Book* (1944), 46.

<sup>35</sup> “Corn of Plenty,” *Newsweek*, June 13, 1949.

typically tinged, if not rife, with surprise and scorn.<sup>36</sup> In fact to many writers, hillbilly music's growing popularity seemed only worth comment because it made the "naïve," "folksy," "raucous," and "obnoxious" sounds of the genre "a national earache."<sup>37</sup> In 1946 *Collier's* described the genre's growing popularity as an "epidemic of corn" and its musicians as "barefoot fiddlers who couldn't read a note but could raise a voice on endless tunes, especially with the aid of corn liquor."<sup>38</sup> Most offensive perhaps was the article "Hillbilly Heaven" published in *American Magazine* in 1952, which began in a profoundly condescending manner:

If you don't mind, I will write this report lying down. I feel giddy. Before my eyes are funny little men chasing each other with pitchforks and banjos. In my ears rings mournful sounds such as never were before on land or sea. No, it's nothing I et. It's because I have been exposed, in person, to a national phenomenon called the Grand Ole Opry, and I'm afraid it bit me...This noteworthy nation has been taken down bad with an epidemic called hillbillyitis.<sup>39</sup>

While these writers tried to play into the anti-hillbilly sentiment that was resurging after the war as Southern migration again became a point of contention, they failed to sway most Americans' musical tastes even as they gained traction with their social commentary. This speaks to the ability of the industry to distance themselves from hillbilly stereotypes, something that such vitriolic and demeaning criticism unintentionally spurred on. The constant reinforcement of negative (and usually Southern) stereotypes introduced elements of defensiveness into the genre that do

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<sup>36</sup> Cusic, *Discovering Country Music*, 103-110. Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 59-60.

<sup>37</sup> "Pistol Packin' Mama," *Life* 15, no. 11 (October 11, 1943).

<sup>38</sup> Doron K. Antrim, "Whoop-and-Holler Opera," *Collier's* 117, no. 4 (January 26, 1946): 18, 85.

<sup>39</sup> Don Eddy, "Hillbilly Heaven," *American Magazine* 153, no. 3 (March 1952).

much to explain its consistent drive to distance itself from its Southern roots, a drive that only intensified in the postwar years.<sup>40</sup>

Building upon the patriotic momentum it had accumulated during the war, hillbilly music tried to solidify its position as a “national desire” not just a “regional manifestation.”<sup>41</sup> Simultaneously affirmed and challenged by rock and roll’s emergence and separation from its hillbilly roots, the Nashville-centered industry worked to promote itself as a bastion of ‘traditional’ values. Integral to this conception was the supplantation of hillbilly musical styles by what became known as country-pop; as the industry became more and more interested and successful in crossing over to the pop charts, it abandoned many distinctive Southern stylistic traits and instruments, producing the famous (or infamous) “Nashville Sound.”<sup>42</sup> As *Newsweek* wrote in 1966, the Nashville Sound became an “all-American sound” because of its evolution towards “popular taste” and its rejection of “the raw, nasal ‘hillbilly’ sound alien to urban ears.”<sup>43</sup> While this musical transformation was underway, the songs of the 50s and early 60s were just as blatant in their patriotism as the songs produced during world war. Espousing anti-Communism (“No, No, Joe,” “Advice to Joe,” “I’m No Communist,” and “The Red We Want is the Red We’ve Got in the Old Red, White, and Blue”), pro-war attitudes (“Thank God for Victory in Korea,” “Douglas MacArthur,” “Old Soldiers Never Die,” and “Korea Here We Come”), and traditional Christian values (“Deck of Cards” “They Locked God Outside the Iron

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<sup>40</sup> Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 100-103, 158.

<sup>41</sup> “Country Music is Big Business and Nashville is Its Detroit,” *Newsweek*, August 11, 1952.

<sup>42</sup> Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 91-94. Malone, *Country Music U.S.A.*, 231-270.

<sup>43</sup> “The Gold Guitars,” *Newsweek*, April 4, 1966, 96-97.

Curtain,” and “The Bible on the Table and the Flag upon the Wall”), these songs resounded with the voice of the nation, not the South. Perhaps most symbolic of the genre’s all-out Americanism was Tex Ritter’s release of “The Pledge of Allegiance/The Gettysburg Address” at the beginning of the post-war period, which spoke to the way the last tinges of Southern rebellion had been quelled in the genre.

Hillbilly music’s renunciation of Southern heritage and wholehearted embrace of Americana paved the way for its reframing as the more respectable country or country and western. Although the term hillbilly had in many ways been appropriated with a sort of self-effacing pride by earlier singers and fans, by the 40s, the word, with all its negative, Southern, and working class associations, no longer suited the needs of the rapidly-expanding industry. Musicians, songwriters, and record executives initiated an all-out campaign for the abandonment of the denigrating hillbilly label.<sup>44</sup> Although some of the rationale was certainly based in anger and wounded pride, as evidenced by Roy Acuff’s comment that “we’re not ignorant and shouldn’t be ridiculed” and Johnny Bond’s reference to hillbilly as an “uncomplimentary putdown,” the strongest reasoning was focused on public perception and consumption, not feelings. As Ernest Tubb explained, “a lot of people don’t understand what hillbilly means; they think of somebody...out there in the hills, barefooted, with a long beard, and making moonshine...then they think of our music as inferior music.”<sup>45</sup> Music publisher and songwriter Fred Rose agreed with

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<sup>44</sup> Malone, *Country Music U.S.A.*, 216. La Chapelle, *Proud to Be an Okie*, 126. Ronnie Pugh, “Country Music Is Here to Stay?,” *Journal of Country Music* 19, no. 1 (1997): 32-38.

<sup>45</sup> Qtd. in Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 99-100.

this perspective in his 1946 letter to *Billboard* arguing that calling country music hillbilly was a dismissal of it as music at all, something which was commercially foolish given the “75 percent of all the people in the United States” to whom the genre appealed.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, Columbia Records’ Art Satherly’s dictum that all artists he worked with “from Autry on down the line” remember “we [don’t] consider ourselves to be ‘hillbillies’” and substitute terms like “folk music,” “mountain music,” or “country music,” especially when talking to reporters, demonstrates a keen sense of image’s importance in the genre’s commercial success.<sup>47</sup>

As Diane Pecknold suggests, “this wrangling over terminology” represented both a “battle for respect” and “the music industry’s struggle to grasp the meaning and magnitude of country’s potential popularity.” Forced to pay attention to the genre they had so long maligned, the mainstream music industry’s obvious confusion over country music’s cultural transition is exemplified in the pages of *Billboard*. *Billboard*’s first coverage of hillbilly music in 1941 relegated it to sharing a column with foreign hits, tacitly undermining the music’s American credentials. By 1942, however, *Billboard* was granting the genre greater respect as music popular across the nation and moving gradually away from the hillbilly moniker. The publication cycled through various names and groupings of musical styles including “Western and Race,” “Western, Race, Polkas,” “American Folk Records: Cowboy Songs, Hillbilly Tunes, Spirituals, Etc.,” and “Folk Talent and Tunes.” In 1944, in a move that symbolically marked the country as truly worthy of notice, *Billboard* incorporated popularity charts into their coverage of the genre, and by 1949, they

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<sup>46</sup> Fred Rose, *Billboard*, August 3, 1946, 123.

<sup>47</sup> Qtd. in Pugh, “Country Music Is Here to Stay?,” 34-35.

boasted a whole “Country & Western” section, including retail sales and radio airplay charts.<sup>48</sup>

Although the transition was in no way smooth, with hillbilly stereotypes persisting into the 50s even among country artists and fans, hillbilly music had become country. Record labels almost universally adopted the label of country and pressured stores and radio stations to do the same.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, as *Country Music Life* put it, the term hillbilly had become “as obsolete in the country music field as the term ‘flying machine’ is to the aircraft industry.”<sup>50</sup> The few who still used the phrase justified their choice within the context of historicity or tradition. For example, Tex Ritter utilized the term (reportedly after much debate) to pay homage to past icons in “I Dreamed of Hillbilly Heaven.”<sup>51</sup> Likewise, a 1962 *Broadside* article discussed hillbilly music as part of the evolution of folk with a sidenote clarifying that hillbilly was “not a pejorative term.”<sup>52</sup> By and large, however, the country music industry had successfully distanced itself from the label that tethered it inexorably to a poor, unsophisticated, and, equally damaging, Southern image. Country placed itself firmly in middle America; publications devoted to the genre did not hesitate to reaffirm its newfound respectability, claiming that those who enjoyed country were “home-owning, tax-paying, Cadillac-driving, sartorially splendid citizens with the

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<sup>48</sup> Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 58-59. Malone, *Country Music U.S.A.*, 191, 216.

<sup>49</sup> Rachel Rubin, “Sing Me Back Home: Nostalgia, Bakersfield, and Modern Country Music,” in *American Popular Music: New Approaches to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Rachel Rubin & Jeffrey Paul Melnick (University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 104-109. Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 114-116. Harkins, *Hillbilly*, 100.

<sup>50</sup> *Country Music Life* qtd. in La Chapelle, *Proud to Be an Okie*, 127.

<sup>51</sup> Johnny Bond, *Reflections: The Autobiography of Johnny Bond* (Los Angeles: John Edwards Memorial Foundation, 1976), 13-14.

<sup>52</sup> Walter Camp, “Folking in Los Angeles,” *Broadside* 1, no. 3 (May 1962): 3.

highest ideals and morals,” that “country music lovers” made up “the MAJORITY” of U.S. citizens, and that the music was integral to “the American way of life.”<sup>53</sup>

### **Segregationist Country Music**

The first signs of trouble with country’s new position as American music emerged in the early to mid-60s outside the major record labels in underground segregationist music. Arising from the proliferation of independent regional record companies that had sprung up during and immediately after the war, this music represented white Southern backlash to the Civil Rights Movement among other political developments deemed detrimental to the Southern lifestyle.<sup>54</sup> The liner notes of the most prominent segregationist label Reb Rebel’s album *For*

*Segregationists Only* spell out their political views as follows:

These selections express the feeling, anxiety, confusion and problems during the political transformation of our way of life...Transformations that have changed peace and tranquility to riots and demonstrations which have produced mass destruction, confusion, bloodshed, and even loss of life; transformations that have changed incentive for self-improvement to much dependency on numerous federal 'Give Away' programs, under the guise of building a 'Great Society'. For those who take a conservative position on integration, this 'Great Society' program, the controversial war in Viet Nam and the numerous so-called 'Civil Rights' organizations, this record is a must!

While the South is not mentioned explicitly in these notes, the name Reb Rebel and the Confederate flags that served as a logo for the label made it clear that “our way

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<sup>53</sup> “An Open Letter to the U.S. Congress,” *Pickin’ and Singin’ News*, February 26, 1954, 2.

<sup>54</sup> Nick Pittman, “Johnny Rebel Speaks,” *Gambit Weekly*, June 10, 2003, <http://www.bestofneworleans.com/gambit/johnny-rebel-speaks/Content?oid=1241588>.

of life” meant a Southern way of life, something that held true for all the underground country labels responsible for the segregationist sound.<sup>55</sup>

This is borne out in the music itself, which consistently promotes Southern pride as the natural corollary to racist and conservative messages. While some songs like Hatennanny Records’ “Ship Those Niggers Back” (“America for whites, Africa for blacks”) and “We Is Nonviolent Niggers” by Odis Cochran & the Three Bigots focused almost solely on race and others like “Robert E. Lee,” “The South’s Gonna Rise Again,” “Here I Follow Johnny Reb,” and “The Long Grey Line” only on themes of Southern pride, the majority combined the two in no holds barred attacks on Civil Rights politics. The song “Segregation Wagon” by Colonel Sharecropper on Reb-Time Records expressed some of the most overtly pro-Southern, Confederate-sympathizing lyrics inviting “all sons of freedom” to join a “Southern band” and “rally round the stars and bars” to protect the “Southern way of life.” The song also linked segregation explicitly with the Confederacy—“Segregation is our watchword/States rights we demand.”—and invoked other traditional Southern tropes such as “carpetbaggers” and “the quiet life.” At the same time, however, the song insisted that the “segregation wagon” was not a wholly Southern concept, for “conservatives across the land” would join in the movement. Still, with its complementary A-side “Move Them Niggers North,” this record propagated

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<sup>55</sup> Liner notes to *For Segregationists’ Only*, Reb Rebel Records 1000, 1971, qtd. in “Label History: The Story about Jay Miller and his Reb Rebel label,” *Reb Rebel*, last modified 2001, <http://www.aryan88.com/whiterider/reb rebel/homepage.html>.

unabashed regional and racial pride.<sup>56</sup> Similarly Johnny Rebel's "Stay Away from Dixie" suggested that if the "jigaboos" and the NAACP did not leave "Dixieland" alone, the region would rise up again and win by virtue of a somewhat confusing alliance with "Yankee-land."<sup>57</sup> Other Johnny Rebel songs like "Who Likes a Nigger," "Kajun Klu Klux Klan," "Nigger Nigger," and "Nigger Hatin' Me" blamed the North and the federal government for supporting uppity blacks through welfare and tolerating the actions of agitators and painted Southern whites as long-suffering guardians of racial purity. Big-K Records and The White Riders, obviously more associated with the Klan than the others in this canon, paired the quintessential KKK song "Stand Up and Be Counted" with a recording of "Dixie."<sup>58</sup> A violent racist and Southern tone pervaded these recordings so much so that one of the least militant, Conservative Records' release of "Old Uncle Joe" by The Dixie Greys, seems positively soothing in its softer form of racism and Southernness that calls to mind (and in fact uses snippets of) the plantation songs of Stephen Foster to reinforce its 'Uncle Tom' message of black love and respect for their white superiors and hatred of Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>59</sup>

While it remains unclear exactly how and to what extent this music circulated, the voices of segregationist country singers were not ignored. Bill Malone asserts that a musical underground developed to distribute such records "covertly

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<sup>56</sup> "Move Them Niggers North/Segregation Wagon," Reb-Time Records 1861, Colonel Sharecropper.

<sup>57</sup> Johnny Rebel, "Stay Away From Dixie," Reb Rebel Records 518.

<sup>58</sup> "Stand Up and Be Counted/Dixie," Big-K Records 1915, The White Riders.

<sup>59</sup> "Old Uncle Joe," Conservative Records 139, The Dixie Greys.

through mail-order or ‘under the counter’ purchases.”<sup>60</sup> Likewise, journalist Nick Pittman quotes Floyd Soileau, a contemporary and competitor of Reb Rebel founder J.D. Miller, to prove that radio stations rarely played such music and that most sales came from an “underground trade” involving “certain juke joints” that played the music and bought copies to resell. Soileau also makes sure to distance the popularity of such records from Reb Rebel’s home region of southwest Louisiana where “people didn’t want them that much” in contrast to other states where “they sold pretty well.”<sup>61</sup> Reb Rebel’s website contradicts this, claiming their music enjoyed airtime on radio stations throughout the state, including black radio stations.<sup>62</sup>

Either way, the influence of this music extended beyond the prejudiced few. That Reb Rebel’s initial releases were more moderate and satirical gained the label many fans. Leroy “Happy Fats” LeBlanc’s “Dear Mr. President” set up a less hostile and more amusing presentation of racism. Playing a confused farmer addressing Lyndon Johnson, Happy Fats asked patently absurd questions such as “I’d like to know if I’ll be permitted to plant white and black peas in separate rows of equal length or will I have to mix them together?” and “My white coon dog won’t hunt with my black bird dog. Could I get an injunction to make them hunt together?...Do you suppose the judge could use legal persuasion on them or will you send troops to make them hunt together?”<sup>63</sup> Poking fun at the Civil Rights Movement paid off; the song sold somewhere between 200,000 and 300,000 copies. Another early release, “Flight NAACP 105,” a highly racist version of an Amos n’ Andy skit, also used

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<sup>60</sup> Malone, *Don’t Get above Your Raisin’*, 236.

<sup>61</sup> Qtd. in Pittman, “Johnny Rebel Speaks.”

<sup>62</sup> “Label History,” *Reb Rebel*.

<sup>63</sup> “Dear Mr. President,” Reb Rebel 501, Happy Fats.

comedy and became an even bigger hit than “Dear Mr. President.”<sup>64</sup> With little or poor documentation of segregationist sales, it is difficult to assess their reach, but statistics like these give a sense of fairly widespread appeal. If anything they probably underestimate the popularity of these underground hits in a white South unready to integrate. The fact that this music attracted attention from several national news sources further speaks to its importance as a cultural phenomenon.<sup>65</sup>

While segregationist country is all too easily dismissed from larger studies of the genre (indeed few scholars seem to include it and then only in passing), its importance in understanding country as a whole cannot be overlooked. Although segregationist labels were outside the purview of the mainstream Nashville-based country industry, many of the individuals involved were not. J.D. Miller, founder of Reb Rebel, for example, signed with influential Nashville music publishers Acuff-Rose after Kitty Wells made his song “It Wasn’t God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels” a hit and achieved moderate success as a country writer and producer until he moved away from the field in favor of blues, “swamp-pop,” R & B, and Cajun sounds.<sup>66</sup> He was also connected to the famous “singing governor” Jimmie Davis, serving as his campaign manager in Acadia Parish, a position which likely gave him unique insight into the intersection of country music and Southern politics. In addition to his own involvement in Jimmie Davis’ campaigning, Leroy “Happy Fats” LeBlanc possessed strong ties to Nashville as well, having recorded on major

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<sup>64</sup> “Flight NAACP 105,” Reb Rebel 500, Son of Mississippi.

<sup>65</sup> Neil Maxwell, “The Bigotry Business: Racist Records, Books Are Hits in the South,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 26, 1967. “Crowley Today,” *Blues Unlimited* 47 (October 1967): 4-7.

<sup>66</sup> Shane Bernard, “J.D. Miller and Floyd Soileau: A Comparison of Two Small Town Recordmen of Acadiana,” *Louisiana Folklife Journal* (December 1991).

country labels like RCA Victor and Decca, worked with country greats like Hank Williams and Ernest Tubb, and made appearances on both *The Grand Ole Opry* and its competitor *Louisiana Hayride*.<sup>67</sup> Reb Rebel and other labels like it further claim that some of their performers were well-known country stars performing anonymously to avoid controversy; the extensive use of pseudonyms makes this impossible to prove or disprove.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, the segregationist form of country was not as removed from the mainstream as it would appear.

### **Constructing the South as America**

In fact, a renewed sense of Southern heritage and interest in the Confederacy first began around the same time as the segregationist hits, likely sparked by the same white backlash to Civil Rights advances that produced these more extreme records. The beginnings of this shift were fairly mild. Country music artists began to again record Civil War favorites like “Just Before the Battle Mother,” “My Pretty Quadroon,” “Lorena,” and “Darling Nellie Grey.” At the same time, songs like “Johnny Reb” and “The Ballad of the Blue and Grey” surfaced and achieved remarkable popularity. However, none of these songs truly glorified the Confederacy or the antebellum South. While they embraced the Civil War as a thematic framework, the country singers recording such songs in the early to mid-60s seemed much more focused on the destructive power of the war. “The Ballad of the Blue and Grey” tells the story of brother fighting brother, calling the war “a war that both sides had to

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<sup>67</sup> “Label History,” *Reb Rebel*. Ryan Andre Brasseaux, *Cajun Breakdown: The Emergence of an American-Made Music* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 150, 201-203.

<sup>68</sup> “Label History,” *Reb Rebel*.

lose, no matter which side won.”<sup>69</sup> While “Johnny Reb” is more pro-Southern in the way it honors the Confederate soldiers and their bravery (and has been adopted in recent years by white power and neo-Confederate groups), it too advocates a poignant sense of reconciliation and mutual respect in its account of “honest Abe” playing Dixie at the end of the war to heal the nation.<sup>70</sup>

Several factors played into country’s renewed interest in the war. For one, these initial songs seem to have functioned on a symbolic level. In a country ever more deeply split over issues like the war in Vietnam and Civil Rights, songs about the Civil War were truly topical. The visceral and emotional way in which these conflicts wracked the nation, creating divisions within communities and families, found its natural musical accompaniment in songs about the last time the nation split in two. The tragedy in these musical accounts of the Civil War offers a critique of dissension that avoids vilification but still upholds the ideal of a united American people. A more simplistic, but probably equally important explanation is the arrival of the war’s centennial, which generated a spate of Civil War themed concept albums by country artists like Jimmy Driftwood, Don Reno, Red Smiley, and Tennessee Ernie Ford. Johnny Horton even used the centennial as a publicity stunt for his release of “Johnny Reb,” singing the song to a 116-year-old former Confederate General.<sup>71</sup> Still, these initial recordings can hardly be characterized as a wave of Southern pride, and the role of Civil War songs in the country industry remained marginal.

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<sup>69</sup> Harlan Howard, “Ballad of the Blue and Grey,” Columbia 4-41455, Lefty Frizzell, 1959.

<sup>70</sup> Merle Kilgore, “Johnny Reb,” Columbia 4-41437, Johnny Horton, 1959.

<sup>71</sup> Smith & Akenson, “The Civil War in Country Music Tradition,” 7-8.

As the 60s progressed, a number of trends coalesced to pave the way for the South's reemergence as a dominant feature of country music. During the Vietnam War, the patriotism that had characterized country music since WWII remained strong. Unlike WWII, Cold War, and Korean War country songs, songs about the Vietnam War tended to avoid talking about the war itself, perhaps because of its fundamentally contested identity. Instead of taking the complicated and messy route of "defending American policy in Southeast Asia," these songs chose the easier and more familiar task of representing 'traditional' values like "service to one's country, deference to authority, unquestioning patriotism, or, better yet, loyalty to a policy even if one questions it."<sup>72</sup> With the rise of the New Left and increasing protest over the war, country music, as the self-determined voice of middle America, did not so much align itself with the war as against the new, radical elements of American society. Songs like "Day for Decision," "What We're Fighting For," "The Minute Men (Are Turning in Their Graves)," "The Battle Hymn of Lt. William Calley," "Fightin' Side of Me," "It's America (Love It or Leave It)," "Ballad of Two Brothers," "Vietnam Blues," "Must We Fight Two Wars," "Where Have All the Heroes Gone?," "The Marching Hippies," and the majority of Harlan Howard's patriotic, anti-protester concept album *To the Silent Majority With Love* exemplify this theme, discussing not the Vietnam war per se, but the decline in American values represented by the countercultural activism of the period.

While a diverse group of country singers including Johnny Cash, the Wilburn Brothers, Bobby Bare, Loretta Lynn, Kris Kristofferson, Wanda Jackson, Jan Howard,

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<sup>72</sup> Malone, *Don't Get above Your Raisin'*, 240.

and Billy Joe Shaver, expressed the sadness, cruelty, and seeming futility of the war, or any war, that was as far as they went. Indeed, the moments of ambivalence (for outright criticism of the war in country music was essentially nil) and the moments of patriotism seem borne from the same impulse, that is the desire to preserve a proud American heritage based on self-reliance, family, democracy, and Christian morals—in other words God, kin, and country. For example, Bobby Bare and Billy Joe Shaver’s “Christian Soldier,” renamed “Good Christian Soldier” when Kris Kristofferson covered it, questions war in general terms because of how hard it is to reconcile Christianity with fighting:

He just prays to make it through another day.  
'Cause Lord it's hard to be a Christian soldier when you tote a gun  
It hurts to have to watch a grown man cry  
But we're playin' cards and writin' home and havin' lots of fun  
Telling jokes and learning how to die.  
Things I'm seeing now seem so confusin'  
Lord it's gettin' hard to tell what's wrong from right  
I can't separate the winners from the losers anymore  
So I'm thinking bout just giving up the fight.<sup>73</sup>

A similar rueful attitude manifests itself in “Little Johnny from Down the Street,” in which the demise of an idealized small-town youth can be understood as a loss of innocent small-town values.<sup>74</sup> Not necessarily pro-war, but emphatically pro-soldier and pro-America, this attitude was famously summed up by Johnny Cash, hardly an

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<sup>73</sup> Bobby Bare & Billy Joe Shaver, “Christian Soldier,” *I Need Some Good News Bad*, Mercury SR 61342, Bobby Bare, 1971. Bobby Bare & Billy Joe Shaver, “Good Christian Soldier,” *The Silver Tongued Devil and I*, Monument ZQ 30679, Kris Kristofferson, 1971.

<sup>74</sup> The Wilburn Brothers, “Little Johnny From Down the Street,” *Little Johnny From Down the Street*, Decca CL 75173, 1970.

aggressive warmonger, when he evoked powerful overtones of American masculinity: "If you're not going to support the president, get out of my way, so I can stand behind him."<sup>75</sup>

Interestingly, this profoundly American ideology laid the basis for the emergence of the South as an American ideal. The implicit critiques of modern America embedded in country music's condemnation of war protesters and counterculture created a need for an alternative. The stereotypical South, once lambasted for its backwardness, offered the perfect image to counteract the turmoil of America during the Vietnam War. By reappropriating the South, country music brought it in to the genre's patriotic thought and made it a representation of all the things missing from 1960s America. Using the idealized South in this way offered a chance of redemption, a way for the entire nation to reclaim its Americanness through Southernness. This idea is at its most potent in Merle Haggard's "Okie from Muskogee," often viewed as the ultimate expression of country's jingoistic and narrow-minded tendencies, which elevated rural Muskogee as a haven of American values (unpolluted by drugs or radicals, free of racial strife, and chockfull of patriotic ideas).<sup>76</sup> Marty Robbins' "Ain't I Right" echoes the same theme, placing a "southern town" in direct opposition to "a bearded bathless bunch," "two-faced politicians," and "tramps that march out in our streets" in an effort to ensure that "Communistic boots will never trod/Across the fields of freedom that were given to us/With the blessings of our great almighty God."<sup>77</sup> Harlan Howard took a more

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<sup>75</sup> Qtd. in Malone, *Don't Get above Your Raisin'*, 241.

<sup>76</sup> Merle Haggard, "Okie from Muskogee," Capitol 2626, 1969

<sup>77</sup> Marty Robbins, "Ain't I Right," Sims Records 296, Johnny Freedom, 1966.

unusual tack in “A Little More Time,” lamenting the passing of an unlikely trinity of JFK, Jesus, and Stephen Foster; by linking Foster, the most famous of the songwriters elevating the South in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to the other two, Howard weaves Southern nostalgia into his patriotic, Christian, and tradition-based worldview.<sup>78</sup> Country’s refashioning of Southern stereotypes as positive is also evident in the Nashville establishment’s acceptance of the hillbilly humor found on the nationally popular show *Hee Haw*.

Presenting the South as more American than America troubled the regional dichotomy that had long plagued country music. Surrendering one’s Southern roots was no longer necessary to be recognized nationally or to indicate national pride; in fact, Southern pride and American pride now seemed capable of existing side by side. Arguably, this approach only gained strength after the war’s conclusion, as the United States collectively engaged in a struggle for meaning. Country music, and the South it began to espouse, had fought for high moral and patriotic concepts throughout the war, and their refusal to relinquish these in its aftermath provided a soothing counterpoint to what James Charles Cobb refers to as “the self-flagellation that had become almost a national pastime as the United States backed out of Southeast Asia.”<sup>79</sup>

At the same time, the negative racial associations that had long been used to malign the South were largely disappearing. The Civil Rights Movement was moving out of the South, riots were happening in Northern ghettos, and radical black politics

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<sup>78</sup> Harlan Howard, “A Little More Time,” *To The Silent Majority With Love*, Nugget Records NR LP-105, 1971.

<sup>79</sup> Cobb, “From Muskogee to Luckenbach,” 83.

were challenging white hegemony in new uncomfortable ways. Northern whites could no longer treat racism as a problem endemic to and indicative of Southern backwardness. The increasing national popularity of segregationist politician George Wallace in the 60s and 70s speaks to the way Southern identity had become a nostalgic touchstone of whiteness. Key to Wallace's campaigning was his evocation of a Southern good old boy image, bolstered through his use of country acts.<sup>80</sup> This link is not as intangible as it might at first seem; when an unnamed worker in Detroit said, "We're all hillbillies. What Wallace says goes," he spoke for many Americans, who found in the Southern stereotypes they had so long reviled an affirmation of their racial beliefs.<sup>81</sup> Mainstream country's studious avoidance of explicit discussion of racial issues (minus a few oblique recordings like "Irma Jackson" and "Skip a Rope") and the widespread popularity of a select few black artists (most notably Charley Pride) actually strengthened its appeal in this regard by playing into white feelings that they were not bigoted but just wanted things the way they used to be. The way country's assertions of Southernness disguised and justified prejudice as nostalgia helped uphold one of the central myths of white backlash to the Civil Rights Movement, that everyone knew their place and was happy with it before the involvement of outside agitators and that the restoration of traditional hierarchies would benefit all. "Resoundingly white without being

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<sup>80</sup> Cobb, "From Muskogee to Luckenbach," 82. Malone, *Don't Get above Your Raisin'*, 238-239.

<sup>81</sup> Qtd. in Joseph Kraft, "Michigan Apathy," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, October 20, 1972.

expressly anti-black,” country’s expressions of Southern pride offered a kind of “white escapism” to those across the United States.<sup>82</sup>

Country music and its reconnection with its Southern identity, then, became a convenient low-commitment political statement. After George Wallace, this was first taken advantage of by Nixon as a key component of his ‘Southern strategy.’ This brand of cultural populism, which took advantage of the liberal bent of many of country music’s strongest detractors, is evidenced by Nixon’s invitation of Merle Haggard and Johnny Cash to the White House and his designation of October as Country Music Month. In his mobilization of country music, Nixon overlooked the fairly diverse political views of country artists and emphasized the traditional, patriotic, down-to-earth, and thus, Southern ideals the music depicted.<sup>83</sup> Nixon strategist Kevin Phillips summed this process up when he wrote about how country music spoke to “the forgotten Americans...who drive the trucks, plow the farms, man the factories, and police the streets” and provided a way to “use the emotional issues of culture and race” to polarize without alienating.<sup>84</sup> When he became the first President to appear on *The Grand Ole Opry*, Nixon elaborated further:

What country music is, is that first it comes from the heart of America, because this is the heart of America, out here in Middle America. Second, it relates to those experiences that mean so much to America. It talks about family, it talks about religion, the faith in God that is so important to our

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<sup>82</sup> Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 225-226.

<sup>83</sup> Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 219-226. Malone, *Don’t Get above Your Raisin’*, 243.

<sup>84</sup> Kevin Phillips, “Revolutionary Music,” *Washington Post*, May 6, 1971.

country and particularly to our family life. And as we all know, country music radiates a love of this Nation, patriotism.<sup>85</sup>

As is apparent in this quote, the Southern values of country music became an easy way for politicians, particularly on the right, to make a statement of their beliefs and attract support without actually saying much at all. Conservatives' wholehearted embrace of Southernness as an emblem of Americanness marked a turning point in country music; Southern identity was no longer something to divest but something to celebrate.

### **The Resurgence of Rebel Pride**

Ironically, it was reaction against the staid Southern values responsible for rendering Southern pride acceptable again that produced the most extreme displays of Southern heritage. The two musical movements in country music that were particularly responsible for making increasingly radical assertions of Southernness palatable to the mainstream were both breakaway movements, trying to differentiate themselves from the uniformity of sound and message coming out of the country music establishment. Country 'outlaws' and southern rockers took the gentler Southern pride evident in the recordings of the 60s and early 70s and transformed it into a rebellious statement.

Confederate references and symbolism offered an obvious way for 'outlaw' performers to build up their rebel reputations while not taking them too far away from the Southern pride that was proving so lucrative to their more mainstream peers. Willie Nelson frequently wore a Confederate cap during performances.

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<sup>85</sup> Richard Nixon, "Remarks at the Grand Ole Opry House, Nashville, Tennessee" March 16, 1974. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=4389>.

Alongside various Confederate war anthems, Waylon Jennings recorded “The Ghost of General Lee” and was involved with the Civil War concept album *White Mansions*, both of which presented a superficial balance but a true Southern bias. Johnny Cash also recorded Confederate songs old and new including “God Bless Robert E. Lee” and “The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down.” The renewal of Confederate themes in ‘outlaw’ country, however, is most apparent and abrasive in the personas cultivated by Hank Williams, Jr. and David Allan Coe. William’s publicity materials often featured the Confederate flag prominently.<sup>86</sup> This even went so far as the distribution of Williams-themed Confederate flag boxer shorts at Nashville’s annual Fan Fair.<sup>87</sup> The music matched the promotion as he recorded songs like “The South’s Gonna Rattle Again,” “If Heaven Ain’t A Lot Like Dixie,” and “If the South Woulda Won.” David Allan Coe also used Confederate imagery extensively, often in his clothing or sets.<sup>88</sup> In “I Still Sing the Old Songs,” Coe’s narrator boasted that he had “never crossed the Mason-Dixon line” and longed “to see the day the South will rise again.”<sup>89</sup> Still, this song could not possibly compare with those Coe released and self-promoted through his own label D.A.C. Records. Later consolidated into *18 X-Rated Hits* (with crossed Confederate flags on the cover), the *Underground* and *Nothing Sacred* albums contain racist and neo-Confederate content so extreme that David Allan Coe and segregationist singer Johnny Rebel are often confused and their songs

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<sup>86</sup> Cecil Kirk Hutson, “More Smoke Than Fire,” *America Under Construction: Boundaries and Identities in American Popular Culture*, ed. Kristi S. Long & Matthew Nadelhaft (Routledge, 1997), 99.

<sup>87</sup> Jim Bessman, Personal Interview, July 2013.

<sup>88</sup> Rick Sanjek, Personal Interview, July 2013.

<sup>89</sup> David Allan Coe, “I Still Sing the Old Songs,” *The Mysterious Rhinestone Cowboy*, Columbia KC 32942, 1974.

misattributed to each other. Coe's song "Rails" discusses how "niggers made me vote for segregation" and "Well it's hard to work for a dollar a week/and the Klu Klux Klan is bigger/So Take the sheets off of your bed/And let's go hang a nigger."<sup>90</sup> Even worse is "Nigger Fucker," a song dedicated to "nigger lovin' whores:"

And to think I'd ate the pussy  
Where that big, black dick had been  
And kissed the lips that sucked him off  
Time and time again  
It's enough to make a man throw up  
Sure is hard to figure  
How any decent girl could ever fuck  
A greasy nigger...  
Cause there's nothing quite as worthless  
As a white girl with a nigger<sup>91</sup>

While not mainstream Coe hits, these songs were inextricably tied to his 'outlaw' image, an image that for all of the self-proclaimed 'outlaws' had to on some level include support for the South's Confederate past.

Southern rockers continued in this same vein. While not precisely country, this genre was undeniably borne out of and in many ways overlapped with country both stylistically and lyrically. Like the 'outlaw' movement, it represents an important disavowal of mainstream country sounds, in this case the integration of them with rock and roll. Although Lynyrd Skynyrd has become most associated with Confederate references in song and imagery, they were hardly unusual among Southern rock groups. Lynyrd Skynyrd's use of the Confederate flag on almost all

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<sup>90</sup> David Allan Coe, "Rails," *Nothing Sacred*, D.A.C. Records LP-0002, 1978.

<sup>91</sup> David Allan Coe, "Nigger Fucker," *Underground Album*, D.A.C. Records LP-0003, 1982.

their album covers and at most of their concerts is simply a more pronounced version of the same actions taken by their peers. Molly Hatchet and even the supposedly progressive Allman Brothers both featured Confederate costuming in publicity photos and album art. Black Oak Arkansas's lead guitarist Stanley Knight played a guitar emblazoned with the stars and bars, and the flag also hung from the drum riser during concerts.<sup>92</sup> Several of the bands also featured "Dixie" in their regular concert repertoire.<sup>93</sup> The Charlie Daniels Band "The South's Gonna Do It Again" exhorted its listeners to "be proud you're a rebel," Wet Willie's "Dixie Rock" affirmed the way white Southerners coopted black music, and Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Sweet Home Alabama" offered a sanitized picture of the South and what was interpreted by many as support of George Wallace.<sup>94</sup> Clearly, the Southern rockers embraced, if not the full political implications of Southern symbolism, the symbolism itself.

The significance of these two musical movements is found in the way they made the South the possession of a younger generation and a broader political base. Both had connections to progressive politics and even to counterculture, which in a way softened the stridency of their Confederate pride. While this feeling was largely intangible, some artists actively tried to musically reconstruct the South as more tolerant version of itself. Forefather of the 'outlaw' movement Mickey Newbury's

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<sup>92</sup> Hutson, "More Smoke Than Fire," 96-99.

<sup>93</sup> J. Michael Butler, "'Luther King was a Good Ole' Boy': The Southern Rock Movement and White Male Identity in the Post-Civil Rights South," *Popular Music and Society* (Summer 2003): 46.

<sup>94</sup> The Charlie Daniels Band, "The South's Gonna Do It Again," Epic 15-2393, 1975. Wet Willie, "Dixie Rock," Capricorn Records CP 0149, 1975. Lynyrd Skynyrd, "Sweet Home Alabama," MCA-40258, 1974.

efforts to reclaim “Dixie” produced “An American Trilogy,” a combination of “Dixie,” “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” and the spiritual “All My Trials.” One of the rare female ‘outlaws’ Tanya Tucker recorded the most famous version of “I Believe the South is Gonna Rise Again;” urging listeners to “forget the bad and keep the good,” the song depicted an idyllic post-racial South with “everybody hand in hand” achieving ascendancy but “not the way we thought it would back then.”<sup>95</sup> Similarly, Black Oak Arkansas’ “You Can’t Keep a Good Man Down,” praises Martin Luther King, Jr. in stereotypically Southern terms as “a good ole boy.”<sup>96</sup> In reality, these songs can hardly be held up as beacons of liberalization and tolerance; the inclusion they advocated was premised on a basis of white Southern ideology and ratified by white Southern supremacy. By normalizing the borderline neo-Confederate tone emerging in country music, songs like this attempted to distance Southern pride from its racial overtones, a move that in and of itself had profound racial overtones.

The election of Jimmy Carter (coupled with his extensive use of Southern rock bands during his campaign) and the rise of the Sunbelt economy initiated further blurring of boundaries between North and South. This loss of regional distinctiveness functioned on one level to make Southern pride and culture seem safe to outsiders and on the other to push Southerners more towards strong claims of a unique culture even as their uniqueness was vanishing. These political developments sparked greater Northern fascination with the South and catalyzed

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<sup>95</sup> Bobby Braddock, “I Believe the South is Gonna Rise Again,” CBS 3134, Tanya Tucker, 1974.

<sup>96</sup> Black Oak Arkansas, “You Can’t Keep a Good Man Down,” *10yr Overnight Success*, MCA-2224, 1976.

the growing strains of Southern pride in country music.<sup>97</sup> With headlines exulting “We Ain’t Trash No More” or seriously suggesting “The South as The New America,” the resultant surge of aggressively pro-Southern music somehow couched in the trappings of respectability is unsurprising.<sup>98</sup> It was this period that produced the marriage of the ‘outlaw’/Southern rock conception of the South and the earlier more nostalgic South that defines much of country music today.

The evolution of country music as a distinctly pro-Southern genre destabilizes the predominant and simplistic narratives favored by those vilifying country. This is not, however, any kind of excuse for Confederate references in country music. By tracing country’s Southern pride or lack thereof from commercialization onward, it becomes all too evident that such symbolism cannot be separated from its racial implications, that while the music of Hank Williams may be different in degree from that of Johnny Rebel they are borne out of the same feelings and justified in the same way, and most importantly, that ‘heritage not hate’ is little more than a mask for hatred in another form.

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<sup>97</sup> Hutson, “More Smoke Than Fire,” 104-107. Melton A. McLaurin, “Songs of the South,” *You Wrote My Life: Lyrical Themes in Country Music*, ed. Melton A. McLaurin & Richard A. Peterson (Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1992), 26. Malone, *Don’t Get above Your Raisin’*, 46, 245.

<sup>98</sup> Larry L. King, “We Ain’t Trash No More: How Jimmy Carter Led the Rednecks from the Wilderness,” *Esquire*, November 1976. Reg Murphy, “The South as The New America,” *Saturday Review* 4, September 1976.

Limiting political discourse by professional boundaries, political activity, we can note that the political discourse is also the form of institutional discourse. It means that political discourse is a discourse generated in such circumstances, as government meeting, Session of Parliament, the party congress. The sender has to make statements as a politician in the institutional setting. Thus, discourse is political when it accompanies political act in a political environment. Intentions and plans of political discourse sender are always sufficiently defined. As P. Parshyn noted, Parshin, political discourse is a kind of ideological discourse [9, 200, see. also 3, 6-8], its main purpose is to evaluate a social phenomenon from the standpoint of existing ideological guidelines. Analysing Political Discourse is a must for anyone interested in the way language is used in the world of politics. Invoking Aristotle's idea that we are all political animals, able to use language to pursue our own ends, the book uses the theoretical framework of linguistics to explore the ways in which we think and behave politically. International in its perspective, Analysing Political Discourse also considers the changing landscape of global political language post-September 11, focusing on self-legitimising language and the increasing use of religious imagery in political discourse. Bill Clinton's address persuading his country to go to war in Kosovo is analysed, and speeches by George Bush and Osama bin Laden are examined in relation to each other.