
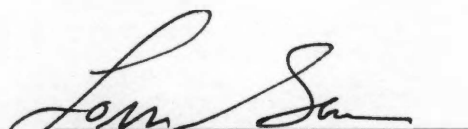


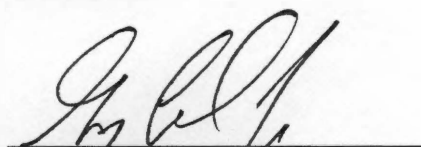
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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Charles Robert Wurl entitled "Willie, Waylon, and Me: Mythopoetic Narratives in Outlaw Country Music." I have examined the final paper copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in History.

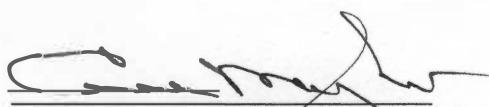
  
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# Willie, Waylon, and Me: Mythopoetic Narratives in Outlaw Country Music

A Thesis  
Presented for the  
Master of the Arts Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Charles Robert Wurl  
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Thesis  
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For Nicole

## Abstract

The primary objective of this thesis is to analyze the role of masculinity in Outlaw country music as part of a constantly changing ideal of American manhood. The secondary objective is to understand the distinct southern affiliation inherent in Outlaw county music and how that related to the movement. Accordingly, this thesis represents an effort at continuing the larger historiographical development generated by the introduction of men's studies into contemporary scholarship. The analysis of masculinity within a historical framework provides a chance to examine factors that shape cultural perceptions of society and the individual's place within it. Scholars of men's studies point out that the quest for manhood represented a formative and persistent experience in American men's lives. Moreover, American masculinity is neither timeless nor static; rather it represents a constantly changing set of definitions and relationships between men and the world around them. In this context, the social and musical culture that grew out of Outlaw music represented a mythopoetic male movement that arose during a period of social, cultural and political change.

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## Introduction

Over the past four decades, scholars of women's studies have demonstrated that gender represents a socially constructed variable that affects culture, politics, economics, art, and even international relations. During this time, women's studies emerged as a legitimate field of intellectual inquiry on a multidisciplinary level. Western culture has always stressed male and female differences, but not until recently had the term gender become privileged, often eclipsing one's status, rank, profession, race, or religion as the key determinant of personality.<sup>1</sup> As an increasing number of scholars began to understand how gender colored historical agents' views of the world, it became important to understand how gender ideals affected social history. In accordance with the academic trends of women's studies, the new field of men's studies emerged as scholarly effort in the same direction.<sup>2</sup>

The analysis of men as men opens scholars up to a variety of new questions and answers. Feminist scholars have often argued that "woman" represents an anomalous historical category whereas "man" does not have to be explained.<sup>3</sup> This concept is simply not true. Most histories study men within a context of specific functions, such as politicians, doctors, lawyers, scientists, artists and historical figures. Scholars of men's studies counter this phenomenon by studying men as *men*. The historian George Mosse states that "We are often so fascinated by the exceptional, the especially interesting or challenging, that we forget that it is the normative – that which is considered normal –

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<sup>1</sup> Angus McLaren, *The Trials of Masculinity: Policing Sexual Boundaries, 1870-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Kilmartin, *The Masculine Self* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill Higher Education, 2000), 315.

<sup>3</sup> Leo Braudy, *From Chivalry to Terrorism: War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Press), xiv.

which motivates most people and determines their perceptions of society and their place within it.”<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the aim of this study is to examine “that which is considered normal.” Specifically, how prescriptions of normative gender roles, when challenged, created a dialectic in American culture.

The term “mythopoetic” entered popular American discourse following Robert Bly’s 1990 publication, *Iron John*. The book gained notoriety on the assertion that there was something radically wrong with American men. Bly argued that men had lost touch with their essential masculine past through the increasingly feminine influence in American society. Bly writes, “The male of the past twenty years has become more thoughtful, more gentle. But by this process he has not become more free.”<sup>5</sup> Bly’s book topped the best sellers list for over thirty-five weeks in 1991, and has since helped develop the ideological backdrop of the modern men’s movement.<sup>6</sup> This series of now historical events raises the question about other men’s movements in American history. Have these feelings been shared by men of the past? How have men historically responded to the supposed “feminization of the masculine mystique?” The answer to the former is, yes, and one historical response was Outlaw country music of the 1970s.

Outlaw country music became an increasingly popular form of American culture in the 1970s. Artists like Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, David Allan Coe and Johnny Paycheck achieved a level of national popularity had eluded previous artists of the country music genre. What was exceptional about these artists was their assertion of a

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<sup>4</sup> George Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 12.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Bly, *Iron John* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publications, 1990), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Kimmel, *The Politics of Manhood: Profeminist Men Respond to the Mythopoetic Men’s Movement (And the Mythopoetic Leaders Answer)* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 16.

masculine essence during a period when white, patriarchy was challenged. American patriarchy in the 1970s faced the challenges of the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, and Women's Liberation, all of which challenged the grounds on which perceived notions of "normal" gender roles rested. In the wake of these adverse challenges, Outlaw country music put forth a prescription of reversionary masculinity, a mythic form of manhood found in the legends of the American Wild West.

Historiographically, this study aims at filling at least three scholarly gaps. First, scholarly works on men's studies in the historical discipline are few in number. Sociological and psychological scholarship remains the dominant form of inquiry on men and masculinity. Works such as *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* by the sociologist Michael Kimmel, and *The Masculine Self* by the psychologist Christopher Kilmartin, represents the forefront of men's studies scholarship, but generally lack in-depth historical analysis.

Second, prior to the 1968 publication of *Country Music, USA* by the historian Bill Malone, academic scholarship on country music was almost entirely non-existent. Malone's book, recently revised in 2002, paved the way for academic scholars to research the economic, social and political ramifications of country music's rural roots and regional affiliation. Since then the amount of scholarly works on country music has grown dramatically with Richard Peterson's *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* and George Lewis's edited work, *All That Glitters: Country Music in America*. As for gender analysis in the history of country music, themes have been limited to the female experience. Most recently, the historians Mary Bufwack and Robert

Oermann published *Finding Her Voice: Women in Country Music, 1800-2000*, however, masculinity and country music remains unexplored scholarly themes.

Finally, since the 1941 publication of the historian W.J. Cash's seminal work, *The Mind of the South*, scholars have inquired about the South's distinctive historical experience. In 1974, the journalist John Egerton published *The Americanization of Dixie: The Southernization of America*, a work that questioned the continued existence of a distinct southern identity in the wake of contemporary the social and political changes of the 1970s. Since then, historians C. Vann Woodward and Charles Roland have expanded on the topic of southern identity and questioned whether such changes affected the definition the term "southern."<sup>7</sup> In addition to the analyses done by Woodward and Roland, the sociologist John Shelton Reed has investigated southern identity in *My Tears Spoiled My Aim: And Other Reflections on Southern Culture*. Woodward, Roland and Reed all conclude that the 1970s marked a watershed moment in southern history where political and cultural expressions of the South gained widespread acceptance on the national landscape. This study aims to show how country music, as a mode of cultural transportation in the 1970s, added to the adoption of the South as an intricate piece of American culture.

This study is broken up into three chapters. The first, "Mythopoetic Roots," lays the groundwork for both the historical context and gender theories that directly apply to Outlaw country music in the 1970s. The objective of the chapter is to determine the central historical agents of the Outlaw movement and how that response reflected a

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<sup>7</sup> See Charles Roland, "The Ever-Vanishing South," *The Journal of Southern History*, 48 (1982), 3-20. Also see C. Vann Woodward. "The South Tomorrow," *Time* (Sept. 27, 1976), 98-99.

mythopoetic narrative. In this context, the issue of race relations has been purposely ignored as the primary social demographic of the Outlaw movement consisted of white, working-class men. The second chapter, "The Performers," introduces the reader to the major performers of the Outlaw genre and how they became leaders in the musical and cultural movement. The third and final chapter, "Songs of the South?," investigates the ideological underpinnings of the lyrical compositions that make up Outlaw music, and how these notions relate to the southernization of American in the 1970s.

## Chapter I: Mythopoetic Roots

“The boys dressed themselves, hid their accoutrements, and went off grieving that there were no outlaws anymore, and wondering what modern civilization could claim to have done to compensate them for their loss.”

- Mark Twain in *Tom Sawyer*

On July 4 1973, Chuck Allen drove his Chevy truck away from the bustling city of Austin and fought the Texas heat and over four miles of dirt road to attend a country concert in Dripping Springs. Chuck, a construction worker and native Texan, sat in his lawn chair and sipped his can of Lone Star Beer while an estimated crowd of 50,000 people gathered alongside him.<sup>8</sup> The crowd consisted of a bizarre mixture of cowboy-hat-wearing-working-class people (like Chuck), and a bunch of half-naked Texas hippies that smoked pot and danced on the hills surrounding the stage.<sup>9</sup> Who or what had hosted what one reporter called a “peaceful gathering of supposedly warring cultures?” According to the *New York Times*, it was the long-haired country singer and “ideological antithesis of Middle America,” Willie Nelson.<sup>10</sup>

Willie Nelson and the host of other performers that played at the first annual Fourth of July Picnic at Dripping Springs, Texas, that day represented the vanguard of a style of music called “progressive” or “Outlaw” country. The term “Outlaw” derived from the country musicians who rebelled against the Nashville recording system and took full artistic and productive control over their music. Along with the Outlaw performers’ well publicized move away from the Nashville establishment, at the time considered a musical monolith, the *New York Times* reporter asserted that Outlaw music demanded

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<sup>8</sup> Patrick Carr, “It’s So ‘Progressive’ in Texas,” *New York Times* (July 22 1973), 9.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

“the kind of sensibility that thrives on too much Jack Daniels [and] too many sleepless nights away from home in the back of a tour bus or in some barren dressing room.”<sup>11</sup>

The music and lyrics performed by these artists put forth a distinctly masculine ideal in their characterization of manhood in relation to modern society. Chuck Allen and the crowd of 50,000 people in Dripping Springs were on the cusp of a musical and cultural movement that soon achieved nationwide popularity.

This study aims at defining the musical and cultural movement kicked off by Willie Nelson’s Fourth of July Picnics during the early 1970s. The primary objective is to analyze the role of masculinity in outlaw country music as part of a constantly changing ideal of American manhood. Simply put, the goal is to figure out why Chuck Allen and the other 50,000 fans came together to experience performances by the “ideological antithesis of Middle America.” The secondary objective is to understand the distinct southern affiliation inherent in outlaw country music and how it related to the movement. Accordingly, this essay represents an effort at adding to the larger field of historiography generated by the introduction of men’s studies into contemporary scholarship. The analysis of masculinity within a historical framework offers a chance to examine factors that shape cultural perceptions of society and the individual’s place within it.<sup>12</sup> Scholars of men’s studies point out that the quest for manhood represents a formative and persistent experience in American men’s lives.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, American masculinity is neither timeless nor static; rather it represents a constantly changing set of

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>12</sup> See George Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 4.

definitions and relationships between men and the world around them.<sup>14</sup> In this context, the social and musical culture that grew out of Outlaw music represented a mythopoetic male movement that arose during a period of social and political change.

The term “mythopoetic” is rooted in Jungian psychology and refers to the philosophical position that men have lost the roots of their masculine past. Jung argues that the roots of “normative” masculinity were established and passed down since the dawn of mankind, which spawned from ancient mythology and provided a heroic image for man and his identity.<sup>15</sup> He also asserts that heroic figures in mythology represent the larger male psyche and the more comprehensive identity of the personal male ego. To be disconnected from this masculine identity meant being alienated from one’s nature, and this self-alienation has negative psychological consequences. Moreover, when historical masculine identity is broken from its mythological roots, men make attempts to regain control of their “lost” manhood by taking part in archaic activities.<sup>16</sup> In contemporary times, these archaic activities include expressions of sexual superiority, beating drums, heavy-drinking, foul language, and violence. Jung concludes that these archaic activities provide the male psyche with sources of historical strength that allows men to reassert their masculinity on society.<sup>17</sup> Mythopoetic in this context implies an atavistic response to emasculating effects of modern society.

The development of the modern mythopoetic men’s movement has challenged gender scholars to re-evaluate what constitutes a mythopoetic movement. Poet and social activist Robert Bly published *Iron John* in 1990, and has since been considered the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Kilmartin, *The Masculine Self* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill Higher Education, 2000), 306.

<sup>16</sup> Carl Jung, *Man and His Symbols* (London: Aldus Books, 1964), 114.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 114.

founder of the modern mythopoetic male movement. The sociologist Michael Kimmel condensed Bly's interpretation of what constitutes a mythopoetic movement into three closely related components. First, the movement must express a psychological analysis of Jungian archetypes, where fairy tales and myths serve as historical examples. Second, the movement offers a historical interpretation of the negative affect industrialization has on men's lives. Finally, mythopoetic movements regularly look to the initiation rites and rituals of non-industrialized societies as providing the most secure identities for men.<sup>18</sup> These components create a worldview that wrongly assumes that manhood represents an essential and ingrained quality that is both ahistorical and culturally universal.<sup>19</sup> The definition of what constitutes a mythopoetic movement provides a provocative dialectic when placed within an historical context. From the standpoint that gender represents a set of socially and historically constructed ideals, the Outlaws of country music defined manhood as a deep and essential form of masculinity that could be retrieved through the reassertion of what they perceived as "normative" behavior. In terms of a mythopoetic movement, the Jungian archetype of the Outlaws was the American Wild West; the lyrics and actions of the performers expressed that modernization represented a destructive force against essential masculinity and their un-industrialized hero was personified in the myth of the American cowboy.

The concept of "normative" gender roles represents a hotly contested idea in contemporary scholarship. In terms of this study, normative refers to *perceived* notions of gender roles, established in the early twentieth century and passed on to subsequent

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<sup>18</sup> Michael Kimmel, *The Politics of Manhood: Profeminist Men Respond to the Mythopoetic Men's Movement (And the Mythopoetics Leaders Answer)* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 19.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

generations. Based on the idea of normal masculinity, white, American men achieved a sense of social and psychological security through the belief in white economic autonomy and public patriarchy. During the 1970s, these widely held notions of normal, white masculinity were challenged by the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement and women's liberation. As many gender scholars point out, the period represented the impetus for the modern men's movement, therefore making it a watershed moment in terms of challenging patriarchy and deeply held notions of an American masculine essence.<sup>20</sup>

Sociologists Michael Kimmel and Susan Jeffords assert that the 1970s represented a period in which traditional definitions of white manhood met new challenges. "It was as if the screen against which American men had for generations projected their manhood had suddenly grown dark, and men were left to sort out the meaning of masculinity by themselves . . . [and] by the 1970s, positive role models were increasingly hard to find," asserts Kimmel.<sup>21</sup> Within this historical context, American men consisted of a heterogeneous group that defined masculinity according to regional systems of identification. In the South, country music's supposed core, opposition to the Civil

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<sup>20</sup> See Michael Kimmel, *The Politics of Manhood: Profeminist Men Respond to the Mythopoetic Men's Movement (And the Mythopoetics Leaders Answer)* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, 1997) and *The Gendered Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Also see, Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989). Also see, Bill Obersby *Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth and Liesure-style in Modern America* (New York: Berg Press, 2001). Also, Leo Braudy, *From Chivalry to Terrorism: War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Press, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 281.

Rights Movement of the 1960s further damaged an already appalling image of southern white men in the eyes of many northern citizens.<sup>22</sup>

Susan Jeffords asserts that Vietnam challenged the ground on which patriarchy rested and led to a widespread renegotiation of traditional values. Specifically, she argues that the American counter culture discredited the masculine virtues of the Vietnam veteran, and that it viewed masculinity as a destructive force.<sup>23</sup> Jeffords insists that Vietnam stands out as the most advantageous arena for American remasculinization for four reasons. First, she asserts the representation of combat in American culture is almost exclusively and masculine domain. Second, Vietnam put American manhood on trial. Third, because Vietnam was the first war America lost. And finally, wartime masculinity often transcends barriers of class and race, which makes Vietnam “the logical ground for seeing Vietnam veterans as emblematic of all American men.”<sup>24</sup> In support of her claims she points out that many veterans of the war concluded “that women’s gains since the sixties have been made at the expense of, specifically of the Vietnam veteran, but *generally of masculinity itself*” (my italics).<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the feminist movement in the United States could not have sustained itself without the depictions of the violent American “baby-killer.” Jeffords boldly suggests that the anger felt by women was not

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<sup>22</sup> See James Cobb *Redefining Southern Culture: Mind and Identity in the Modern South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999) and Bill C. Malone, *Don’t Get Above Your Raisin’: Country Music and the Southern Working Class* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002) and Barbara Ching, *Wrong’s What I do Best: Hard Country Music and Contemporary Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Also see Charles P. Roland, “The Ever-Vanishing South” *The Journal of Southern History*, 48 (Feb. 1982), and Numan V. Bartley “Social Change and Sectional Identity” *The Journal of Southern History*, 61 (Feb. 1995).

<sup>23</sup> Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1989), 119.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 134-5.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

generated merely by the lower social status of women, but the death and destruction caused by the Vietnam soldier.<sup>26</sup>

Michael Kimmel asserts that nothing had a larger cultural impact on white masculinity than the rise of the women's movement in the 1970s. He argues that the Civil Rights Movement had already challenged the dominant view that the public arena and the workplace represented white, masculine, social preserves.<sup>27</sup> The women's movement further challenged what were considered even *more* fundamental beliefs about the nature of man's place in society.<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, white men had inherited the cultural ideals based on economic autonomy, public patriarchy, and the belief that they were entitled to power as long as they successfully demonstrated "normal masculinity."<sup>29</sup> Once these widely held notions were challenged, some men resisted feminist objectives through social action by founding organizations to combat perceived inequalities. Some of these organizations included Husbands Against Dirty Divorce, Fathers for Equal Rights, the Joint Custody Association, The National Coalition of Free Men, and the National Organization of Men Against Sexism. These groups were all formed after the rise of the women's liberation movement, which indicated that American men had observed the challenges to traditional patriarchy.<sup>30</sup> In accordance with widespread social reaction, cultural manifestations of an essential masculine nature also became apparent. In the 1970s, one cultural manifestation of this atavistic mood was Outlaw music.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Kimmel, *The Politics of Manhood*, 17.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>30</sup> Kilmartin, 310.

Historically, musical cultures have had the ability to define social movements. Historical and sociological studies show that different types of music appeal to specific niches in segments of society, which link them to a set of shared cultural values.<sup>31</sup> The shared values within specific types of music often provide critiques of the world that surrounds those taking part in the cultural experience. Sociologists Richard Peterson and Paul Di Maggio analyzed the typical country music audience in the early 1970s. Based primarily on a sample of 49 country music radio stations and questionnaires passed out at concerts across the nation, Peterson and Di Maggio concluded that the majority of country music listeners were almost exclusively white, between the ages of twenty-five and forty-nine, unlikely to have a college education, and were over-represented in blue collar occupations.<sup>32</sup> In terms of defining gender roles, the sociologist Karen Saucier examined the top-forty country songs of 1981 and found that ninety-five percent of the songs dealt with male/female relationships. These relationships were all based on gender stratification, or perceived “normal” gender roles. Country music creates a symbolic world where status limits men and women’s acquisition of resources. A man’s status derives from his ability to provide for his family and the ability to satisfy his woman. Therefore, the medium of country music constructed notions of normative gender behavior that passed between artist and listener that created a unique cultural

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<sup>31</sup> Historical studies on this issue include Curtis Ellison, *Country Music Culture: From Hard Times to Heaven* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1995) and Bill Malone, *Don’t Get Above Your Raisin’: Country Music and the Southern Working Class* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002). Sociological studies include Noah Mark, “Birds of a Feather Sing Together,” *Social Forces*, 77 (Dec. 1998). For an examination of gender in popular music see Avelardo Valdez and Jeffrey Halley, “Gender in the Culture of Mexican American Conjunto Music,” *Gender & Society*, 10 (April 1996). With respect to country music see Steven Stack and Jim Gundlach, “The Effect of Country Music on Suicide,” *Social Forces*, 71 (Sept. 1992). Also James Schaefer declared, in a 1979 *New York Times* article that honky-tonk atmospheres, with their country music, drove patrons to drink. The space for follow-up research is promising.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Peterson and Paul Di Maggio, “From Region to Class, the Changing Locus of Country Music: A Test of the Massification Hypothesis,” *Social Forces*, 53 (Mar. 1975): 503.

experience.<sup>33</sup> Because of the lack of female performers in the Outlaw genre, the social niche examined here is that of the white, working-class male.<sup>34</sup>

The historian Bill Malone asserts that country music represents an art form made and sustained by working-class southerners though it could not have survived had it remained joined exclusively to that dynamic.<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, country music in the 1970s experienced a *nationwide* explosion in popularity. By 1974 country music comprised twenty percent of national record sales, of which sixty-seven percent were sold outside the South.<sup>36</sup> Contrary to popular opinion that this sales structure depended on southerners that had migrated north, no sociological evidence supported such claims. For example, Paul Di Maggio studied the country music scene in the Philadelphia area. In a survey of 35 local country music bandleaders, he found that forty-two percent were born within a fifty-mile radius of Philadelphia and only twenty-three percent came from the South. The historian James Cobb asserts that much of the glorification of southern music stemmed from the South's expressions of confidence. Through the early half of the 1970s, Cobb asserts that America wallowed in a "post-Vietnam, post-Watergate paralysis ... except in the South, where the confrontation politics of George Wallace and Lester Maddox had yielded to the moderate progressivism of Reubin Askew and Jimmy Carter."<sup>37</sup> In addition to the alleged positive changes on the southern political landscape, American

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<sup>33</sup> Karen Suacier "Images of Women and Men in Country Music" in George Lewis ed., *All That Glitters: Country Music in America* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993), 241-58, 255.

<sup>34</sup> Bill C. Malone, *Don't Get Above Your Raisin'*, viii.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, vii, ix.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Peterson and Paul DiMaggio, "From Region to Class, the Changing Locus of Country Music: A Test of the Massification Hypothesis," 503.

<sup>37</sup> James Cobb, *Redefining Southern Culture: Mind and Identity in the Modern South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 83.

citizens began to take notice of the improved economic structure of the Sunbelt region and southern traditions and lifestyles were viewed with more acceptance. Country music became one of the most widely accepted forms of southern culture in the 1970s.<sup>38</sup>

Throughout American history, men have taken part in national or regional movements aimed at protecting male privileges that offered them social preserves, which facilitated closeness among men.<sup>39</sup> All these movements began during periods of “masculine crises” and represented pieces of the cyclical pattern that has historically defined American masculinity. According to the sociologist Michael Kimmel, these masculine crises motivated men to seek vigorous expressions of manhood. The results of these expressions included many popular movements throughout twentieth-century America such as, the renewed popularity of the Masons and single-sex colleges and fraternities around the turn of the century, the creation of the Boy Scouts of America in 1911, motorcycle gangs of the 1950s, and even today’s Promise Keepers.<sup>40</sup> Accordingly, the country music Outlaws represented one portion of the mythopoetic cycle that has molded white, American masculine identity throughout the twentieth century. Much like the southern slave gospel songs during the antebellum period or the mid-western folk music of the Great Depression, country music in the 1970s provided a similar social critique and source of psychological strength for both artists and listeners. The image of white men reasserting their perceived, traditional masculine role on a society that had little need for them best characterized this musical and cultural phenomenon.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 315.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 309-11.

<sup>41</sup> Gareth Palmer offers a similar assessment about the music of Bruce Springsteen in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 100-17.

The mythopoetic character inherent in 1970s Outlaw music was twofold. First, the proliferation of American country music throughout the twentieth century followed a peculiar dialectic between traditional and non-traditional forms of the music. The traditional, rustic forms of music created by Hank Williams in the early fifties gave way to non-traditional “crooners” of the 1960s. These crooners included Jim Reeves, Eddy Arnold, Mel Tillis, and Marty Robbins. With the Outlaws of the 1970s, the artists looked back to Hank Williams and re-established a more traditional mode of performance.<sup>42</sup> Second, the social critique made by Outlaw musicians and fans was that traditional, white masculinity suffered from a series of social forces, namely Vietnam, the Civil Rights Movement, and women’s liberation. The Jungian archaic activity and mythopoetic ethos apparent in 1970s Outlaw music came in the form of the heroic cowboy image of the American Wild West.

Country music historians assert that the Outlaw image represented a desperate attempt to play on America’s love affair with the singing cowboy image.<sup>43</sup> The overriding question these historians rarely answer is, how? How had the unpolished, masculine image of performers who sang traditionally southern music persuaded the American nation to take them into their hearts? The answer rested in how the artists and the Nashville record studios successfully portrayed a romantic image of “natural masculinity” in their use of the Outlaw image. Outlaw music tapped into the male fantasy that modern-day Robin Hoods still existed and continued to fight for the rights of

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<sup>42</sup> The scholar recognized with this discovery is Richard Peterson, in his, “The Dialectic of Hard-Core and Soft-Shell Country Music” *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 94 (1995), 273-300.

<sup>43</sup> The most notable historian to have made this assertion was Bill C. Malone in *Country Music, USA*.

the common man. Moreover, the romanticized image of the cowboy/outlaw portrayed a sense of freedom allegedly lost by white American men.

Country music journalist Bob Allen wrote of the Outlaws that “they appear to us as throwbacks to a mythopoetic era when the individual was in the forefront. In this age of saccharin and complexity, they are fundamentalists: they drink their coffee black and take their whisky straight.”<sup>44</sup> In addition to the atavistic nature of their musical style, the complete Outlaw ethos evolved from an eager promotional campaign, a unique fashion sense, and a series of well-documented accounts of rowdy and illicit behavior.<sup>45</sup>

The post-World War II era of country music symbolized country music’s “high-period.” In 1950, The *Grand Ole Opry* employed 120 performers who reached millions of American listeners every Saturday night on NBC broadcasts.<sup>46</sup> Hank Williams joined the *Opry* in 1949 and played a major role in country music’s meteoric rise in popularity. The widespread appeal of Williams and his music rested in his ability to perform simply and sincerely. Although country artists sang honky-tonk songs and biographical confessions prior to and after Williams, Nashville labeled him the quintessential male country performer. His rustic, high-pitched singing style and Alabama roots established a certain bond between himself and his audience that was unmatched by other performers

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<sup>44</sup> Bob Allen, *Willie and Waylon: The Full Story in Words and Pictures of Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson* (New York: Quick Fox, 1979), 7.

<sup>45</sup> The argument here is not that advertising went after men for the first time, but rather to understand why men were drawn to this type of advertising and culture at this period in history. In *Playboys in Paradise*, Bill Ogersby argued that the 1950s and 1960s represented the period in American history when advertising emphasized and individualistic, narcissistic style created a brand of masculinity based on youth, affluence and leisure, which created an endlessly regenerating consumer market, 201.

<sup>46</sup> Bill C. Malone, *Country Music USA* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 208.

of his time.<sup>47</sup> His untimely death, however, propelled his image further than his traditional style of performance.

A member of Williams's band, The Drifters said, "Of course he died good . . . Not old and ugly . . . Hank died right at the height of his career, so everybody remembers him when he was tops."<sup>48</sup> On New Year's Day, 1953, Hank Williams died of a supposed drug overdose on a stretch of highway just north of Knoxville, Tennessee. In death, Williams forever engraved his image into the world of country music as the man who made it to superstardom his way. Young admirers of Williams understood the example left in the wake of his death: Live hard, die young, and leave a good-looking corpse. Williams provided the prototypical image of the hard-living, hard-drinking, hillbilly singer that launched a thousand singers that wanted to "do it like Hank did." Similar to the American cowboy image at the turn of the century, Hank Williams became a mythic icon in the world of country music. According to country music journalist Michael Bane, in the life and death of Hank Williams, Nashville experienced its "first run-in with rampant Outlaw-ism."<sup>49</sup>

In the 1960s, the country music industry experienced a period of cultural stagnation. The death of Hank Williams and the emergence of rock and roll ended Nashville music's high period. The younger generation of affluent record buyers avoided the country music racks in favor of Elvis Presley and Bill Haley. After the loss of the younger listeners, the small core of Nashville recording studios at Acuff/Rose and RCA

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<sup>47</sup> Barbara Ching, *Wrong's What I do Best: Hard Country Music and Contemporary Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 47.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 179.

<sup>49</sup> Michael Bane, *The Outlaws: Revolution in Country Music* (New York: Doubleday, 1978), 14

developed a new type of music called “countryopolitan.” RCA focused attention on Chet Atkins who created a sound aimed at preserving the country “feel” while cutting loose from the music’s honky-tonk roots. By the mid-1960s Atkins and RCA represented a corporation of artistic hegemony aimed at the middle-of-road popular audience.<sup>50</sup> Chet Atkins’s style of country music appealed to those who disliked both the “hip-gyrating” beat of rock and roll and the nasal twang of Hank Williams. Rather than market records towards the young listeners of rock and roll, Nashville decided to go after their parents.<sup>51</sup>

A closer look at the economics and hierarchical system of the country music business clarifies Music City’s restrictions and creative boundaries. The middle-aged market targeted by Chet Atkins and RCA limited record sales to a specific market niche. The limited sales market dictated the amount of money spent on the creation of any single country album. The albums cut in Nashville tended to cost very little, and a small core of “countryopolitan” musicians often restricted musical experimentation of the harder sounds of earlier country music (i.e., Hank Williams). RCA and Chet Atkins turned to the crooning styles of Jim Reeves, Eddy Arnold, Mel Tillis, and Marty Robbins in order to conform to Nashville’s jazzy country sound. Artist and repertoire men like Chet Atkins gained definitive power within this system that determined which artists got signed, what songs they sang, and how the songs were recorded. These tight controls imposed on Nashville artists and country music in general created what many called the “well-oiled” machine, which produced records that sounded exactly alike. Though the

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<sup>50</sup> Bill Malone, *Country Music, USA*, 245.

<sup>51</sup> Michael Bane, *The Outlaws*, 27.

assembly line approach to country music did produce hit records, the artists lost artistic control of their music and became a part of the Nashville monolith.<sup>52</sup>

Upset with the direction of country music under the powerful hierarchy of RCA and Chet Atkins, country artists began to abandon Nashville in favor of hipper and younger southwestern cities such as Austin, Texas. The music produced by these middle-aged rebels offered hard-driving rock beats with lyrics reminiscent of country music's honky-tonk days. First dubbed "progressive" or "underground" country, their deliberate stray from the Nashville's countrypolitan style caused fans and critics to label these artists "Outlaws." Artists that fell under the Outlaw label included Jack Clement, Jerry Jeff Walker, Kris Kristofferson, Johnny Paycheck, Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson and David Allan Coe. Among this group of country artists, Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, David Allan Coe, and Johnny Paycheck spearheaded the movement.<sup>53</sup> In their attempt to return to a "rural straightforwardness" and honky-tonk style of traditional country music, the Outlaws looked back to hard-core country music's high period for inspiration. *Country Music Magazine* labeled the men, "The first of the last real cowboys."<sup>54</sup> Country journalist Michael Bane said of the Outlaws, "you can be sure, have heard the midnight train whining low, and if Hank Williams wrote anybody's life, it's theirs."<sup>55</sup>

In 1973, a disc jockey at WCSE in Ashboro, North Carolina phoned Hazel Smith, promoter of Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson, and asked for a good title for his Sunday afternoon radio program. The WCSE disc jockey stated that he dedicated his radio program solely to the new, hard-driving, honky-tonk music created by artist such as

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>54</sup> Dave Hickey, "In Defense of the Telecaster Cowboy Outlaws," *Country Music Magazine*, 1 (1974) 90-6.

<sup>55</sup> Michael Bane, *The Outlaws*, 19.

Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings. Smith informed the disc jockey to “call it Outlaw music.”<sup>56</sup> In a later interview, Smith stated that the term “Outlaw” fit the performers perfectly. The term still implied a cowboy image, but carried a meaner and harder tone than often associated with country music singers. The musical movement experienced by Chuck Allen in Dripping Springs, Texas had acquired a name.

In America during the 1970s, white working-class men were forced to deal with the challenges of Vietnam, the Civil Rights Movement and women’s liberation. These challenges created a re-evaluation of what were once considered essential American values. The central target of these challenges was the widespread belief in a white, normative, masculinity. National expressions of traditional values appeared unpopular, except in the South, where improving economic infrastructure and increasingly progressive politics gave southerners a reason to applaud their heritage. As a fundamental expression of southern heritage, country music became increasingly popular on the national scale. Outlaw country, with its affirmation of traditional values and masculine ethos, urged listeners to look back to the ideals of the Wild West as a source of strength in the face of social and cultural adversity.

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<sup>56</sup> R. Serge Denisoff, *Waylon: A Biography* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 194.

## Chapter II: The Performers

The lives of the Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, David Allan Coe, and Johnny Paycheck read like country songs. All four overcame spiritual crises, poverty, prison, death, substance abuse, and broken dreams. Each “rebelled” from the typical “lily-white virginity of Music City” and attracted the younger, hipper audience long lost by the “Nashville Sound.” These efforts garnered the foursome unprecedented commercial success. In response to their newfound fame, Waylon Jennings scolded, “in their obsession with making country music ‘legitimate,’ it never occurred to the moguls of country that American youth and young adults could identify with a bunch of over-thirty highway gypsies.”<sup>57</sup> Between 1972 and 1980, Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings produced twenty-one number one country hits and sold over fifteen million albums.<sup>58</sup> In the same span of time, Johnny Paycheck posted nine top ten singles and reached the platinum mark in sales twice. Because of the foul language and racist overtones of his songs, Coe’s success in the country music charts paled in comparison to Jennings and Nelson. Nevertheless, Coe successfully achieved fame and stardom thanks to his Outlaw affiliation with Nelson, Jennings, and Paycheck. By the late 1970s music sources around the country labeled Nelson, Jennings, Coe, and Paycheck *the* premier Outlaw performers of the decade.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Dave Hickey, “Outlaw Blues,” *Country Music Magazine*, 5 (Feb. 1977), 23.

<sup>58</sup> Chart Data compiled from Billboard’s country music charts, 1972-1980. The total of 15 million represents an estimate compiled from interviews and platinum album awards received by both artists between the said years.

<sup>59</sup> Two country artists of the 1960s, Johnny Cash and Merle Haggard, represented anomalies in the assembly line approach. Johnny Cash recorded “Cry, Cry, Cry” and “Hey Porter” for Sun Records of Memphis, TN, in 1955. Both songs earned Cash considerable fame as a rockabilly artist. During the 1960s,

Willie Nelson was born in Abbott, Texas, on April 30, 1933. Raised by his grandmother on a cotton farm, Nelson started writing songs by age ten. Early in his career, Nelson worked a number of jobs throughout eastern Texas. In addition to his performances at local honky-tonks, he taught Sunday school, worked as a plumber's assistant, and sold used cars and bibles. After the parishioners from his Sunday school class found out that he moonlighted at local beer-joints, they forced Nelson to make a choice. Nelson later commented on his decision: "I was asked either to stop playin' the honky-tonks or drop the Sunday school class... since Sunday school wasn't payin' me as much as the beer joints, I had to leave the Church."<sup>60</sup> After a short stint as a disc jockey in Vancouver, Washington, Nelson returned to Texas and sold two of his original songs. The first, "Family Bible" earned him fifty dollars, while his second, "Night Life" earned one hundred fifty. After he realized the possibility of writing songs for money, Nelson made the pilgrimage to Nashville, Tennessee, and became a star.<sup>61</sup>

In Music City, Nelson established himself as a premier songwriter with songs like, "Hello Walls," and Patsy Cline's chart topper, "Crazy." Throughout the 1960s, Nelson experienced at first hand the "assembly line" approach to cutting records and grew more disillusioned with the Nashville system. In an interview in 1979, he stated, "When I got to town (Nashville), I didn't know anything. So I did whatever they told me

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Cash's infusion of popular styles and country music kept him in Nashville's musical vanguard as he successfully fused urban folk music with country. Historians also recognize Cash's "Folsom Prison Blues" as an Outlaw song; however, Cash was not recognized as part of the Outlaw movement of the 1970s. Similarly, Merle Haggard experienced limited recognition prior to 1967 when his convict experience and personal relationship with Cash became central themes of his songs. Songs like "I'm a Lonesome Fugitive," "Mama Tried," and "Okie From Muskogee" earned Haggard popular distinction as a working-class hero. Though these artists touched on many of the themes that later dominated Outlaw music, neither musician adopted the progressive sound that set Outlaw music apart from other forms of country. Consequently, both artists remained a separate entity in the country music scene throughout the 1970s.

<sup>60</sup> Allen, *Willie and Waylon*, 12.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

to do, because I assumed they knew more about it than I did . . . but as it turned out, they didn't know what to do either."<sup>62</sup> After he cut his last album, *Yesterday's Wine*, for RCA in 1971, Nelson moved back to Austin. In Texas, he found a thriving music scene that consisted of a youthful audience (from the nearby University of Texas) and a number of honky-tonks in which he could perform. There, Nelson experienced a unique turn of events that soon launched his new uninhibited musical style to the forefront of American popular culture.

Nelson's partner in Outlaw stardom, Waylon Jennings, was born in the small West Texas town of Littlefield on June 15, 1937. At an early age Jennings began performing locally, and by the time he entered his teens, he established himself as a well-known musician. His early career kept him within the state of Texas until he met Buddy Holly in Lubbock in the mid-1950s. Holly became Jennings's mentor, producer, and friend. In the latter part of 1958, Holly hired Jennings as the bass player in the Crickets for the upcoming "Winter Dance Party" tour. Consequently, Jennings went down in history as the person who gave up his airplane seat to the Big Bopper the fateful January night in 1959, when the plane crashed and killed Buddy Holly, Richie Valens, and the Big Bopper. Following Holly's untimely death, Jennings left the music business for a disc-jockey job in Lubbock. He fell into a deep depression and many friends agree that the memory of giving up his seat haunted him forever.<sup>63</sup>

By the 1960s, Jennings moved to Phoenix, Arizona, where he made a name for himself at "J.D.'s," a local honky-tonk. He soon gained moderate fame with songs like

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<sup>62</sup> Bob Allen. "Interview: Willie Nelson," *Journal Of Country Music*, 8 (1980), 11.

<sup>63</sup> In a TV interview for CMT in 1999, Waylon stated in reference to his upcoming ride in the bus with no heat, that he jokingly told Buddy Holly and the Big Bopper, "I hope y'all crash."

“Four Strong Winds” and “Just to Satisfy You,” and so RCA Nashville called and offered him a recording contract.<sup>64</sup> In 1965 Jennings moved to Nashville to become a star with the legendary producer Chet Atkins.<sup>65</sup> Atkins controlled and produced all of Jennings’s albums in Nashville and kept true to his countrypolitan motif by changing songs in order to fit the middle-of-the-road “Nashville Sound.” Like Nelson, Jennings struggled with the Nashville system and grew angry with RCA and Chet Atkins after he prohibited his road band, the Weylors, to record with Jennings on any of his RCA albums. In an interview with a biographer, R. Serge Denisoff, Jennings said of the early RCA days, “Chet Atkins is kind of finicky about lettin’ a road musician in a studio . . . he just didn’t go for it.”<sup>66</sup> These actions led to a well-publicized dispute between RCA records and Jennings. On November 27, 1972, after years of continuous disagreement over the “softened” sound of his music, Jennings and RCA finally reached a new contract agreement that gave him full artistic control of his music. Successful in his rebellion from the middle-of-the-road system and fresh off of his monumental contract, which overshadowed that of the legendary Chet Atkins, Jennings set out to change the course of country music.

Jennings refused to conform to the Nashville Sound after he gained full artistic control of his music. Rather than performing the songs of what RCA considered “safe songwriters,” Jennings returned to his rockabilly roots and teamed up with Nelson to

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<sup>64</sup> Both Songs appear on David Allan Coe, “Greatest Hits,” *Columbia*, (1985), 040185.

<sup>65</sup> Waylon suffered financially during his first years in Nashville. With hardly any money, Jennings met up with Johnny Cash and the two shared a small apartment while both battled the pressures of Nashville with alcohol and amphetamines. The two often hid their drugs from each other for fear of losing their stash. In one incident, Johnny Cash tore the interior door panels off of Waylon’s Cadillac in search of narcotics.

<sup>66</sup> Denisoff, 121.

write songs that contained backbeats reminiscent of contemporary rock and roll. Jennings' lyrical compositions centered on themes he considered to be more in touch with the audience of the 1970s. Jennings realized that the country audience had changed from that of Atkins' heyday. Listeners were looking for social commentary and songs about real life situations that they could relate to, not the jazzy whines of lost love and low-income lifestyles. Jennings and Nelson wrote songs about pride and the complexity of life, themes rarely considered by Nashville's "safe songwriters."<sup>67</sup>

David Allan Coe was born in Akron, Ohio, on September 6, 1939. The product of a broken home, Coe entered the Akron Boys Industrial School at age nine. He claims from that point on until age twenty-eight "he breathed free air for no more than sixty days consecutively."<sup>68</sup> In 1967, after serving time on death row for allegedly killing an inmate, Coe was released from the Marion Correctional Facility, traveled to Nashville, and became a country singer. In Music City, Coe dubbed himself the "Mysterious Rhinestone Cowboy," and donned an all-black leather outfit studded with rhinestones, a mask, a cape and a black cowboy hat. In an effort to gather attention, Coe parked a large black hearse in front of the Ryman Auditorium and played for the "Grand Ole Opry" crowd as it entered and exited the show. Coe played for dimes so that he could afford to pay the parking meter in front of the Ryman. After the "Opry" shows ended, Coe performed at Tootsie's Orchid Lounge for the late-night crowds. Eventually his determination paid off and he recorded an album with Sun Records in Nashville in 1968.

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<sup>67</sup> Bane, *The Outlaws*, 67.

<sup>68</sup> Biographical information on David Allan remains spotty and must be approached with a large amount of skepticism. His Outlaw image often produces larger than life tales of his prison days. One of his first producers and SSS said, "I always figured David's stories were about 92 percent bullshit. But it made for good promotion." see Larry L. King, "David Allan Coe's Greatest Hits," *Esquire* (July 1976), 73, 142.

For his first album, *Penitentiary Blues*, Coe recorded a collection of songs he wrote while in prison. His follow-up album, *Requiem for a Harlequin* further solidified Coe as a talented songwriter. With his ability to mimic the voices of many popular country artists of the time, Coe made a name for himself by the early 1970s. In 1973, Columbia bought out his record contract from Sun and Coe became one of Nashville's up and coming stars.

Johnny Paycheck, born Donald Eugene Lytle on May 31, 1931, grew up in a working-class family in Greenfield, Ohio. He started his musical career at age 13 after dropping out of the seventh grade. He traveled by train and entertained at honky tonks throughout southern Ohio and northern Kentucky. By 16, Paycheck landed a steady job as a performer at the "Club 28" in Columbus, Ohio. At age 18, Paycheck joined the Navy and was later court marshaled for hitting an officer. After he served two years in a Navy brig, Paycheck arrived in Nashville in 1958. He changed his name to Donny Young performed as a sideman for Porter Wagoner, George Jones, Faron Young, and Ray Price.<sup>69</sup>

After he changed his name in 1965 to Johnny Paycheck, he recorded a lyrical tribute to the automobile entitled "The Lovin' Machine," which became his first top ten hit. Soon after Paycheck's career slowly declined because of alcohol and drug abuse and he lived on the streets of Los Angeles from 1967 to 1970. Billy Sherrill of Epic Records tracked him down in 1970 and offered him another shot if he got himself together. Paycheck released "She's All I Got" in 1971, a song that reached number two on the

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<sup>69</sup> Paul Kingsbury with the assistance of Laura Garrard, Daniel Cooper, and John Rumble, *The Encyclopedia of Country Music: The Ultimate Guide to the Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 367.

country charts. He followed that effort with three more top ten hits between 1971 and 1974, but he achieved superstardom in 1978 with the release of the song, “Take This Job and Shove It,” written by Coe. He followed these songs with a string of top ten hits, but his career eventually fell into disarray when his outlaw behavior landed him more time in court and penitentiary than in recording studios.<sup>70</sup>

In addition to their stray from Nashville’s middle-of-the-road songwriting approach, Jennings, Nelson, Paycheck and Coe solidified themselves as Outlaws icons with their physical appearances as well. All four fashioned an aura of “cowboy machismo” by not donning the famed Nudie Suit that had become the staple of Music City performers.<sup>71</sup> Named for its inventor, Jamie Nudie, a Nudie Suit comprised of a colorful country and western-style suit, heavily adorned with rhinestones and/or tassels. The suits were made popular in the 1940s and remained the common dress of country artists throughout the 1960s. In contrast to both the clean-cut Nudie style and the bouffant hair-do of his rockabilly image, Jennings grew his hair long and sported a beard. When he was on stage he wore a ragged cowboy hat, boots, leather pants and a leather vest. Paycheck and Nelson both shed their clean-cut appearance of the 1960s in similar fashion, by growing long hair and beards. Within months after he arrived in Austin, Nelson grew his hair and beard, started wearing his now trademark bandana, blue jeans and jogging shoes. In addition to their appearance, Nelson and Paycheck’s uninhibited use of marijuana and hostility toward the “establishment” quickly transformed them into Outlaws. When David Allan Coe went without his “rhinestone” garb, he wore the

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 368.

<sup>71</sup> Bane, *The Outlaws*, 10.

apparel associated with his “Outlaw” motorcycle gang, blue jeans, a black leather vest, and sometimes a cowboy hat.

For fans of Outlaw music, country fashion became a popular trend in the 1970s as cowboy hats and blue jeans could be found on men in both the South and the North. In Nashville, one reporter noted that the town “caint git Outlaw enough.” According to this account, all the bars on Broadway changed their motifs from the town’s happy Music City image, to a much darker and rougher image that made them all “look like the Last Chance Saloon.” The journalist noted further that the fashion sense changed dramatically after the rise of Outlaw music the town’s citizenry possessed “two pair of Luchese Boots and three Stetsons per capita.”<sup>72</sup>

As the popularity of Outlaw music expanded northward with the introduction of country music to New York City’s airwaves, some reporters wondered if the Big Apple was becoming Houston, Texas. The nation’s changing economic and cultural trends moved entrepreneurs and musicians back and forth between the cities and the “urban cowboy” could be seen either on New York’s Fifth Avenue, or Gilley’s dance hall in Pasadena, Texas. In New York, Ralph Lauren even introduced a western inspired cowboy look in his 1978 fall fashion line. In Houston, middle-class newcomers from the East acclimated themselves to the style. A reporter from the *New York Times* asked a psychologist to explain the rushed embrace of the Texas style. The psychologist asserted that in conjunction with the reconciliation of North-South relations, “It may [also] be one

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<sup>72</sup> Hickey, “Outlaw Blues,” 23.

aspect of a renewed concern for the quality of leisure life, after the traumas of Vietnam and the recession.”<sup>73</sup>

As part of their Outlaw image, Jennings, Nelson, Coe, and Paycheck paid special attention to express the masculine behavior long associated with the American outlaw or cowboy. Record companies promptly realized that the print media provided an excellent promotional tool for Outlaw-ism, and gave many journalists and fans the lawless fuel they desired. By the middle of 1973, country magazines filled their pages with stories of the “Outlaws of country music.” Tompall Glaser, co-producer of Jennings’s new sound, went so far as to send out “Outlaw Membership Certificates.”<sup>74</sup> The media’s portrayal of the artists stressed five common themes that centered explicitly on masculine behavior: staunch individualism, male chauvinism, alcoholism, substance abuse, and violence. Accordingly, these five themes highlight the central component of hyper-masculinity and the mythopoetic contention in the Outlaw movement.<sup>75</sup>

Jennings probably received the most publicity concerning his Outlaw behavior and those accounts offer excellent insight into public infatuation with his image. In one of the earliest accounts of him as an Outlaw, *Music City News* journalist Geoff Lane reported that Jennings “wants to express himself totally, making no compromises whatsoever...Waylon will fight for his own.”<sup>76</sup> In another account, interviewer Bob Campbell actually feared approaching Jennings because of the “stories [that] float around

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<sup>73</sup> Phil Patton. “Country Movies Are in Tune with ‘New-Patriotism’” *New York Times* (March 9, 1980), D1.

<sup>74</sup> Denisoff, *Waylon*, 195.

<sup>75</sup> The psychologist Christopher Kilmartin asserts that men, in times of psychological strain, or in an effort to over assert their masculinity, binge drink, involve themselves in high risk behavior, and express their superiority over women. See *The Masculine Self*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill Higher Education, 2000), 285-94.

<sup>76</sup> Geoff Lane, “Waylon Still the Rebel,” *Music City News* (Oct. 1973), 6b.

about the surliness of some of his hired hands... stories of organizational paranoia concerning outsiders . . . of drugs, of Neil Reshen, Waylon's manager, a man with a sinister reputation."<sup>77</sup> Despite these allegations, Campbell later notes that Jennings supposedly disliked the attention he received for his rebellious actions. Jennings complained, "All they want to put in is where you come in, sit down, kick a waitress, sit with your back to the wall, face the door and you knock out a bartender – humming all the while."<sup>78</sup>

Whether or not Jennings truly disliked the attention he received for his Outlaw behavior remains debatable, but one particular incident stood out as particularly gratifying to his lawless image. On August 24, 1977, only months after being named honorary police chief by the Nashville Metropolitan Police Department, D.E.A. agents in Nashville arrested Jennings at his studio and charged him with conspiracy and possession of cocaine with intent to distribute. According to the allegations, Jennings ordered twenty-seven grams of cocaine from a record associate in New York. The private courier hired to deliver the package tipped off the D.E.A. about the contents of the package, and federal and local authorities set up a sting operation at Jennings's studio. After the package arrived, the D.E.A. soon followed, but they failed to bring a search warrant. While the authorities waited, the contents of the package were quickly flushed down the studio toilet.<sup>79</sup> Although he avoided being convicted of any wrongdoing, the incident further propelled his Outlaw image when he penned the song, "Don't You Think This

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<sup>77</sup> Bob Campbell, "Waylon," *Country Music Magazine*, 7 (1979), 51.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>79</sup> Denisoff, 265.

Outlaw Bit's Done Got Out of Hand." The song hit number five on the Billboard country charts.<sup>80</sup>

Similar to Jennings' role of a country music Outlaw, Nelson's role of an Outlaw provided him with popular appeal. In Nelson's case, the 1973 Dripping Springs Fourth of July picnic further projected his Outlaw image. The performers in attendance often drank wildly through the night that made for wobbly 6 a.m. sound checks on stage. The uneasiness on stage continued into the afternoon when Tex Ritter began "cracking lame Black Panther jokes."<sup>81</sup> The crowd played their chaotic part in the event. Scores of cowboys and hippies crashed the gates, filled the air with marijuana smoke and the consumed truckloads of Lone Star Beer. Geoff Lane reported "one person was accidentally shot, another bitten by a poisonous spider . . . [But] for all that, and despite the announcements like: 'Don't eat the mushrooms.' It was a day never to be forgotten."<sup>82</sup>

The direct links to the old West image in Nelson's persona arose with his newfound popularity in Austin, but countless interviews and tell-all accounts further solidified his Outlaw aura. In a 1978 *Rolling Stone* interview, journalist Chet Flippo noticed that Nelson sat under the same poster of Chief Frank Fools Crow every time he boarded his bus. "Without even asking Willie, I know why that poster is there. He and Chief Fools Crow are both throwbacks, remnants of the American West, honest men who to tell the truth and who believe in justice," charged Flippo.<sup>83</sup> Journalist Al Reinert

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<sup>80</sup> Joel Whitburn, *The Billboard Book of Top 40 Country Hits* (New York: Billboard Publications, 1996), 162.

<sup>81</sup> Denisoff, 194.

<sup>82</sup> Geoff Lane, "Dripping Springs Draws 50,000," *Music City News* (Aug. 1973), 27.

<sup>83</sup> Chet Flippo, "The Saga of Willie Nelson," *Rolling Stone* (July 13, 1978), 47.

proclaimed Nelson “King of Country” in a 1978 *New York Times* article. In the piece Reinert portrayed Nelson as a “rank male chauvinist,” but quickly pardoned Nelson’s conservative stance because he and Waylon Jennings represented “the Redford and Newman of country.” Reinert’s tone tacitly implied that if male chauvinism was acceptable for Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, it was acceptable for Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings.<sup>84</sup>

Coe’s outbursts of Outlaw behavior made him one of the most incorrigible rebels in the Outlaw genre. From his early days when he played the sidewalks at Ryman Auditorium to later accounts of him supporting seven wives simultaneously, Coe took Outlaw behavior to a whole new level. His ruthless lyrics and turbulent stage presence added greatly to his Outlaw image. At a Pasadena performance in 1976, Coe informed the crowd that the release of his latest album was three weeks overdue. He told the audience that his record company refused to release the album due to his constant use of foul language on stage. Coe sat back in his stage chair and said, “Well... muthafuck that shit!”<sup>85</sup> The crowd greeted his message with a wild roar of appreciation.

Aside from his onstage antics and hell-raising philosophy, Coe remained an Outlaw with his offstage actions as well. After his arrival in Nashville in the late 1960s, Coe joined the Outlaw motorcycle gang, a Florida-based club well known for brash violence and hard-drinking tendencies. Once he achieved stardom, Coe enlisted his “brothers” as tour bus security and nightclub “assistance.” Coe was sued for one million dollars after this “assistance” hospitalized a Houston man after he supposedly threw a

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<sup>84</sup> Al Reinert. “King of Country,” *New York Times* (Mar. 26, 1978), 33, 50.

<sup>85</sup> Larry L. King. “David Allan Coe’s Greatest Hits,” *Esquire* (July 1976), 73.

bottle at Coe. In an interview following the incident, country music journalist Michael Bane asked Coe why violence and controversy followed him wherever he went. Coe reasoned that constant violence stemmed from his perception of masculinity. He stated that “almost every musical superstar there’s been since Elvis Presley has been some kind of motherfuckin’ faggot” and that was not the image he chose to project.<sup>86</sup>

The context of the interview above offers a prime example of Coe’s perception of his own masculine ethos. After his comment about the constant violence that surrounded Coe and his shows, he reasoned that his masculinity and violent nature made him attractive to women, despite the existence of women’s liberation. Coe stated, “Women’s liberation and everything, most of the men have gone over to that side of the fence. And her I am still calling them cunts.”<sup>87</sup> There is a pause in the interview and Coe continues, “Eighty-five percent of the women I’ve known in my life, I’ve just seen the tops of their heads. A lot of women really resent me, but they’re curious. They come up to me with the intentions of, well, ‘I’m going to show you ... [but] before the night’s over [that changes].”<sup>88</sup> Coe’s message to his interviewer is clear. Despite the efforts of the women’s liberation movement, Coe believed that *all* women still wanted men to act out some form of violent and oppressive patriarchy. Coe’s philosophy about meeting women at his shows further reflected his beliefs. He argued that women get “tired of listening to thirty minutes of bullshit conversation when all the guy really wants to do is fuck them anyway. And these dudes are actually jealous because their women love me.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Bane, *The Outlaws*, 127.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

No country performer has been more closely tied to Outlaw behavior than Johnny Paycheck's. Paycheck is remembered by many as the most persistent and incorrigible criminal in the history of country music. Like Coe, Paycheck held a close affiliation with a motorcycle gang, he openly discussed and sang about his battles with alcoholism and drug abuse, and he challenged the country music status quo with his rowdy concerts. At a 1978 concert in West Palm Beach, Paycheck fueled his Outlaw image. The journalist Shari Bergbom reported that, "Gallons of beer had been consumed since 8 p.m. and a shorthanded auditorium security staff had been hard-put to control the sporadic fisticuffs which broke out all over the auditorium."<sup>90</sup> In the end, five concertgoers were arrested, which Bergbom identified as a record for a country concert, and Paycheck stumbled drunk off the stage. Paycheck was informed it was the last time he would be asked to perform in the West Palm Beach Auditorium.<sup>91</sup>

In terms of illegal activity, Johnny Paycheck's rap sheet remained long and accomplished even by criminal standards. At the age of eighteen, Paycheck served two years in military prison for going AWOL and punching his commanding officer. He was arrested in Edmonton, on a paternity suit registered in 1976; he was charged \$1,900 and released.<sup>92</sup> In Casper, Wyoming Paycheck pleaded no contest to charges that stemmed from accusations he had sex with a twelve-year-old girl while staying at her mother's home.<sup>93</sup> Paycheck's most infamous run in with the law occurred in December 1985,

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<sup>90</sup> Shari Bergbom, "A Bit of Decorum in Order at Auditorium," *West Palm Beach Times* (June 23, 1978), page unavailable.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, page unavailable.

<sup>92</sup> UPI, "Johnny Paycheck Arrested in Paternity Suit," *Nashville Banner* (March 2, 1980), page unavailable.

<sup>93</sup> Banner wire services, "Paycheck Pleads no Contest in Sex Charge," *Nashville Banner* (July 16, 1982), page unavailable.

when he shot a man in the head after a barroom scuffle broke out in Hillsboro, Ohio.<sup>94</sup> The victim suffered a mere flesh wound from the stray .22 caliber bullet, but Paycheck served two years in an Ohio prison for his actions. Through these hardships, Paycheck's label, Epic Records, released a statement about Paycheck's career. The four-page release concluded with a simple statement. "Free. A big word with so few letters. Rarely has the magnitude of that word been so brilliantly expressed as in the continuing legend of Johnny Paycheck."<sup>95</sup>

Nashville executives could hardly have predicted the unprecedented rise in the popularity of Outlaw music in the 1970s. As national attention focused more and more on country music, Music City record executives brainstormed for new ways to market their Outlaw product. Head of RCA's Nashville operation, Jerry Bradley, noticed by "mid-1974, denim and Stetson and coke stash were *de rigeur* for the Nashville man about town."<sup>96</sup> Following the unprecedented success of *Wanted: The Outlaws*, a record that consisted mostly of previously released tracks, many of which "were downright bad, record executives realized that their product was not necessarily the music itself, but the iconic figures who performed it."<sup>97</sup> Outlaw producers rarely kept Jennings', Nelson's, Coe's, or Paycheck's rowdy behavior out of the media spotlight. Instead, they used their behavior as part of a marketing ploy that tapped into a nostalgic affirmation of perceived, traditional values. Jennings, Nelson, Coe, Paycheck became icons. They embodied the

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<sup>94</sup> AP, "Paycheck Says Innocent in Shooting," *Nashville Banner* (January 10, 1986), page unavailable.

<sup>95</sup> Epic Records, "Johnny Paycheck," radio introduction notes released for the Radio Programming Service between the years 1982 and 1989, 2.

<sup>96</sup> Bane, *The Outlaws*, 114.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

romantic image of a group of rebellious loners who were free from the masculine constraints of modern society.

### Chapter III: Songs of the South?

“If there were a chance to get back to what we once were, if there could be change, if there were hope left for this country, any hope at all, it was here  
... in Dixie”

- Singer and songwriter R.W. McCall on the  
“southernization of America” in the 1970s

An examination of the ideological underpinnings of Outlaw music requires a lyrical analysis of the songs themselves. What follows is an examination of some of the most popular songs performed by the Outlaws. Although almost all their songs offer support for the argument that they represented a mythopoetic male movement, these songs represented the most popular songs from the Outlaw movement. They included Willie Nelson’s “Red Headed Stranger” and “My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys,” Waylon Jennings’s and Willie Nelson’s “Good Hearted Woman,” Waylon Jennings’s “Luckenbach, Texas” and David Allan Coe’s “Longhaired Redneck,” and “If That Ain’t Country,” and Johnny Paycheck’s “Take This Job and Shove It.”

Willie Nelson wrote and produced the album “Red Headed Stranger” and Columbia Records released it in 1975.<sup>98</sup> The concept album offered a biographical tale of a cowboy who is mourning the loss of his wife he kills after he finds her in the arms of another man. Rather than wallow around in his own misery, the cowboy heads out of town and rides throughout the Wild West in search of redemption. The title song and medley, “Red Headed Stranger” tells how the mournful man entered town on his black stallion with his dead wife’s bay in tow. An unsuspecting “yellow-haired woman” notices the horse and makes an attempt to steal it but is shot by the “red headed stranger.”

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<sup>98</sup> Willie Nelson, “Red Headed Stranger” *Columbia Records* (1975), KC33482.

The song implies that nineteenth-century laws of the American West allowed any person the right to protect his horse from thievery, the “stranger” escaped the gallows for his violent crime. The song’s chorus concludes with a warning of about the red headed stranger: A man riding and hiding his pain from the world was not to be reckoned with.

“Red Headed Stranger” offers a shocking portrayal of life in the old West, but when placed in the context of America during the 1970s, the song took on a much deeper meaning. *Rolling Stone* editor Paul Nelson best revealed the song’s inner theme when he said, “to the quiet American, violence, like the perpetual but unreal motion of life on the road, seems to serve as a solicitous coin of the realm of the solitary survivor.”<sup>99</sup> The “yellow-haired lady,” much like the threats against the essence of manhood in the 1970s, threatened to steal the memory of the cowboy’s past. For her efforts, she is killed with no fair warning and the cowboy faces no legal consequences for his actions. In the romanticized images of the Old West, a man had the right to protect both his physical and emotional property from any thief; an idea lost in the 1970s. Nelson’s “Red Headed Stranger” sold over 500,000 copies in 1975 alone.

Another album that offers an excellent source for a lyrical examination of Outlaw music was the “Wanted: the Outlaws” album. In January of 1976, Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, Jessi Colter (Jennings’s wife) and Tompall Glaser released the, “Wanted” album. The album consisted mostly of previously recorded tracks remixed in Glaser’s Nashville studio, but the importance of the album rested in its widespread commercial appeal. The album went down in history as the first country album to go platinum in sales, that is, sell one million copies, which made it Outlaw music’s standard for both

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<sup>99</sup> Bane, *The Outlaws*, 99.

musical style and content, however the real draw of the album was the cover. It depicted the pictures of each artist on the front of a Wild West “wanted” poster riddled with bullet holes. Two songs on the album provide excellent resources for the examination of both the mythopoetic ethos and masculinity itself. The songs are, “My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys” and “Good Hearted Woman.”<sup>100</sup>

In the song, “My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys,” Nelson reminisces about the cowboy image in American popular culture. Nelson tells the listener that he “grew up dreaming of being a cowboy” and how he loves the lifestyle portrayed by these men. Specifically, he admires how cowboys have the freedom of mobility and promiscuity without the guilt often associated with those acts in modern society. The contention that the heroic cowboy’s best days passed by during Nelson’s childhood expresses the mythopoetic narrative in, “My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys.” The “brand of misery” depicted in the song recognized the loss of these heroes in the social upheavals of contemporary society, not the lonesome nature of life on the plains.

In “Good Hearted Woman” Jennings and Nelson sing about a relationship between an upstanding woman in love with a hard-drinking, hard-living man. The rocky relationship between the two derives from his frequent honky-tonk attendance and the fact that he enjoys “the bright lights and good timin’ friends.” The man’s spouse loves him unconditionally and never complains about his “wicked ways.” Jennings and Nelson thus endorse the notion that men should not give up their rowdy ways after marriage, as long as his wife allows him to do whatever he wants. Within the context of masculinity

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<sup>100</sup> Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, Jessi Colter and Tompall Glaser, “Wanted: The Outlaws,” *RCA* (1975), APL1-1321. “My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys” written by Willie Nelson. “Honky Tonk Heroes” written by Waylon Jennings. “Good Hearted Woman” written by both Jennings and Nelson. “Me and Paul” written by Willie Nelson.

the song offers an excellent example of the prescriptive notions about male and female relations in Outlaw music. Clearly, the man holds the power in the relationship and reaps the benefits of both married and single life, without facing any consequences to the former.

In April of 1977, Waylon Jennings released the “Ol’ Waylon” album.<sup>101</sup> The album’s first track, “Luckenbach, Texas” rocketed to the top of the country charts and became the fastest climbing single in country music history.<sup>102</sup> The song presents an autobiographical tale about the perils of being a country star. In it, Waylon asks his spouse if they can give up all of their material possessions, buy some blue jeans and “go to Luckenbach, Texas” with Willie Nelson and his friends. Efforts at keeping up with the financially motivated “Jones” bring only heartache and feud, so Luckenbach, Texas (population 3) seems the best place for Jennings to get back to the “Basics of Love.” According to the lyrics, Luckenbach’s lack of modern conveniences means that the citizens and visitors feel “no pain” caused by the turmoil of contemporary society. The universal appeal of the song rested in its representation of detrimental nature of modern, fast-paced lifestyles. The name of the town, “Luckenbach” provided a handy play on words since, when pronounced with a southern drawl, the town’s name sounds like “looking back.” The social commentary inherent in the song told the modern day man that life was destined to be brief, hard, and materially and emotionally unfulfilling unless he escaped (or at least, looked back).<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Waylon Jennings, “Ol’ Waylon” RCA (1977), APL1-2317.

<sup>102</sup> Denisoff, 264.

<sup>103</sup> See Bill Malone, *Don’t Get Above Your Raisin’*.

Coe's lyrical additions to the Outlaw movement offer much more upfront examples of southern-ness and efforts to regain lost male privileges. He dedicated his autobiography and many of his songs to "all men in prison, be it mentally or physically."<sup>104</sup> Moreover, Coe's shock value often manifested itself in many of his recorded songs.<sup>105</sup> One of his most famous songs, "Longhaired Redneck," provides an excellent example of his ability to portray a mythopoetic ethos.

The 1975 title track of the album, "Longhaired Redneck" is one of many of Coe's musical autobiographies. In the song, country DJ's refuse to see the rebellious Coe in the "dives" where he performs. The crowds inside these honky-tonks resemble those at Willie Nelson's Picnics: Cowboys, hippies and bikers. One loudmouth tells Coe that he "ain't country" and this remark enrages him. In response, Coe informs the listener that the man fails to recognize the sign that reads, "Coe has been to prison." Furthermore, Coe tells the crowd to warn the "loudmouth" before he gets violent and "knocks him off his chair." All the commentary leads up to the lyrical climax of the song when Coe states that his appearance fails to hide the fact the he is a "redneck" who has never lost a fight. His southernness is further aided by the fact that he "knows every song" by Hank Williams and Johnny Cash once bailed him out of prison. Portrayals of southern masculinity in "Longhaired Redneck" continue throughout the songs four verses, but this one stands out most. Coe endorses a masculine philosophy that justifies southern manhood with jail-time, violence, long hair, and an intimate knowledge of the South's musical culture. The appeal of this song rested in the notion that all white, working-class

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<sup>104</sup> Richard Burger, "Coe Maintains his Outlaw Image," *Music City News* (Sept. 1982), 24.

<sup>105</sup> Many of David Allan's songs have been banned on radio stations nationwide. He recorded at least three X-rated albums that were filled with racism, sexism and violence. Proper decorum prevented me from discussing them here.

men, despite their appearance and place of origin may take part in the Outlaw movement.<sup>106</sup>

Another Coe song that endorsed similar cultural values was “If That Ain’t Country.” In this song, another biographical tale, Coe describes life on his childhood homestead. His father, an alcoholic veteran and ex-convict, bought his house with the G.I. Bill, but Coe points out that the house “wasn’t worth all he had to kill to get it.” For money, his father works on used cars and sells used tires for “a dollar or two . . . cash.” In the song, Coe’s mother fears God and prays everyday for her convict son and “whore” of a daughter. The lyrical bridge to the chorus suggests that the yard is full of chickens, the house full of (thirteen) children, and each family member searches for redemption through hard work. After this verse, Coe makes the musical declaration that his family is “poor, white-trash,” and, “If that ain’t country,” he will “kiss your ass.”

Though the song remained too racy to gain any major airtime, it quickly became a classic with the Outlaw music fans. The deeper meaning inherent in the song is that the family fails to live up to the American dream.<sup>107</sup> Despite the modernization of the South during the 1950s, his family, and many others like them, still “lived like hicks.” The social commentary in the context of this song shows how southern men were limited in their access to social and economic power, despite their patriotic efforts during World War II and the Korean conflict.

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<sup>106</sup> This point counters the assertion by Barbara Ching that hippies cannot take place in the Outlaw movement because they were not country, even though they wore similar dress. Ching argues that the people that fail to recognize the difference between a hippie and a country singer angers Coe. There is no evidence that would support his claim.

<sup>107</sup> Barbara Ching, 24.

“Take This Job and Shove It” is the title track to Johnny Paycheck’s album released in 1977. Written by Coe, “Shove It” was an instant hit in both the country and pop charts. The song became an anthem for working people everywhere and carried enough sociopolitical might to be heard at labor strikes and negotiations across the nation.<sup>108</sup> The song spent 13 weeks on the country charts and peaked at number one for two weeks. The 1981 movie starring Art Carney was based on the song.<sup>109</sup>

“Take This Job and Shove It” is another biographical ballad. In the song, a man decides he is going to quit working his factory job because his “woman” left him. In addition to the flight of his spouse, the ballad tells how fifteen years of hard work in a dangerous factory job has failed to provide enough income for bills. Paycheck tells the audience that his foreman and line boss are both incompetent and remain out of touch with their employees. The social commentary in this song is quite clear. Because of the increased bureaucratization and of factory work, the singer has lost anything that resembles an autonomous lifestyle. Furthermore, his spouse left him because his job failed to provide enough income to take care of them both. Therefore, “Take This Job and Shove It” points out that the traditional patriarchal order of America can no longer exist in a modern society. What is left for a man to do in this situation? According to the lyrics of the song, he should get angry and give up on the modern way of life.<sup>110</sup>

With their outlandish behavior and grassroots lyrical compositions, Jennings, Nelson, Coe, and Paycheck portrayed themselves as men stuck in the throes of a

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<sup>108</sup> Linda Solomon, “There’s No Stopping Paycheck,” *News World Daily* (March 1, 1978), page unavailable.

<sup>109</sup> Whitburn, 241.

<sup>110</sup> “Take This Job and Shove It” written by David Allan Coe, performed by Johnny Paycheck. Johnny Paycheck, “The Soul and The Edge,” *Epic Records* (2002), EK 85246.

liberalizing and modernizing society. From the mythopoetic stance that American men had lost their natural rights, the image of the drifting outlaw provided the quintessential symbol of male individualism, freedom, and optimism.<sup>111</sup> Their music portrayed the artists as rambling cowboys who had inherited old-time southern traditions of oppressive patriarchy, hard drinking, violence and promiscuity. The songs often portrayed limited the roles of females to four main categories: Mother, lover, forgiving wife, and whore. In terms of vocabulary, the artists made the conscious effort at re-defining the term's "redneck," "hillbilly" and "country" as badges of honor, not derogatory judgments made by northerners. By engaging in this commentary, Outlaw musicians tempted the listener to either fly the banner of the South's oppressive confidence, or to miserably surrender themselves to the effects of modernization.<sup>112</sup>

The issue of southern identity and the self-proclaimed monikers of "redneck" and "hillbilly" represent interesting avenues of inquiry because Coe and Paycheck were not native southerners. Both were born in Ohio but spent most of their adult lives in the South. As the sociologist John Shelton Reed has argued, southerners "belong to a group defined by a historical experience, in which membership is ordinarily inherited but *rests ultimately on a combination of individual identification and acceptance or categorization by others*" (my italics).<sup>113</sup> From this standpoint, Coe and Paycheck portrayed themselves as members of the South by identifying themselves as "rednecks" and "hillbillies" in order to be accepted by their fans and musical peers. Once their careers took off, their

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<sup>111</sup> Ching, 43.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>113</sup> John Shelton Reed, *My Tears Spoiled My Aim: and Other Reflections on Southern Culture* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 29.

identity was never questioned and Coe and Paycheck became part of country music's southern character.

The emotion-laden lyrics of the Outlaw movement provided a simulcast picture of southernness and masculinity but, despite the obvious appeal to the southern population, social and political factors contributed to Outlaw music's rise to national prominence by the end of the 1970s. Prior to the 1970s, country music encountered the same hostility and condescension traditionally reserved for all things southern.<sup>114</sup> In *The Burden of Southern History*, C. Vann Woodward argued that a major factor in the South's identity was its inability to share fully in America's traditions of virtuousness and prosperity. The southern historical consciousness bore the burden of guilt that spawned from two "unpardonable sins" of slavery and secession.<sup>115</sup> The historian Charles Roland asserts that during the one hundred year period between Reconstruction and the 1970s, the North regarded the South as a "delinquent child who has somehow failed to shape up to the national standards."<sup>116</sup>

Following the Boston race riots, and the election of Jimmy Carter, *Esquire* magazine's southern columnist Larry L. King cheered, "We Ain't No Trash No More."<sup>117</sup> As national media attention focused on the North and their embarrassing racial problems "self-righteousness withered along the Massachusetts-Michigan axis."<sup>118</sup> Historians argue that this ironic turn of events generated a growing tendency to forgive the South

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<sup>114</sup> James Cobb, *Redefining Southern Culture: Mind and Identity in the Modern South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 78.

<sup>115</sup> Charles P. Roland, "The Ever-Vanishing South," *The Journal of Southern History*, 48 (1982), 4.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>117</sup> Larry L. King, "We Ain't No Trash No More," *Esquire*, 86 (Nov. 1976), 156.

<sup>118</sup> C. Vann Woodward, "The South Tomorrow," *Time* (Sept. 27, 1976), 98.

and even applaud many of its peculiarities, including country music.<sup>119</sup> Unsteady race relations and the Vietnam War had delivered devastating blows to the myth of a progressively and peaceful North. “Those myths were never shared by the South . . . In their present state of demoralization, northerners are looking south for leadership,” commented C. Vann Woodward in 1976.<sup>120</sup> The leadership came from a humble peanut farmer from Georgia who carried his American-ness and southern-ness all the way to the White House. Jimmy Carter’s distinctively southern traits of evangelical faith and traditional masculinity combined with his “Yankee-like” commitment to efficiency and made him an attractive leader to reconcile cultural relations between the North and the South.<sup>121</sup>

Although the role of southern culture remained paramount in determining the masculine image portrayed in Outlaw music, the movement’s appeal soon drifted northward as millions of northerners took interest in the country performers. On November 18, 1979, Ken Emerson wrote in the *New York Times*, “The 1970s will be remembered as, among other things, the decade during which the South was at long last readmitted to the Union.”<sup>122</sup> In addition to the election of Jimmy Carter and the economic success of the Sunbelt, Emerson made a profound connection between country music’s widespread appeal and America’s newfound patriotism. What confused Emerson most was how country music, with its rural roots and weighty southern affiliation, could have possibly boomed into a national industry. Less than a decade prior to Emerson’s “confusion,” country albums rarely went gold or platinum in sales charts

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<sup>119</sup> Cobb, 82.

<sup>120</sup> C. Vann Woodward, “The South Tomorrow,” 98.

<sup>121</sup> Cobb, 83.

<sup>122</sup> Ken Emerson, “Country Music: Confusion in Profusion,” D24.

and certainly never garnered airtime in New York City. By 1979, nearly every major country label produced multiple gold albums per year and New York City was home to the largest country radio station with more than 1.2 million listeners.<sup>123</sup>

The Outlaw musical movement's masculine ethos and nostalgic affirmation of perceived, traditional American values, led many commentaries toward the notion that a "New-Patriotism" had emerged in the United States. With news of the 1980s re-birth in country and western movies like *Honeysuckle Rose*, *Urban Cowboy*, and *Red Headed Stranger*, journalist Phil Patton asserted, "Interest in 'down-home' and Western values lends certain camaraderie in the face of adversity."<sup>124</sup> Journalist Robert Palmer equated country music's rise of popularity with "a general resurgence of political conservatism and patriotic fervor."<sup>125</sup> Hollywood film director Sidney Pollack agreed with these assertions. He stated, "I think its part of what could be called cautious patriotism. It's all about the cowboy, and the cowboy is the quintessential American."<sup>126</sup> Who or what had led American audiences to re-claim their lost patriotic values? Patton and Pollack credited Nelson, Jennings and Coe by name.

In the 1970s, the post traumatic effects of the Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam, and women's liberation openly challenged the perceived set of traditional masculine norms throughout the nation. American white, working-class men grew increasingly conscious of these challenges and found masculine escapes within popular culture. The symbolic value of Outlaw musicians' straightforward approach and vigorous expression

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., D24.

<sup>124</sup> Phil Patton. "Country Movies Are in Tune with 'New-Patriotism'" *New York Times* (March 9, 1980), D1.

<sup>125</sup> Robert Palmer. "Riding Country's Wave of Patriotism?" *New York Times* (May 13, 1981), C34.

<sup>126</sup> Patton, D1.

of southern masculinity reflected a widespread reactionary mood that thrived among working-class white men in both the North and South. The unprecedented popularity of Outlaw music culture reflected this mood. The mythopoetic ethos inherent in Outlaw music exemplified one element in the cyclical pattern that has historically defined American masculinity.

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