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FROM COUNTRYPOLITAN TO NEOTRADITIONAL: GENDER, RACE, CLASS, AND REGION IN FEMALE COUNTRY MUSIC, 1980-1989

by

DANA C. WIGGINS

Under the Direction of Michelle Brattain

ABSTRACT

During the 1980s, women in country music enjoyed unprecedented success in record sales, television, film, and on pop and country charts. For female performers, many of their achievements were due to their abilities to mold their images to mirror American norms and values, namely increasing political conservatism, the backlashes against feminism and the civil rights movement, celebrations of working and middle class life, and the rise of the South. This dissertation divides the 1980s into three distinct periods and then discusses the changing uses of gender, race, class, and region in female country music and links each to larger historical themes. It concludes that political and social conservatism influenced women's country performances and personas. In this way, female country music is a social text that can be used to examine 1980s America.

INDEX WORDS: Country music, Women performers, Gender, Race, Class, Region, 1980s, Conservatism, Popular culture

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DANA C. WIGGINS

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Georgia State University

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Dana C. Wiggins

2009

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by

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TO MAYA

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INTRODUCTION

NASHVILLE'S CHANGING FACES

With the release of *Urban Cowboy* in 1980, country music became trendy, widespread, and in the words of Barbara Mandrell, "cool."[1] This film ushered in an entire decade of country music on television, the silver screen, and on more radio stations than ever before in history. Female country singers profited from this trend and during the 1980s, their share of hit records rose from 10 to 20 percent to 25 to 35 percent.[2] Their success can be attributed to the talent and path-breaking efforts of prior performers, but these factors alone do not sufficiently explain their newfound popularity. Image contributed as well and, like their forerunners, country music females presented deliberately crafted appearances to appeal to a larger audience. But women performers in the 1980s used different strategies from those of their predecessors to win legitimacy and fans. These women, like those before them, drew on images of the South, race, class, and gender to link them to a country fan base; however, these representations meant dramatically different things at different times. Furthermore, as the 1980s progressed, the images continued to adapt to adhere to the political, economic, and social climates of the day. The visual and musical changes also corresponded to larger historical themes and trends for women in America, in terms of both the representations and tactics women used to gain power and popularity. This dissertation examines the changing uses of gender, race, class, and region in female country music in the 1980s and links these changes to prevalent political, social, and

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[1]. This quote is taken from Mandrell's "I Was Country When Country Wasn't Cool," *Barbara Mandrell Live,* MCA, 1981.

2. Mary A. Bufwack and Robert K. Oermann, "Reba McEntire Walks On," *Journal of Country Music* 16, no. 1 (1993): 16; Alanna Nash, "The Gender Gap," *Country Music* 227 (August–September 2003): 23–35.

economic currents. Examining the uses of each allows us to investigate larger themes regarding what it meant to be female, white, and southern in 1980s America.

Female country musicians performed more than their songs; they performed gender, region, class, and race as well. Each image was a carefully crafted representation, a social construction created for consumption that coincided with views of the South, whiteness, southern womanhood, and working- and middle-class values. Female performers had been using similar themes since the advent of commercial country music in the 1920s; however, in the 1980s these subjects took on new meanings rooted in the political, social, and economic changes associated with this decade. During the 1980s the South underwent an image transformation; it became known as the home of former president Jimmy Carter, the Sunbelt, and a land of redemption, not a place of anti-civil rights violence and "hillbillies." This era also saw conservative resurgence, Cold War tensions, economic turmoil, military buildups, and backlash against the civil rights movement and feminism. Women in country music changed along with these developments and altered their images, expressed class-based sentiments of the period, used various versions of the South, and bound themselves together through race and class.

By 1990 women's reign in country music, at least for the moment, was over. Male "hunks" and "hat acts" pushed women aside, and female country singles fell to 12 percent, the lowest since the early 1960s. Regardless of this male takeover, "80's Ladies" are significant both in terms of the music industry itself and for what they tell us about American culture.[3] They paved the way for future women stars such as Shania Twain, Faith Hill, and the Dixie Chicks and set precedents for up-and-coming female musicians. Their music was also important

[3]. The quote is taken from KT Oslin's "80's Ladies," *80's Ladies,* RCA, 1987; Deanna D. Sellnow, "Music as Persuasion: Refuting Hegemonic Masculinity in 'He Thinks He'll Keep Her,'" *Women's Studies in Communication* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 66–84.

in itself in that it reached a larger audience and helped promote unity and group identity among fans. Michel Foucault has argued that each culture has rules that determine who is allowed to speak, when their voices are appropriate, how their messages should be fashioned, and what they will or will not be allowed to say. In the United States, these standards have been traditionally embedded in hegemonic masculinity; therefore, women in country music, by "speaking" within the system, helped promote the status quo. The music and performers attracted fans who shared and reinforced the ideas and social constructions they displayed. In this way their music, especially the representations individual women projected, provide a medium through which to view the values and sentiments of its fans. Moreover, the marketplace, the country music industry, and the performers themselves helped to set and reinforce standards. In these ways, country music reflected the standards that governed behaviors, providing clues about which actions and performances were acceptable and which were not, and, since country music moved beyond the South in the 1980s, it can also speak to national conceptions of gender, class, race, and the South.[4]

This dissertation examines the visual and audio portrayals of female country musicians in the 1980s in order to show their changing uses of race, gender, class, and region. It focuses less on the realities of the women's day-to-day lives and concentrates more on how others portrayed them, or how they portrayed themselves. The representation became everything; the star's lives mattered less to their fans and to the historical significance of these women than did the

4. Mary A. Bufwack and Robert K. Oermann, *Finding Her Voice: The Sage of Women in Country Music* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1993), x; Rebecca Ann Thomas, "The Color of Music: Race and the Making of America's Country Music" (PhD diss., University of Missouri-Columbia, 2000), xxi; Karen Saucier Lundy, "Women and Country Music," in *America's Musical Pulse: Popular Music in Twentieth-Century Society,* ed. Kenneth J. Bindas (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992), 213.

projections of themselves. Moreover, fans received these images and in turn played roles in the creation and maintenance of the representations.

Since this dissertation focuses on performance, it relies heavily on videos, song lyrics, concerts, television, public appearances, film, and fan club documents to show how female singers drew on shifting images of whiteness, belief in a mythical South, southern womanhood, and class to give legitimacy to their music. In terms of archival research, I primarily used the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville, Tennessee. This facility has an extensive collection of fan club archives, broadcast data, video, performances, television series, music videos, and film. I used its visual sources as texts that revealed women's changing styles, behaviors, performances, and overall images. The fan club archives, which contain flyers, letters from fans, memorabilia, and information about the stars, helped answer questions about audience responses and fan/performer interactions. I also consulted the archive at the Museum of Television and Radio in Los Angeles for its sources of television performances, including interviews, concerts, and awards shows. Finally, I utilized the Southern Folklife Collection, Manuscript Department, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, for its audio recordings, television programs, journal articles, secondary sources, and rare books.

Background

Commercial country music began in the 1920s with recordings from both individual artists and groups. Fiddlin' John Carson recorded the first ever country phonograph record in 1923 and then in 1927, in Bristol, Tennessee, the Carter Family created their first recording for Victor. Initially, the industry generally presented the music, both solo and group, as "traditional" and uniquely southern, and the performers as simple family acts or talented, but understated, working-class men. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, country, or "hillbilly" music,

focused less on time-honored southern traditions and family values and more on western themes and ruralism. Despite these changes, country was still "country" and marketed toward a white, southern, working-class audience. Performers sang with exaggerated accents, dressed in campy country or western attire, and presented themselves as authentic keepers of white southern tradition.[5]

The 1950s witnessed the birth of the Nashville Sound, a more mainstream and less rural construction that abandoned fiddles, banjoes, and "country" apparel in favor of synthesized background music, torch singers, and slightly more mainstream fashion choices. Country music's content remained virtually unaltered; songs still contained southern and working-class signifiers, but the look and sound changed. This new format, which fans at first viewed as "selling out," was created in an attempt to pick up the easy-listening and pop audiences who did not respond to newer rock 'n' roll. Over time, the Nashville Sound did prove successful and won country music a larger audience. It also inspired rebellions within country music. Rockabilly, a genre informed by youth culture and the popularity of rock, and honky tonk, a musical form that encompassed nasal vocals and traditional country instruments, emerged in the 1950s as well. The Nashville Sound, however, arguably achieved the most popularity, and its sound and success continued throughout the 1950s and 1960s.[6]

In the mid to late 1970s the Outlaws took center stage with more "traditional," "rough-n-ready," and Texas-inspired music. Performers such as Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson rebelled against the feminine Nashville Sound and instead presented more overtly masculine and

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[5]. Fred Dellar, Alan Cackett, and Roy Thompson, *The Harmony Illustrated Encyclopedia of Country Music* (New York: Harmony Books, 1986), 28–31.

[6]. Paul Hemphill, *The Nashville Sound: Bright Lights and Country Music* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 370–74.

unabashedly country music. Women in country music, specifically Loretta Lynn, Dolly Parton, and Jessi Colter, adopted traditional instruments and attire, and celebrated their rural roots, and in doing so conformed to these new standards. Lynn and Parton in particular mirrored the Outlaw movement and also 1970s feminism, an aggressive move for female country singers. Their songs included topics such as women's empowerment, birth control, divorce, the glass ceiling, and violence against women- new themes that reflected the distinct issues of second wave feminism. The industry accepted and promoted these themes and therefore repackaged itself to meet the demands of the market, which the women's movement influenced. Colter, on the other hand, presented herself as "one of the boys," her own brand of feminism. She wore masculine hats and clothing and held her own with Outlaws Nelson and Jennings. In fact, the 1976 album *Wanted! The Outlaws*, which featured Colter, Jennings, Nelson, and Tompall Glaser, became country's first to sell one million copies. The Outlaws used their popularity to assertively challenge country music's softer image, and in 1975, at the Country Music Association's (CMA) award show, launched a visual and explicit attack against the Nashville Sound. Assigned the task of announcing John Denver, who many perceived as soft and more folk than country, as the CMA's Entertainer of the Year, presenter Charlie Rich instead lit his envelope on fire. This act epitomized country's move away from music designed for crossover success. A few pop-inspired country singers remained, most notably Barbara Mandrell and Anne Murray, but Outlaw music had taken center stage.[7]

In the 1980s, as this dissertation discusses, the music once again changed. Pop country made a comeback, videos and other media formats provided new outlets and exposure, and in the

7. Hemphill, *The Nashville Sound*, 370–74; Joli Jensen, *Nashville Sound: Authenticity, Commercialization, and Country Music* (Nashville, TN: Country Music Foundation Press and Vanderbilt University Press, 1998), 214–16; Martha Bayles, *Hole in Our Soul: The Loss of Beauty and Meaning in American Popular Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 376–80.

late 1980s, crossovers eventually gave way once again to bluegrass, traditional, and Outlaw-like numbers.[8] Moreover, female musicians experienced unprecedented success and publicity. For these reasons, appearances became increasingly important.

During the 1980s, as during previous periods, larger historical themes influenced women's images and performances. Ideas about gender, race, class, and the South changed during the 1980s, and female country music mirrored these developments. Just as Lynn, Parton, and Colter reflected 1970s feminism, women artists in the 1980s echoed conservatism and backlash. In some cases the performers themselves took charge of their personas, in some the industry dictated how women should look or sound, and in other instances the industry and performers responded to the demands of the marketplace. Performances and images became social texts that can be used as windows into 1980s society. They reveal the values, norms, and standards of fans, the industry, and the artists themselves.

Historiographical Essay

The development of commercial country music has inspired scholarship since its inception. Currently the historiography is as diverse as the music itself. In general, writings on country music stress either its origins, performative aspects, multiculturalism, consumer-related dimensions, or rise to national prominence. Few works address women in country music, and even fewer the relationships between images and historical developments. Moreover, the 1980s are a neglected decade in country music history. Many accounts exist of the Outlaws in the 1970s and of women's rise to fame, as well as numerous discussions of the "hat" acts, Garth Brooks mania, and the sexualization of female country music in the 1990s; but the 1980s are

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[8]. Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 388–93; David Sanjek, "Muddying the Clear Water: The Dubious Transparency of Country Music," in *A Boy Named Sue: Gender and Country Music*, ed. Kristine M. McCusker and Diane Pecknold (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), x.

generally portrayed as trivial. This dissertation serves to contribute to country music historiography by moving women to the center and by recuperating the 1980s as a significant decade, one that was not merely a bridge between the 1970s and 1990s.

This dissertation is informed by a rich body of historical work on country music, which historians recognize as a serious and valid academic subject. I argue that country music is not only a social text, but also has *national* (as opposed to regional or class-based) popularity, two factors that contribute to its usefulness as a historical source. In terms of gender, although historians frequently have acknowledged the significance of male performers, few works have focused exclusively on women and women's contributions have been generally ignored. This dissertation deals entirely with women, thereby moving them to the center of the analysis. Moreover, historians have often treated the country music industry as a large, intricate, and controlling business, but I will argue that the music and the performer's images reflected the fans, their norms, and their values; they were not merely the result of an ominous and imposing commercial business. In fact, artist's images were largely based on dialogues between the performers and the fans, not between the musicians and producers, label-heads, or music executives. Finally, my work expands and refines the notion of authenticity in country music, which remained especially important for women in the 1980s as they used changing concepts of authenticity to give themselves legitimacy.

This dissertation is also informed by theories and frameworks from histories of gender, race, class, region, and popular culture. For female country musicians, gender was a performance that changed to mirror the social conventions of the time. In terms of race, I draw largely on analyses of whiteness, race as a performance, and consider the significance of the exclusion of racial minorities from country music and country music's history. I am especially

interested in analysis of the body and how bodily control translated into whiteness. Country music was also intimately linked to contemporary expressions and conceptions of class. I argue that in country music, performers and fans linked crossover success and "pop" or "soft" country to the middle classes, while the industry and performers presented "hard" or traditional country music as working class. Female country music also presented region, race, and gender in distinctly class-inflected ways, as either working or middle class, depending on the period in question. Lastly, I examine the South in country music and claim that the country defined the South in cultural and distinctive terms.

Based on economic factors alone, country music was, and is, not only popular, but hugely successful. Since the 1980s, country records and concerts have commercially rivaled rock, R & B, and hip hop as the highest-selling musical genre. Unlike these other musical forms, country music has a reputation for being unpopular and the music only of white, southern, working-class, uncultured, masses. However, country music's success in record sales and concert performances suggest that its audience is larger than these stereotypes indicate. In *The Nashville Sound*, Paul Hemphill challenges these generalizations; he argues that country music comes not from "uncultured hillbillies" and that instead it embodies "some of the most potent use of the poetic potential of vernacular expression." It is an accessible musical format presented in a language to which many relate. It is compelling and for that reason, incredibly successful.[9] This success, along with country's use of popular language, makes it not only an important musical form, but also a significant topic of study.

Much has been written about country's popularity with the working class, which indicates it can be used as an instrument to reveal aspects of these men's and women's lives.

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[9]. Hemphill, *The Nashville Sound*, 370–74.

David Fillingim's *Redneck Liberation* argues that country music articulates assumptions that shape the worldviews of common people, "hillbillies," and "rednecks," findings that in themselves are significant.[10] Working-class men's and women's consumption of country music suggest that it can be used as a window into their lives. However, as previously stated, it is, and was, extraordinarily popular, and therefore affected more than simply one segment of society. While it reflected a working-class worldview, it nevertheless also functioned as a considerable component of *American* and middle-class popular culture. The stereotype that country music was primarily or exclusively working class obscures the reality that it has been a significant force in the music world.[11]

One can attribute some of country music's success to its lyrics, which are accepted by its audience. In *High Lonesome*, Cecelia Tichi theorizes that fans identify with country music's lyrical messages but not the stereotypical notions of honky tonks, southern scenes, and working-class life. Rather, she argues that fans saw concepts such as the open road, loneliness, nature, and an idealized West as more significant. Tichi believes country music's deceptive simplicity prevents many from taking it seriously, but that detailed examinations of the lyrics and themes reveal that the music serves national interests. She compares country songs to stories, narratives, and poetry that exalt national traditions and values and notes that country's concepts are ones consistently found in American art and literature. For Tichi, "country is synonymous with nation" (meaning the word country); therefore, "country music is emphatically national music." In this way, country music becomes a patriotic art form with lyrics, messages, and performances

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10. David Fillingim, *Redneck Liberation: Country Music as Theology* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), 6–8.

11. Charles F. Gritzner, "Country Music: A Reflection of Popular Culture," *Journal of Popular Culture* 11 (1978): 857–61.

that appeal to a national audience.[12] Like literature, country music is an influential text appropriate for deconstruction.

Tichi's type of analysis expands country music culture from one that is narrowly southern and working-class into one that encompasses American values; however, she fails to realize that the category "American values" is problematic. She does not discuss class, race, or gender, or the impact each has on American cultural forms and their popularity. Nor does she consider that various ethnic and racial minorities have no ties to country music; therefore, it cannot truly represent these groups. Furthermore, for Tichi, if literature and country music both mention the same theme, home for example, then she believes they both are discussing the same topic. This in itself is awkward, as "home" means different things to different people at different times. In addition, a large part of Tichi's thesis argues that country music is significant because it contains themes that link it to "high" culture, a theory that neglects country's folk and working-class traditions and insinuates that popular culture is worthy of study only if it is connected to literature. Moreover, Tichi's definition of country music is too simple; she assumes that all country music is the same.[13] This dissertation adds race, gender, class, and region to the analysis and, in doing so, refines Tichi's insights into country music as an "American" form. It also discusses other persistent themes in country music (which appear in American literature as well), such as patriarchy and racial superiority, and connects these to American culture in the 1980s.

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[12]. Cecelia Tichi, *High Lonesome: The American Culture of Country Music* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 1, 5, 8–9.

[13]. Frank de Caro and Robin Roberts, review of *High Lonesome: The American Culture of Country Music,* by Cecelia Tichi, *South Central Review,* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 74–75; David E. Whisnant, "Gone Country: *High Lonesome* and the Politics of Writing about Country Music," *Journal of Country Music* 17, no. 2 (1995): 62–66.

Like Tichi, other writers agree that country music is national, yet many have taken this insight further and linked it with the historic spread of southern culture. Bill Malone, the most prolific historian of country music, argued that since the end of World War II, southern music (country, rhythm and blues, rock 'n' roll, gospel, Cajun) became mainstream, and so has southern culture.[14] In *Southern Music, American Music*, for example, he argued that country music in particular became more acceptable, mainly through its adoption of a more pop-sounding style in the 1950s. This was country's first attempt to abandon the instruments and sounds associated with ruralism and replace them with more region-neutral voices and instruments. According to Malone, "country music as a whole moved into the sixties thoroughly committed to a heavy electronic sound, with only the bluegrass musicians holding against the tide." The music that emerged from the recording studios of Nashville, called variously the "Nashville Sound," "country pop," "countrypolitan," or "middle-of-the-road music," deemphasized or omitted fiddles and steel guitars and introduced background voices and sedate instrumentation designed to reach new listeners while holding on to the older ones.[15] This move led to country going national.

Once country spread beyond the South, "traditional" country made a comeback. This was possible, Malone argued, only because it had introduced its softer side to audiences first. By 1958 the industry and public stopped using the term "hillbilly" and instead labeled the music "country," a surprisingly less rural moniker. Nashville became the fashionable new center of country music, and the industry formed professional organizations like the CMA to elevate

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[14]. Bill C. Malone, "The Rural South Moves to the City: Country Music since World War II," in *The Rural South Since World War II*, ed. R. Douglass Hurt (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 95, 115–17.

[15]. Bill C. Malone and David Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 98–102.

country's image and to demonstrate its commercial potential. One of the CMA's main goals was to help create more national radio stations that only played country music.[16] As exposure increased, so did country's scope and popularity.

Since national purpose accompanied country music's new success in the 1960s and 1970s, in many ways the music became "respectable." Country music started associating itself with national trends and attitudes and reflecting not only national interests but also anxieties and in doing so, it spread even further beyond the South. Its messages now appealed to more than just southerners and became linked to the "Silent Majority," a group that appreciated country's patriotic lyrics and also its celebration of whiteness and working-class values. Many fans viewed country as more stable than the youth-oriented rock and folk, which criticized the American system. By the time Georgia native Jimmy Carter was elected president in 1976, there was an increasing belief that a developed South would lead the nation. Country's newfound popularity coincided with, and was assisted by, southern culture's rise in national consciousness. Southerners lost much of their guilt about previous traditions and could celebrate southern values without shame. Traits formerly associated with the South, such as religious fundamentalism, aggressive patriotism, and racism, went national, and country went with them.[17]

Malone's interpretation of country music and its ties to larger historical trends informs this dissertation. Just as country music in the 1970s reflected the Silent Majority and the "southernization" of America, it also mirrored 1980s conservatism.[18] Malone used country music as a lens to view political and social trends pre-1980; my purpose is to extend his

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[16]. Ibid.

[17]. Malone and Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music*, 108–10.

[18]. For more information, see John Egerton, *The Americanization of Dixie*: *The Southernization of America* (New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1974).

argument. This dissertation also adds gender and race to the analysis, two components excluded from *Southern Music, American Music*.

If by 1970 country music became the music of the Silent Majority and conservatism, in many ways it became the music of racism as well. Rebecca Ann Thomas, in "The Color of Music: Race and the Making of America's Country Music," reminds us that racism, as in earlier time periods, existed outside the South. The civil rights movement and Great Society programs both provoked a national, conservative, race-based backlash. In the mid-1970s, after Vietnam, country music generally avoided political statements, but over time it become more openly working-class and, like conservative political rhetoric, covertly racist. It also became more adamantly southern, possibly since the civil rights movement had helped separate the South from its shameful past.[19] Other southern attributes, like religious fundamentalism, also existed in country music. Performers presented all aforementioned qualities as exclusively white, a trend that persisted at least throughout the 1980s. These aspects, along with country's criticisms of war protestors, helped unite white middle-class conservatives and working-class populists against intellectuals, students, and minorities. Since country music, like southern culture, racism and conservatism, spread nationally through these groups, one can use it as a tool (or a text) to view American culture and historical trends.

Country music's national popularity was reflected in more than record sales. In the 1970s Loretta Lynn appeared on the cover of *Newsweek* and Merle Haggard on *Time*. The music also became identified with presidential politics. Lyndon B. Johnson ate barbecue with country music guests, while Richard Nixon invited Merle Haggard and Johnny Cash to the White House and dedicated the new Opry House in 1974 in the middle of the Watergate scandal.

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19. Thomas, "The Color of Music," xxi; Malone, "The Rural South Moves to the City," 95, 115–17.

Furthermore, country trickled far down into youth culture. Bob Dylan helped popularize it for young people with his country-inspired album *Nashville Skyline* in 1969, and others, like the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's 1972 *Will the Circle Be Unbroken,* followed. Gram Parsons, Charlie Daniels, Hank Williams, Jr., and Willie Nelson all added integrity and "coolness" to the music.[20] This national acceptance, both from elites and average Americans, suggests country music's place as a popular culture form worthy of further analysis.

As in most historical subjects, women existed in every era of country music; yet, until very recently, their contributions have been ignored or treated as side notes to the dominant narrative. A variety of biographies, autobiographies, and case studies of female artists do exist, but most focus on a handful of "token" performers. Most country music historiography considers men more legitimate, more authentic, and overall more significant than women. For these reasons, aside from the aforementioned works, few histories focus exclusively on women. The exception is Mary A. Bufwack and Robert K. Oermann's *Finding Her Voice: The Saga of Women in Country Music*. *Finding Her Voice* includes many of the great, and lesser-known, female stars and then uses their stories as "windows into the world of the majority of American women."[21] According to Bufwack and Oermann, female country music from the 1920s to the 1990s reflected women's social status, roles, and political positions. For example, 1940s female country music displayed patriotism, labor concerns, and relative independence; post–World War II songs exhibited domesticity; and radical and mainstream feminism influenced women performers in the 1970s.[22] This dissertation, like *Finding Her Voice*, depicts how women

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20. Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, USA* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 370, 372–73, 386–88.

21. Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, x.

22. Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*; For other discussions on female country music as a social text, see Mary Bufwack, "The Feminist Sensibility in Post-War Country Music," *Southern Quarterly* 22 (Spring

changed in response to contemporary political and social developments, but Bufwack and Oermann's work is a longer, more general study that focuses exclusively on class and gender. This dissertation expands their analysis to include region and race and applies this framework to a narrower time period, one that Bufwack and Oermann treat in a somewhat cursory fashion. Even *Finding Her Voice* portrays the 1980s as trivial, significant only as a bridge between two more important eras.

Regardless of the time period, social and cultural currents were not the only influences for women in country music. The music industry and fans were significant factors as well. Images, like songs, became commodities intended for sale to as many consumers as possible; and therefore, artists designed personas that would appeal to a large audience. A few sources in country music historiography argue that the industry chose performer's images and then imposed them on fans who had little agency. Others claim that the fans, and in some cases the artists themselves, had more authority. This dissertation argues that in most cases, fans and female artists influenced women's images and performances, and thereby women's representations in country music reflected the values and norms of its national audience.

Don Cusic's *Music in the Market* attempts to answer claims that some writings on the country music industry focus too much on music as a product, thereby making it seem impersonal. For Cusic, however, the music in fact is a product and any attempt to ignore this does a disservice to the industry and its work. Cusic claims that the "music industry is a combination of music, technology, and business" and that it, not necessarily the performers or

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1984): 143; and Robert Coltman, "'Sweethearts of the Hills': Women in Early Country Music," *JEMF Quarterly* 14, no. 52 (Winter 1978): 161–64.

fans, is a major influence on popular culture.[23] For Cusic, the artist and the consumer "connect" and the bond can be powerful, but that is not the entire story. Performers, while they generally enjoy making music, are also aware that music is a career, a business. For that reason, they allow the industry to market and define their songs and images. Both the label and the artist want to appeal to a large market; therefore, performers cooperate with the label in terms of marketing and images. Moreover, fans have little choice, since labels usually play it safe and market performers who conform to society's values.[24]

Dan Daley's *Nashville's Unwritten Rules: Inside the Business of the Country Music Machine*, is similar to Cusic's *Music in the Market*. Daley, a longtime journalist and composer who based his work largely on personal interviews with record executives and producers, writes that "success in Nashville has always been about the twin pursuits of myths and money," and the two have to be reconciled in order for performers to succeed. To reconcile the two, country music uses myths, mainly tradition and ruralism, to distract audiences from the business of country music. Daley deals with four groups, record producers, songwriters, music publishers, and musicians, and determines that producers, not fans or performers, are the most influential actors in country music's images.[25]

Diane Pecknold's *The Selling Sound: The Rise of the Country Music Industry* is based on the same assumptions that inform Cusic's and Daley's works. Pecknold, through the use of

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[23]. Don Cusic, *Music in the Market* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1996), 169.

[24]. Ibid., 102–3. Others outside of country music historiography agree with this interpretation as well. For example, John Fiske supports the Marxist idea that popular culture is a way to manipulate the public, or a way to exercise power. This interpretation completely lessens fans' power and makes them insignificant actors, a theory that this dissertation does not support. John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

[25]. Dan Daley, *Nashville's Unwritten Rules: Inside the Business of Country Music* (New York: Overlook Press, 1998), 2.

interviews and novels and films on country music, theorizes that commercialism has historically been the most significant factor in country music; in fact, she claims that it had greater importance than authenticity, image, or the sounds of songs. For Pecknold, commercialization started in the 1930s as a way for country music to win a larger audience. The first attempts proving successful, they continued throughout the 1940s and 1950s and then increased in the 1960s. In addition, the industry started marketing more towards the middle classes with the Nashville Sound and pop-sounding artists.[26]

This dissertation suggests that fans and artists had more agency than Cusic, Daley, or Pecknold recognize. According to Cusic, the artists and fans have little influence; however, he does concede that performers mirror social and political conventions. Even if the industry controlled images, it still marketed singers who conformed to larger standards of accepted behavior. This dissertation accepts that claim but does not endorse the view that fans are passive receptors of country music marketing. As it shows, the audience, through fan club activities, records and concert sales, and television ratings, had a great deal of influence on women in country music's images.

Like Cusic, Daley gives the musicians themselves very little power and removes fans from the equation altogether. While I agree that the country music industry did play a role in image creation, the fans were equally, if not more, significant. Daley's sources are largely based on interviews with executives and producers, and his findings reflect this by claiming that the industry, not the fans, had more power. He does interview musicians but again, they are not his focus. This dissertation uses fan club archives, performances, song lyrics, and interviews with

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[26]. Diane Pecknold, *The Selling Sound: The Rise of the Country Music Industry* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

musicians along with secondary sources on the industry to arrive at its conclusions. In this way fans and musicians are considered as equal players to music executives and producers.

The Selling Sound, with its focus on commercialization, makes it seem as if performers thought only of profit. In Pecknold's analysis, musicians had neither power nor concern about their music, and fans were insignificant factors. While I agree that commercialization, marketing, and profit all contributed to country performers' images, one has to consider other elements, namely the fans themselves. The fans did not represent inactive beneficiaries of industry marketing and instead played roles in which artists succeeded and which did not.

Furthermore, these histories, for the most part, cannot account for the fact that many artists used self-consciously constructed images, and many did so successfully. Barbara Ching challenges the idea that country music originates from uncultured hillbillies or from a complex industry, and instead argues that country's performers worked to create very specific images and chose particular songs with precise sounds. Artists wanted to be seen as down-home, everyday people and therefore adopted uncomplicated, somewhat naïve, and traditional behaviors. These performances deliberately encouraged fans to believe they were authentically country, a hugely significant factor in a country performers' success. These calculated constructions made the music, and performers, seem simple, when in reality the artists themselves and their images were complex.[27] Ching's analysis informs one of this dissertation's underlying themes: that in some cases the musicians themselves created images consistent with fans' expectations, and therefore their performances tell us something about fan's values and beliefs.

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[27]. Barbara Ching, *Wrong's What I Do Best: Hard Country Music and Contemporary Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 75–78; David Sanjek, "Muddying the Clear Water: The Dubious Transparency of Country Music," in McCusker and Pecknold, *A Boy Named Sue*, xiii.

Some scholars do claim that alterations in country music coincided with lifestyle changes in its audience, an interpretation that places fans at the center. In *Smile When You Call Me a Hillbilly: Country Music's Struggle for Respectability,* Jeffrey Lange examines the period between 1939 and 1954 and concludes that country's audience drew meaning from the music because it reflected their own beliefs. Even though commercialization increased after 1954, some performers did want "authenticity" and remained "true" to their music. Many fans liked the music because it reflected their attitudes and norms.[28]

Legendary musician and producer Jimmy Bowen's take is similar to Lange's. In *Rough Mix*, Bowen uses his own personal memories to chronicle his life as an ambitious child, then musician, and finally one of the most successful music executives in history. Bowen, who was a rockabilly star in the 1950s and who also headed six Nashville labels between 1960 and the mid-1990s, strove to put artists in charge of their images and music. Of course they had little control over their earnings or masters, but they did select their own personas. For Bowen and artists who worked under him, Reba McEntire, Garth Brooks, and George Strait for example, the singers controlled the image and the label marketed it. If they succeeded, then the performers and labels profited; if not, the labels dropped and replaced singers. Bowen believed that successful performers tapped into fans' desires; the industry did not control or manipulate stars.[29]

Bill Malone and David Stricklin's *Southern Music, American Music* also presents country as an expression of its audience. According to Malone, country music originated through a clash of Celtic, African American, and rural cultures in the nineteenth-century South. Eventually this mixture spread beyond the South and entered mainstream American culture. Malone then

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[28]. Jeffrey J. Lange, *Smile When You Call Me a Hillbilly: Country Music's Struggle for Respectability, 1939–1954* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

[29]. Jimmy Bowen and Jim Jerome, *Rough Mix* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997).

discusses the first recordings of country music in the 1920s and how the industry and performers presented them as southern, but not as a hybrid of various cultures. In essence, country music retained its southernness but abandoned its multicultural history. This presentation, for Malone, was a direct result of the South's racial politics and therefore a representation of country's early fans, the southern white working class. Fans wanted southern, white, and rural music, not music that reflected a multicultural South. Country music thereby reflected its fans' values, not the reality of the South or of country music.[30]

Lyrics can also be used to understand fans and the values they appreciate. According to Paul DiMaggio, Richard A. Petterson, and Jack Esco, Jr., in "Country Music: Ballad of the Silent Majority," instruments change but themes stay the same. Love, drinking, work, and longing for the good old days persistently appear in country lyrics. The authors theorize that the themes in country music are universal, and that they represent concerns that existed throughout American history. In this way, the lyrics speak to the values of the audience.[31] This interpretation is compelling, though the authors do not consider how these "universals" were nevertheless shaped by gender, race, class, or region. This dissertation not only examines how country music lyrics represented fans' desires and beliefs, but also considers how gender, race, class, and region intimately shaped these wishes and viewpoints.

Although the relative agency of performers and the commodification of country music have been central to interpretations of the genre, fans are largely absent in these analyses. I argue that country music is responsible to its fans in ways that other genres are not. This is best

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[30]. Malone and Stricklin, *Southern Music, American Music*, 108–10.

31. Paul DiMaggio, Richard A. Petterson, and Jack Esco, Jr., "Country Music: Ballad of the Silent Majority," in *The Sounds of Social Change,* eds. R. Serge Denisoff and Richard A. Peterson (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1972), 38–45.

exhibited with the significance of Fan Fair, an event that has received virtually no academic attention. John Lomax's *Nashville: Music City, USA* presents one of the few discussions of Fan Fair, a festival in which the buyers of country music come en masse to Music City (Nashville) to meet and mingle with stars. Industry executives created Fan Fair in 1972 after too many fans arrived at the Grand Ole Opry's birthday celebration, an affair that also included the CMA's awards show. Country music organizers realized that the music needed a separate event that would allow fans and performers to interact, hence Fan Fair. The first few festivals took place in Nashville's Municipal Auditorium, but in 1981 it moved to the state fairgrounds after a dramatic increase in fans. Fan Fair lasted one week, and artists personally attended and acted as their own publicity machines and as representatives of their labels. Fans paid to get into the fairgrounds and also received access to Opryland and the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. Fan Fair included hundreds of booths, concerts, exhibits, autograph-signing stations, and special events. This festival gave many country music fans what they wanted: a platform where they could meet stars and discuss their likes and dislikes. As Lomax observes, "Fan Fair presents the best opportunity to see the bond that exists between country singers and their audience."[32] This event, which was, and is, a rite of passage for singers, makes country music stars more accountable to their fans. They answer to their audience in ways that performers from other genres do not. Country music prides itself on being "real," the expression of "common people," and a forum where stars are humble and receptive. Fan Fair exemplifies this and shows that musicians do directly interact with fans and that these encounters have importance.

Fan Fair also contains elements of George Lipsitz's concept of "dialogue" between individuals and popular culture. In *Time Passages*, Lipsitz claims that popular culture enables

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[32]. John Lomax III, *Nashville: Music City USA* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1985), 46–51.

people to assert their collective characteristics and desires. Individuals enter into a "dialogue" with popular culture, particularly with music, where they discuss their "past, present, and future struggles over culture and power." Lipsitz's argument reminds us that consumption of pop culture is shaped by memory and historical context, other issues that impact country music's audience.[33] At Fan Fair, the audience did engage in actual dialogues with performers, and many of these conversations involved how fans believed artists should appear, behave, or sound. Fans' past experiences and their present social, cultural, financial, or political situations informed their expectations. While this example is more straightforward than Lipsitz's abstract conception, Fan Fair underlines the fact that country music was a give-and-take between performers and fans, not a form that merely represented the interests of an industry or market.

This dissertation argues that the images fans demanded, and that musicians delivered, in female country music in the 1980s included changing combinations of gender, race, class, and region. Even though images shifted as the decade progressed, performers presented them, and fans saw them, as authentic. As previously argued, authenticity in country music was essential; if an artist appeared unauthentic, then he/she had little chance of success. But authenticity was never fixed; image in country music and success were both linked to *changing* versions of authenticity. Country performers had to appear bona fide; however, requirements of that status constantly fluctuated. Moreover, for country women, authenticity clearly did not reflect women's actual lives. They exhibited unobtainable, idyllic versions of womanhood. In spite of these contradictions, authenticity played a significant role in female performer's images and songs.

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[33]. George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 68, 99, 105, 109.

Richard Peterson's *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* focuses on country music as a social construction with a concentration on the years from 1923, when Victor recorded the first country song, until 1953, with the death of Hank Williams, one of the first national stars. He claims that in order for country music to be popular, it had to be considered authentic; however, authenticity was a social construction that constantly changed. Singers had to represent whatever tradition was popular at that time, and if no one custom was obviously the most in vogue, then record companies and performers would try various images until they found a style to which fans responded. In these images Peterson sees a few consistent themes, primarily among them was a desire for a fictitious past with simple origins and rural traditions. Furthermore, historical accuracy did not generally determine "authentic" images, much like plantation legends in film and literature. The audience only had to believe the image was authentic, that it was an exact copy and not an imitation. The authenticity and performance also had to be perceived as natural, logical developments.[34]

This dissertation examines how women musicians in the 1980s expressed these traditions and myths through their bodies, dress, lyrics, and performances. All demonstrated their southernness, whiteness, and class consciousness through gendered and racial means; they performed their entire image. In addition, fans saw fluctuations in women's images as natural moves, changes that happened without deliberation or coercion. It was supposedly "normal" for women to be sexualized, then pure; to celebrate a progressive South and then exhibit rural southern pride; to disregard race and then discuss it only through comedy; or to court a middle-class audience and then present themselves as speaking only for the working class. Even when images changed, as they did during the 1980s, fans saw the alterations as sincere and, in many

34. Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 205–12.

cases, seemingly forgot previous styles. Fans changed as well and therefore accepted modifications in country music authenticity. As fans moved through the 1980s, their values and behaviors shifted, and in response country music changed.

Peterson also discusses the ties that connected country music fans. Identification with country music was similar to associations with racial or ethnic groups; it included associations with certain values and lifestyles to which many people related. Fans discarded other loyalties (class, region, usually not race) and assumed similar identities based on ruralism and traditional values. In this scenario, the musician represented a member of the fan's community. This added another component to country's authenticity: performers had to be authentic since they served as the spokespeople for a group of fans. In order to achieve this level of legitimacy, musicians learned the canons and customs of the music, the behaviors, sounds, and accepted performances. Of course fans saw the music itself as important; however, the signifiers were equally, if not more, significant. In Peterson's words, "The boots, the hat, the outfit, a soft rural Southern accent, as well as the sound and subjects of the songs all help."[35] Peterson's discussion focuses entirely on the performative aspects of country music, features that are ripe for gender analysis, especially in terms of family values, country signifiers, links to tradition, and legitimacy. However, Peterson does not address these issues. Moreover, this dissertation expands his argument and examines how whiteness, class, and region factored into authenticity and how these concepts changed over time.

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35. Ibid., 218–27. Peterson also discusses how models of ideal country musicians have changed. By the 1950s, Hank Williams was the "perfect" model of a country music singer; but over time the image moved to Merle Haggard or even John Denver. In addition, Peterson examines fans and their impact on country music authenticity. He writes, "In the 1980s another form of authenticity work began to be important, as copiously illustrated and well-researched fan-oriented histories of country music to appear." These writings expressed how fans viewed and experienced authenticity.

Although the dissertation engages country music historiography, it also draws on theories from academic writings on gender, race, class, and region. In terms of gender, in female country music there was no single image for female performers; there were many, and they changed over time. The images generally had little to do with the realities of the performer's lives and instead tended to mirror society's views on women's "proper" behaviors. Since ideas about women were not fixed, neither were images for female country artists. To complicate this, fans and the industry remembered women's images differently. For example, in "Patsy Cline's Crossovers," Joli Jensen shows how fans and the industry romanticized Patsy Cline's image after her death. During her lifetime Cline minimized her role as a woman and identified with the working class, a strategy designed to defer criticism. After her death fans and critics "remade her for their own uses" and focused on her ability to achieve success as a woman in a male-dominated profession. Moreover, in the 1980s, articles, reviews, and performers portrayed Cline as a performer who catered to middle-class interests, not as a working-class icon. Cline herself had one contemporary image that emerged in her lifetime and another reinvented image that conformed to 1980s standards.[36] Jensen's portrayal of Cline shows how images are fluid; they change over time.

For Jensen, not only did Cline's image change, it also was a performance. In the 1960s Cline used deliberate signifiers and representations that tied her to the working class. This concept draws heavily on Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble,* another work that informs this dissertation. Butler looks at the category of "woman" and argues that gender categories are constantly constructed and reconstructed "through historically specific discourses and that they are not stable, transcendent categories." These performances involve "bodily acts" that "exhibit

[36]. Joli Jensen, "Patsy Cline's Crossovers: Celebrity, Reputation, and Feminine Identity," in McCusker and Pecknold, *A Boy Named Sue*, 107–31.

the artificiality of gender." For Butler, these acts are not innate; they are learned behaviors that stem from gender identities, societal expectations, and accepted gender-based frameworks. In essence, gender is a performance or a parody, not a biologically predetermined existence. In addition, Butler's analysis establishes the body itself as a "cultural entity," a site where societal norms and values are exhibited.[37] Like Butler, I argue that female country musicians performed gender, that the performance involved women's bodies and behaviors, and that each of these changed over time to reflect societal expectations. Since women in country music performed gender, their actions can tell us information about the gendered frameworks that define the 1980s.

Female country musicians also performed race. In all three periods this dissertation examines, women used bodily control (stillness) to convey and present whiteness. As the 1980s progressed, however, country music women who controlled their bodies paired themselves with other artists, namely African Americans, who used their bodies more aggressively. This tactic highlighted country performers' control and also demonstrated their social status. As Laura Kipnis explains in "White Trash Girl: The Interview," "improper bodies … bodies that defy social norms," have "political implications." For Kipnis, "the body invariably symbolizes the social and is universally employed as a symbol for human society." Moreover, "control over the body is always a symbolic expression of social control."[38] Women in country music used their bodies to convey their whiteness, and in turn demonstrated their perceived racial superiority. Their stillness, and their combination of bodily control and "uncontrolled" backup singers or

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[37]. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), xii.

[38]. Laura Kipnis with Jennifer Reeder, "White Trash Girl: The Interview," in *White Trash: Race and Class in America*, eds. Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz (New York: Routledge, 1997), 113–30.

performers, emphasized their whiteness without explicit references to race. Women rarely mentioned racial minorities, racism, or the perceived whiteness of country music and instead used the performative aspects of race to link them to their audience.

Not only did women in country music perform whiteness, they also portrayed whiteness as the norm. When they spoke of their audience, the South, ruralism, or the working and middle classes, they referred to whites, not to others. This tactic resembles what Richard Dyer found in *White*. Dyer looks at whiteness in film but makes the same points: that whiteness became the standard by which all else was measured.[39] This is all the more striking in country music since it had a multicultural history. Although country music had a predominantly white audience, black musicians and performers influenced country music instruments, singing styles, and lyrics.[40] Since country music marketed itself as white music, performers selectively "forgot" or excluded black contributions.

Women performers in the 1980s, along with the industry and male performers, participated in African American exclusion from country music's history. In *Creating Country Music,* Richard Peterson examines this history and concludes that country music's past had to be misremembered since it contained traces of African American influence. As country music became more commercial, it distinguished itself from other musical forms associated with southern blacks; rhythm and blues, for example. Peterson then takes his discussion of race further and investigates the divergence in attitudes between black and white working-class audiences. For example, he claims that overtime, the working-class, southern communities who created jazz and blues distanced themselves from the genres, whereas poor and working-class

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[39]. Richard Dyer, *White* (London and New York: Routledge: 1997), 1–6.

40. James E. Akenson, "Social and Geographic Characteristics of Country Music," in Bindas, *America's Musical Pulse*, 45; Also see Thomas, "The Color of Music," 1–19.

white southerners continued to accept country music. Both jazz and blues have become categorized with art, folk traditions, and middlebrow-to-highbrow culture, associations that imply they have "moved above" their humble beginnings. In contrast, country music is still perceived as relatively lowbrow, it continued to be seen as authentic while other southern music "sold out" to the industry. This commodification of authenticity, according to Peterson, was at the center of country music's increasing post–World War II popularity. If southern white men and women still viewed country music as representative of their own culture, then northern audiences could as well. For Peterson, the industry misremembered African Americans, and their removal assisted in country music's image as a white genre.[41]

Rebecca Thomas's "There a Whole Lot O' Color in the White Man's Blues" also discusses black exclusion from country music. Thomas reveals the connections between country subgenres and African American influences, and she also presents information on individual artists that black musicians inspired. For example, black blues influenced the sounds and movements of rockabilly, and honky tonk's lyrics borrowed heavily from blues as well. In terms of individual performers, Thomas explains that black musicians inspired many of the most revered country legends. Jimmie Rodgers learned rhythms from black work gangs, Bill Monroe and Chet Atkins studied with black musicians, and Hank Williams, Sr., credited an African American Georgia street musician for his signature style. Williams mimicked the bodily movements and raw sexuality associated with his mentor, a blues performer, and learned his

[41]. Peterson, *Creating Country Music*, 208–12; Writings on country music are not the only sources that discuss African American exclusion. Joel Williamson, for example, claims that southern society excluded black men and women after Reconstruction. The South moved from a culture that relied on black labor to one that included blacks as secondary citizens, to one in which they were virtually excluded. Simultaneously, the South increasingly included poor whites and elevated their status. He also claims that some economically powerless white men felt guilty about their sexual desires and therefore created myths where they served to protect white women from African American males. This "crucible," the combination of sexual aggression and poverty, led to a society in which blacks were excluded. For more information, see Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 305, 414–15.

signature features, which included his trembling voice, the crouching over the microphone, and the pelvic twists, from an African American street musician. Many black performers also enjoyed relative success in country music. DeFord Bailey played harmonica during the opening of the Opry on radio in the 1920s, Chuck Berry and Ray Charles played country music, and Charley Pride rivaled his white counterparts. However, in spite of African American contributions, most of their efforts have been ignored. For Thomas, country music performers, writers, fans, and the industry "concede to early black influences and the potential of current artists in a manner that might be best described as tokenism. The result is a curious tension intrinsic in today's country music—a combination of white aversion to black performers and denial of their merit, and the simultaneous attraction to a style of music that African Americans helped effect."[42]

In "The Color of Music," Thomas placed country music more broadly within the framework of the social construction of race in the South. Thomas sees country music as manipulating its image as a symbol of whiteness through advertising and propaganda. From its commercial beginnings in the 1920s, the music has thrived on the concept of a distinct southern musical culture segregated from African American music (in spite of the fact that African American culture and musicians inspired much of the music). African Americans had been excluded in an effort among whites to reflect a heritage of independent "pure white accomplishments." Performers achieved this through negative imagery of the "Other" with "lustful and sinful" blues music and positive images of white country musicians as keepers of pure, rural, Christian, working-class traditions. Racial imagery also combined with gender in

[42]. Rebecca Thomas, "There a Whole Lot O' Color in the White Man's Blues: Country Music's Selective Memory and the Challenge of Identity," *Midwest Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (Autumn 1996): 73–89.

prescribing strict guidelines for the white female musicians to demonstrate their "traditional" virtues and femininity.[43]

This dissertation accepts Peterson's and Thomas's claims that female country music excluded black performers and extends this into the 1980s. However, since women performers generally did not speak of race I will build more upon Thomas's analysis of the connections between whiteness and gender. I expand her discussion into the 1980s and add that not only did women in country music use gendered concepts of race, but their uses of class and region contained racial components as well. Moreover, I argue that women used stillness and presented themselves in opposition to black performers, both strategies that highlighted their own whiteness. I also claim that in the late 1980s women in country music did begin to discuss race, thereby acknowledging other black performers, but they usually only mentioned race through comedy.

Women in country music discussed class more explicitly. Unlike race, they did not exclude class from country music memory, in fact, during the 1980s women linked themselves to both the working and middle classes and included each in their versions of country music history. By the 1980s, the industry and performers connected certain styles of country music to different classes; for example, the Nashville Sound became seen as middle class, while the Outlaws had more working-class links. These class associations led to class-based categories within country music. Richard Peterson labeled these categories "hard" and "soft" (or on occasion "hard core" and "soft shell") and then helped popularize the new terms. "Hard" country came to be seen as more authentic; it included singers with deep southern drawls, southern pasts, direct links to rural or western life, and personal, sometimes autobiographical

43. Thomas, "The Color of Music," xvii. Nick Tosches also writes on African American exclusion in country music; however, Thomas's work is more current and inclusive. For more information, see Nick Tosches, *Country: The Biggest Music in America* (New York: Stein and Day, 1977).

lyrics. It also incorporated "traditional" instruments such as steel guitars, banjoes, and fiddles. "Soft" country, which the Nashville Sound first popularized, became synonymous with pop country. The performers used pop instruments and performances that appeared more pop than country to straddle the fence between country and pop, but their lyrics contained clear country signifiers. Late 1970s and early 1980s chart-toppers exemplified pop country and therefore had middle-class associations, while fans saw the hard country music of the late 1980s as more working-class. Moreover, the industry marketed the hard music of the late 1980s as not only working class, but also as more authentic, hence its label "neotraditional."[44]

This dissertation includes an analysis of women musicians and their uses of hard and soft country, how their lyrics and performances incorporated hard or soft ideas, and how and why these ideas changed. Throughout the 1980s, women used hard and soft tactics to win different fans or to present themselves as linked to certain concepts or behaviors. Moreover, I also argue that hard and soft categories were classed as well as gendered. For example, this dissertation examines what aspects of hard or soft country fell outside of the bounds of female country music, and why.

Barbara Ching's *Wrong's What I Do Best* expands the hard/soft dichotomy and notes that "lyrics and characteristic sounds convey complex meanings." Beginning in the 1970s, American presidents started publicly accepting country music and referring to it as a truly American art form. According to Ching; however, they spoke of mainstream, or soft, country, not hard. Hard country, at least according to its own image, was not meant to be an example of America; it did not come in a package, did not appear suitable for consumption, and never appeared on magazine covers. It was masculine and, in some cases, defiant. Women in country music could not be

44. Richard A. Peterson, "The Dialectic of Hard-Core and Soft-Shell Country Music," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 94, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 273–300.

insolent or overtly rebellious since they had less power and therefore operated with more constraints than their male counterparts. Male performers had access to hard lyrics and performances, while women did not and as a result risked becoming labeled as unauthentic or soft.[45] Ching's discussion expands Peterson's thesis to include gender, but it does not discuss the hard country female performers in the late 1980s and how they used hard core techniques in their performances. This dissertation will explore how women in the late 1980s adopted hard country's signifiers and performances, but combined them with more traditionally female styles.

Peterson's and Ching's discussions of hard and soft country music show that both classes have been represented in country's past. Others agree; for example, Kristine McCusker's "Bury Me beneath the Willow" argues that country music has historically used "images and metaphors referring to both middle and working class experiences to entice a broad section of Americans." From the late 1920s through the 1940s, the barn dance, an urban-based radio genre that broadcast constructed images of a rural past nationwide, sought a larger audience. To court working- and middle-class listeners, it focused on ruralism but incorporated middle-class concerns as well. In addition, the industry and performers created versions of ruralism and based them on perceived wants and desires of the audience.[46] Like Peterson, McCusker sees country music as a genre that manipulated class, and class associations, to its advantage.

In spite of country music's uses of both middle- and working-class signifiers, many listeners saw it as uniquely southern and saw the South as interchangeable with the working class. In *Don't Get above Your Raisin'*, Bill Malone states that working-class southerners originally created country music and gave it its identity. They associated class with ruralism,

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45. Ching, *Wrong's What I Do Best*, 4–7, 29–31, 40–41.

46. Kristine M. McCusker, "'Bury Me beneath the Willow': Linda Parker and Definitions of Tradition on the *National Barn Dance*, 1932–1935," in McCusker and Pecknold, *A Boy Named Sue*, 4.

which influenced country music and gave it its signifiers like cabins, country homes, and churches. It helped create a "common community" among musicians and fans and provided them with mythical traditions that contained as many contradictions as the images themselves. Prevalent themes in country music also embodied many contradictory impulses and values. It included the simultaneous attraction of two seemingly inconsistent lifestyles-- home vs. rambling, Christianity vs. hedonism, pride in working class life vs. benefits of a middle class existence-- which enabled the music to become widely popular within working-class communities. In addition, songs referenced home, the working classes themselves, the cult of motherhood, religion, rambling, and humor, themes the working class appreciated. As country music moved beyond the South, it changed to appeal to other working people; it kept its traditions but was altered. In many cases national fans had no experience with ruralism, but the music appealed to their desires for simpler times and presumably a more wholesome past.[47] Like Peterson, Malone's interpretation of country music is that many view it as working class and authentic, even though it also contains elements of middle-class values and performances.

Barbara Ching's "Acting Naturally" agrees that fans generally saw country music as working class but adds that they also viewed it as lowbrow, meaning that many saw the music and performers as uneducated and crude. Country's association with the unrefined masses contributed to its image as the authentic music of the working class. However, Ching goes on to claim that country was neither uncultured nor simple; it was instead filled with complicated contradictions. It was the "music chosen by the unsophisticated," but at the same time the "music itself expressed this group's lack of sophistication—a quality that in its terms was decidedly contemporary and urban." Moreover, on occasion members of the upper and middle

47. Bill C. Malone, *Don't Get above Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), vii, viii, 22–23, 28, 54, 59–60, 89, 123, 183.

classes produced, marketed, and performed country music.[48] For Ching, class in country music served as a cultural or social construction that mirrored the values of its fans. The audience desired music that appeared to be an authentic creation of the working class, hence country's class-based image.

Country Music Culture: From Hard Times to Heaven by Curtis Ellison takes a different yet somewhat similar perspective. Instead of focusing exclusively on the images, foundations, and created traditions that made country popular, Ellison also looks at the culture that accepted the music and the social functions that the music served. He discusses authenticity, but his analysis concentrates on performers' attempts to appear authentic through expressions of experience with hard times and the everyday occurrences of working-class southern families. Since fans viewed singers as cultural agents of country music, they also assumed performers had seen hard times, encounters they expected to find expressed in their music. Ellison then adds another concept: comic relief. Ellison claims that amusing descriptions of southern or western rural life usually followed hard times. This made the music seem more personal and added legitimacy to the message. It also showed that hardships could be transcended, or that hard times could lead to heaven. Moreover, it undercut other, more critical messages about class or class conflict.[49] In this dissertation, the success of Dolly Parton or the Judds in the 1980s provide relevant examples of Ellison's viewpoints through their frequent references to their "country" backgrounds and working-class origins. However, as I discuss, women also had to couple hard

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48. Barbara Ching, "Acting Naturally: Cultural Distinction and Critiques of Pure Country," in *White Trash: Race and Class in America*, ed. Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 237–38. Ching's analysis draws heavily on George Lipsitz's ideas of memory and dialogue. Middle- and upper-class performers engage in dialogues with working-class audiences, and what links the two are their constructions of a class-based past. Lipsitz, *Time Passages*, 113.

49. Curtis Ellison, *Country Music Culture: From Hard Times to Heaven* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1995), 100–112.

times with success, not necessarily comedy. For example, fans accepted women who discussed their rural working-class backgrounds, but only if they ended songs with success stories, the American Dream. Many fans saw complaining, or overt discussions of subjugation, as unwomanly, a view that could lead to alienation.

If class, gender, and race were all social constructions in country music, then region was as well. As I discuss in subsequent chapters, the image of the South in female country music changed throughout the 1980s. In some cases women presented the South as the Sunbelt, in others Appalachia, and in the latter part of the decade the country music South became synonymous with ruralism. In spite of these differences, country music contained two consistent regional themes throughout the decade: the South was a distinct region, and it was defined in cultural terms. Moreover, most country performers linked southern distinctiveness to southern culture, meaning that in country music, southern culture made the South different from other regions.

The historiographical debate over southern distinctiveness is lengthy and complex. It includes some like John Shelton Reed, who claim the South does possess distinguishing qualities; and others like John Egerton or Peter Applebome, who theorize that the South has become part of the nation and therefore has lost its distinctiveness.[50] In country music, however, the issue of actual southern distinctiveness is irrelevant. Country music portrays the South as a unique region and also depicts southerners as people who self-identify with the South. For those

[50]. Egerton writes that there was a "process of homogenization" throughout the country and that the South, instead of retaining its distinctiveness, followed national trends. He concedes that the South was once "the most distinctive region of the country," but that as it gained political and cultural influence, it lost its unique qualities. Applebome takes a similar stance. As southern music and other southern qualities (religious fundamentalism, conservatism, traditional values) spread beyond the South in the 1970s, and as Americans moved South for jobs and southerners moved to different regions, southernness became synonymous with American. For Applebome, it is now difficult to determine the line between southernness and Americanism. For more information, see John Egerton, *The Americanization of Dixie*: *The Southernization of America* (New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1974), and Peter Applebome, *Dixie Rising: How the South is Shaping American Values, Politics, and Culture* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1996), 4–14, 26.

reasons, this dissertation draws exclusively from writings that discuss southern distinctiveness and the cultural aspects of southern identity.

Bill Malone's *Singing Cowboys and Musical Mountaineers* is one of the few works on country music that explicitly discusses the cultural aspects of southern identity in country music. Malone writes that early fans of country music helped shape the final product through their desires and demands for music that represented a mythical past. Working-class southern audiences wanted music that depicted the South as free, simple, romantic, nostalgic, and rural. When country music spread beyond the South, national audiences shared that desire as well. Fans from other regions did not want a South or southern music that reflected the realities of sharecropping and Jim Crow, but rather one that showed working-class and hometown values, ideas perceived to be lost in urban landscapes. In addition, they demanded that country music neglect its multicultural origins and situate its past within white, rural, traditions.[51] In Malone's analysis, fans perceived the South in terms of myths and culture, not in terms of historical or current realities. In this way, country music performers defined the South as cultural, as opposed to geographical or actual.

Melton McLaurin takes an approach similar to Malone's. McLaurin sees a common cultural heritage as the basis for southern identity. He also maintains that when southerners became exposed to the rest of the nation, especially after World War II, it heightened their sense of being southern. Others viewed displaced southerners as different, and therefore saw themselves as distinct as well. Moreover, Americans viewed the South as a region with separate cultures and traditions, and southerners internalized their beliefs. Country music reflected these

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51. Bill C. Malone, *Singing Cowboys and Musical Mountaineers: Southern Culture and the Roots of Country Music* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 88–91.

views of the South.[52] For McLaurin, southern culture, and the idea that southern culture was separate, was the key to country's portrayal of southern distinctiveness.

Stephen Smith's *Myth, Media, and the Southern Mind* agrees that the country music South was both distinct and cultural. For Smith, however, country music's lyrics, not simply performance, provided "support for the rhetorical vision of Southern distinctiveness." Smith claims that almost 75 percent of the places mentioned in country music were in the South, and that songs portrayed the places themselves and their culture as superior to other areas, mainly the North.[53] Again, in spite of the realities of southern life or the South's history, country music presented the region as culturally separate.

There are those who argue that the country music South is not distinct, and rather claim that country music depicts national, as opposed to southern, values. They do not consider that southerners and others self-identify with the South and instead focus on the South as truly a distinctive region. For example, James Cobb's "From Muskogee to Luckenbach" presents the South as the most "American" region in the country, meaning it became the personification of basic American traits. Country music contained themes of racism, intolerance, and rigid traditions, topics that reflected national, not southern, qualities.[54] While Cobb is probably correct in identifying the national character of country music themes, it is also true that many among country audiences perceived the South as distinct, and therefore they saw country's

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[52]. Melton McLaurin, "Songs of the South: The Changing Image of the South in Country Music," in *You Wrote My Life: Lyrical Themes in Country Music,* ed. Melton A. McLaurin and Richard A. Peterson (Philadelphia: Gordon and Breach, 1992), 31.

53. Stephen A. Smith, *Myth, Media, and the Southern Mind* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1985), 104, 118.

54. James A. Cobb, "From Muskogee to Luckenbach: Country Music and the 'Southernization' of America," *Journal of Popular Culture* 16, no. 3 (Winter 1982): 90.

themes as uniquely southern. In country music it was the belief, rather than the reality, that was most significant to performers and fans.

In this respect, John Shelton Reed's views of southern distinctiveness and its cultural aspects are particularly relevant to my analysis. In *The Enduring South* he discovers, through opinion surveys, that differences exist between southerners and non-southerners, that southerners do possess different sets of beliefs.[55] In *The South for New Southerners* Reed argues that the South is an idea that exists in southerners' imaginations. Southerners see themselves as distinct, a view exemplified by businesses that use the word "Dixie" in their titles and in other signifiers.[56] This dissertation utilizes Reed's insights into the cultural construction of the South and examines the creation of that cultural construct in country music.

In addition to the aforementioned sources, this dissertation also draws heavily from Reed's *My Tears Spoiled My Aim*. Here Reed asks, "Where is the South?" and then determines that the question is pointless. The relevant issue is that southerners are tied together through culture, not place. To explain his thesis, he discusses southern views of the South, southern traditions and cultural activities, and southern racism. He concludes once again that southerners see themselves as distinct and that their distinctiveness is tied to culture, not to the past or to geography.[57]

For John C. Boles, the South is also a region that most Americans recognize as distinct. *Dateline Dixie* discusses the debates over the beginnings of southern distinctiveness (the

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[55]. John Shelton Reed, *The Enduring South: Subcultural Persistence in Mass Society* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975).

[56]. John Shelton Reed, "The South: What Is It? Where Is It?" in *The South for New Southerners*, ed. Paul D. Escott and David R. Goldfield (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 39.

57. John Shelton Reed, *My Tears Spoiled My Aim: And Other Reflections on Southern Culture* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1993).

Revolutionary period, the increases in slavery, or the Civil War) and when, or if, that distinctiveness ended. He also discusses the problem of defining the South. Geographical explanations fall short, as do climactic and rural constructions. He also examines southern culture, history, ruralism, religion, economy, and patriotism. His conclusion, which this dissertation uses, is that self-identification as southern is the heart of southernness.[58]

Boles expands his argument in *The South through Time* to consider the causes of southern distinctiveness. In the past, Boles claims, many attributed the South's unique qualities to a large population of African Americans and to southern racism, but the increasing political significance of the region's African Americans challenged the view that the South remained separate. He then examines ruralness, a factor that did contribute to southern distinctiveness pre-1960, but that diminished as the region became more urban. He also looks at the region's early lack of immigrants but concludes that since immigration increased after World War II, this is no longer a factor in southern distinctiveness. In the end, Boles once again concluded that "perhaps it is in the realm of mind and culture that we must today look for the essence of southerness." He adds that southerners see themselves as unique and that the "better educated, more urban, more widely traveled, and more affluent they were, the more different southerners seemed to be from their fellow Americans in term of attitudes."[59] This factor shows that not only working, or rural, southerners identified southern distinctiveness, but others did as well.

Organization

58. John B. Boles, ed., *Dateline Dixie: A Journalistic Portrait of the Contemporary South* (Houston, TX: Rice University Studies, 1983), 1–15.

59. John B. Boles, *The South through Time: A History of an American Region*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998), 583–88.

This dissertation is organized chronologically and divided into three main chapters, each representing a distinct era for female country music during the 1980s. The first chapter focuses on 1980 to 1983, the years when female country musicians adopted glamorous styles and became concerned with crossover success. Chapter Two concentrates on approximately 1983 to 1986, a transitional period when women in country music received exposure through television and film but, in turn, opened themselves up to criticism for their perceived abandonment of "traditional" country dress, sound, and performance. From 1987 to 1989, the focus of Chapter Three, female country stars made dramatic returns to "country" and "tradition" in both their appearances and music. Each chapter discusses women's performances and representations; the uses of gender, race, class, and region; and the relationship between these issues and larger historical events and themes. The Conclusion will explain the dramatic decline in popularity of female country musicians in 1990, how male performers replaced them, and the new developments for women in the 1990s and early twenty-first century.

Chapter One begins with 1980, when women's popularity soared. This was the year of *Urban Cowboy*, a film whose bull-riding, line-dancing, and fiddle-laden soundtrack popularized country music and thereby helped open the door for women performers. Dolly Parton had her own success in film as a star in *9 to 5* and also with her song of the same title. Barbara Mandrell's television variety show consistently won high ratings and helped land her a three-year position co-hosting the CMA's awards show. She also won the CMA's coveted Entertainer of the Year Award two years in a row, a feat never accomplished by a female artist. Both Mandrell and Parton achieved popularity before 1980, but they, and others, now used noticeably different images to win legitimacy and fans. They abandoned images associated with the Outlaws or coal miner's daughters and instead adopted sensational and refined appearances. On

film, television, and in performances women became show queens, crossover stars, "countrypolitan." Instead of blue jeans, boots, and down-home charm, country performers donned cocktail dresses and region-neutral accents. They presented themselves as domestic, sexualized, and passive female stars who accepted the status quo. Women also emphasized their whiteness through controlled uses of their bodies and distinguished themselves from newly popular R & B artists. Instead of working-class icons, women in country music adopted images of middle-class singers seeking crossover success. They still spoke of the South but now portrayed it as the Sunbelt, not the rural and isolated place of times past. These changes existed in all aspects of female country music: in dress, behavior, concerts, publications, and the songs themselves. The goal was a persona that appealed to the traditional white, southern, working-class audience, but also one that attracted middle-class fans from across the country. Rising record sales and crossover success reflected the popularity of these new images. Between 1980 and 1983, glam replaced ruralism and led to positive responses from music critics and fans alike.[60]

These developments coincided with larger historical themes and also with changes in American concepts of gender, race, class, and region. Country music's rise in popularity in the early 1980s mirrored the rise of conservatism and the spread of southern culture and values.[61] In terms of gender and race, the heightening backlash against feminism and the civil rights movement impacted women in country music and American women in general. They became

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[60]. Dellar, Cackett, and Thompson, *Harmony Illustrated Encyclopedia of Country Music*, 9, 100, 103, 115, 129, 176; In April 1980 women occupied numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, and 11 on the country music chart. Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 388; Country Music Foundation, *Country: The Music and the Musicians, From the Beginnings to the '90s* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1994), 361.

61. George H. Lewis, "Duellin' Values: Tension, Conflict, and Contradiction in Country Music," *Journal of Popular Culture* 24, no. 4 (Spring 1991): 110.

professionally successful but sexualized, powerful but concurrently submissive, and bound firmly within the gendered norms of conservatism. Moreover, female performers associated themselves with the concept of the white southern lady as opposed to the previous archetype, the farm wife. The lady was a gendered, raced, and classed image that was powerful but simultaneously nonthreatening, an image accepted in American society. In the early 1980s, women could be sexual and successful, but only if their power was contained. Moreover, the early 1980s witnessed a celebration of middle- and upper-class America, a trend reflected in female country music. This period also saw the ascent of the Sunbelt and popularity of the "new" South, a region with a modern image mixed with conservative ideology. It, like women in country music, promoted a more glamorous and less rural look. Furthermore, as part of its move away from the shame of segregation, the South in country music emerged with an almost completely white image. In popular culture and country music, depictions of the South focused on whiteness or omitted minorities completely and therefore avoided overt racism.[62]

From 1983 to 1986, the focus of Chapter Two, female country music and the images women used entered into a period of transition. A large part of this stemmed from dramatic increases in exposure. The Nashville Network (TNN) and Country Music Television (CMT), which both debuted in 1983, gave millions of viewers visual access to country's stars.[63] However, this new exposure did not necessarily translate into success for women in country music. By 1985 the upward trend was over; record sales plummeted, and labels dropped

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62. Eric Stein, "Living Right and Being Free: Country Music and Modern American Conservatism" (master's thesis, McGill University, 1998), 88–89.

63. As Chapter Two will discuss, TNN debuted with the largest audience of any cable network up to that point, and CMT was so successful that within one month it was showing 120–130 videos per week and had twelve major advertisers and seven million viewers, Country Music Foundation, *Country Music Television Programming, 1948–1987: A Preliminary Survey* (unpublished source, prepared for Group W. Communications, Country Music Hall of Fame Archives, 1987), 54.

established stars. The new media formats broadcasted women in country music and their glamorous images into millions of homes, but many viewers felt betrayed and abandoned by the trends of the early 1980s and wanted a return to "tradition." Some fans still appreciated the "pop-country" of the early 1980s, but many looked for newer styles. In searching for new personas, country music women tried on a variety of hats, which allowed a few nontraditional faces to appear (kd lang, for example); but at the end of the period, "new" was out and "old" was in.[64] Performers like Reba McEntire and the Judds made dramatic moves towards more traditionally female images, with performances and behaviors that became increasingly passive, family-orientated, and domestic. They also continued to distance themselves from racial minorities through their bodily control and silence; however, some took this further and subtly criticized and criminalized blackness. Women began moving away from middle-class images and instead started to glamorize the working classes. The South in female country music became traditional as well, and its image shifted from the Sunbelt to Appalachia and the West.

The public's demands for traditional personas for women in country music existed alongside increasing political, economic, and social conservatism. As in country music, American conservatism had enjoyed a few good years of national popularity; President Reagan's successful 1984 presidential election served as a testament of the Right's dominance. Mid-1980s conservatism included ideas about women, race, class, and gender; female country music mirrored these concepts. Conservatism, which included religious fundamentalism, endorsed more traditional constructions for American women, namely that women should act as homemakers and mothers instead of independent breadwinners. Society demonized women who defied these norms, Geraldine Ferraro for example, and extended this criticism to female rebels

64. Country Music Foundation, *Country: The Music and the Musicians*, 361–63, 373.

in country music. The Right also domestically and internationally attacked racial minorities, thereby creating an environment in which women in country music could do the same. As more and more Americans economically suffered under Reaganomics, the country, and female country music, started to romanticize the working classes. Moreover, conservatism, its emphasis on tradition, and the political significance of the South all contributed to more conventional depictions of the region.[65]

In general, this period led to some reorganization for women in country music, but the trends increasingly moved toward conservatism and tradition. Women in the early 1980s gained a great deal of power, and this, according to conservative politics, was a component of society's decline. The American public criticized too much female power, and radical feminism seemed to retreat. These women, however, resisted and fought to keep their fame. Like conservatism, they experienced a few setbacks but entered the late 1980s with new images and strategies.

From 1987 to 1989, the focus of Chapter Three, female country musicians explicitly returned to tradition. Tradition in this time period entailed associations with family, the working classes, conservatism, religion, purity, whiteness, and home. Fans perceived these moves as "natural," authentic, and, with the help of younger, hip artists like Emmylou Harris, once again "cool." TNN and CMT were still widely popular and now included hours of country music videos. By 1987 videos became essential for any country artist; therefore, image became increasingly important. Newer performers like the Judds, Kathy Mattea, and KT Oslin presented rural and "country" images in videos and excelled. Women retooled their wardrobes and this time evening gowns were out and gingham was in. High heels and over-styled hair gave way to

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65. Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001), 219, 221; Haynes Johnson, *Sleepwalking through History: America in the Reagan Years* (New York: Norton, 2003), 208–10.

cowboy boots and hats. In music, artists focused more on fiddles, banjoes, and bluegrass and less on crossover success. In their images, women performers claimed to be of the working class and also singing for this group. The South in female country music performance was again country and rural, but now supplemented by aggressive, even antagonistic, pride. In terms of race, female performers presented whiteness, especially in regard to women, as pure and in need of protection. As in earlier time periods, women became the keepers of these new traditions, but they also needed to be controlled. Stronger focuses on motherhood, marriage, and girl-next-door images replaced sex and glam.[66]

As in previous time periods, historical developments influenced changes in female country music. As performers became more traditional and conservative, so did ideas towards American women. As the backlash against feminism and the women's movement increased, society criticized working women for abandoning their families and "womanly duties." Moreover, popular culture and the American public blamed many of society's ills on women, especially those who worked or did not marry. In terms of race, African Americans succeeded in popular culture and made political gains but still experienced inequality. Conservatives and women in country music, since they could not ignore race, concealed racism, accepted blacks in popular culture, and used their successes to claim that the problem of racism had subsided. As the economic gap between the rich and poor widened, conservatives and women in country music continued their celebrations of the working class and also began depicting these men and women as more American than other socioeconomic groups. Finally, female country music

[66]. Peterson, "Dialectic of Hard-Core and Soft-Shell Country Music," 295, 297; Malone, *Country Music, USA*, 414.

reflected a new construction of the South, which by the late 1980s had emerged as a region filled with defiant pride and aggression.[67]

By the early 1990s the traditional sounds and images of country music had become so clearly ascendant that they were virtually cliché. Record labels once again started looking for newer styles, but women did not factor into the image changes. Instead, country witnessed the emergence of "hunks" in big hats, a masculine revival, and a decline in the popularity of women performers. Megastars like Garth Brooks used dramatic stage shows and energetic performances, both of which were seen as improper for women, and therefore easily pushed aside demure and homely female stars.[68] Once again, women would have to search for styles and images to accommodate the new environment. Some, however, would not find spaces for themselves. As a final insult to all, in 1990, after years of struggling against conservative and gender-restrictive norms, kd lang, one of the few successful female country music rebels, left country music. Her departure, along with the spectacular popularity of country's men, signaled the end of women's 1980s prosperity.[69]

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67. Faludi, *Backlash*, 15–16, 59–60; Johnson, *Sleepwalking*, 394–401, 412–18, 419–23, 421–30.

68. Peterson, "Dialectic of Hard-Core and Soft-Shell Country Music," 295, 297.

69. Victoria Starr, *k.d. lang*: *All You Get Is Me* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 135.

CHAPTER ONE

WHEN COUNTRY WAS "COOL," 1980-1983

Urban Cowboy and its popularization of the two-step, bull riding, and rustic yet uptown fashion began the ascent of country music into mainstream American consciousness. While the genre had been gaining popularity and acceptance throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the early 1980s witnessed a dramatic increase in record sales and visibility of country artists.[1] Female performers benefited from this trend as well and in many cases rose to higher levels of fame and recognition than ever before in recorded country music history. However, women in country music used dramatically different strategies in the early 1980s to attract fans. Female performers discarded the socially constructed images of the girl next door, the cowboy's sweetheart, and the rural, loyal housewife, and substituted sensational and striking personas. These women became show queens, crossover stars, "countrypolitan." They distanced themselves from the coal miner's daughters of the 1970s and became glamorous and sophisticated. To attract an audience with traditional and newfound country fans, they used changing images of gender, race, class, and the South in their music and performances. These transformations coincided with new trends in the political and social arenas, namely the conservative political shift, the elevation of mid- to upper-class norms in both country music and popular culture, and the new climate for women and the feminist movement. Specifically, female country music mirrored America's emerging political, economic, and social atmosphere, and in doing so exhibited new and uncharacteristic performances.[2] These newer representations would continue until 1983, when

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[1]. Mary A. Bufwack and Robert K. Oermann, *Finding Her Voice: The Saga of Women in Country Music* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1993), 388; Country Music Foundation, *Country: The Music and the Musicians, From the Beginnings to the '90s* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1994), 361.

[2]. Eric Stein, "Living Right and Being Free: Country Music and Modern American Conservatism" (master's thesis, McGill University, Montreal, 1998), 77.

Country Music Television and The Nashville Network would again change the face of country music.

Female country music performers began the 1980s with new popularity and style. Barbara Mandrell received the Country Music Association's Entertainer of the Year Award, the *Coal Miner's Daughter Motion Picture Soundtrack* won for album of the year, and Sissy Spacek earned an Academy Award for her portrayal of Loretta Lynn. Dolly Parton entered into an acting career with the release of *9 to 5*, and her single for the film topped the country and pop music charts. Deborah Allen, Loretta Lynn, Reba McEntire, Anne Murray, and Tanya Tucker had musical success as well; in fact, in mid-1980, women dominated *Billboard*'s country music Top Ten chart. Furthermore, country inspired films such as *Urban Cowboy*, which began an era of line dancing and country fashion, benefited all country music performers.[3] Even television promoted the music with shows like *Barbara Mandrell and the Mandrell Sisters*, *Hee Haw*, and made-for-TV movies such as *The Gambler* and *Georgia Peaches*. By 1981 country became America's second best selling music, trailing only rock.[4]

Gender

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3. Fred Dellar, Alan Cackett, and Roy Thompson, *The Harmony Illustrated Encyclopedia of Country Music* (New York: Harmony Books, 1986), 9, 100, 103, 115, 129, 176. In April 1980 women occupied numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, and 11 on the country music chart. Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 388; Country Music Foundation, *Country: The Music and the Musicians*, 361.

4. *Country Music Television Programming, 1948–1987: A Preliminary Survey* (unpublished source, prepared for Group W. Communications), Country Music Hall of Fame Archives, 1987; Sam Lovullo and Marc Eliot, *Life In the Kornfield: My 25 Years at* Hee Haw (New York: Boulevard Books, 1996), 41; Tanya Tucker with Patsi Bale Cox, *Nickel Dreams: My Life* (New York: Hyperion, 1997), 167. *The Gambler*, starring Kenny Rogers, was the highest-rated TV movie of 1980. Stein, "Living Right and Being Free," 77; Country Music Foundation, *Country: The Music and the Musicians*, 362.

In order to achieve this success, during the early 1980s most females in country music attempted to conform to the latest stereotypes about white, southern women. Throughout its history the country music industry imposed restrictions on acceptable behaviors for women performers, ideals that constantly changed in response to the social or political conventions of the time. When concepts of southern womanhood changed, however, performers displayed the differences as natural and linked to tradition and country music's heritage, in spite of the fact that any change insinuated a lack of tradition. In the early 1980s, soft-spoken, feminine, Crystal Gayle exemplified the dramatic transformations in women's roles. Gayle appeared fashionable, chic, and graceful; her songs more pop than country; her presence more middle class; her accent nonexistent. In her 1980 CBS special she wore evening gowns and performed with pop icons Dionne Warwick and Eddie Rabbitt, moves that exemplified country's new look. In contrast, her older sister Loretta Lynn had previously risen to fame with controversial songs like "The Pill" (1975), glamorized her poor and rural background, and spoke and sang with a deep drawl. Lynn's success occurred during country music's "harder" phase, a period in the 1970s that focused on fiddles, banjoes, explicit southernness, and presumably more "country" country music. Over time the term "hard" came to symbolize authenticity and included "true" country stars like Bill Monroe, Hank Williams, George Jones, Merle Haggard, and women like Loretta Lynn. "Soft" country, on the other hand, described artists who sought crossover success with more pop than country music. Lynn adhered to hard standards, and her rustic, uncultured, and aggressive persona won her fans and the support of Music Row, the center of Nashville's entertainment industry.[5] In contrast, Gayle's ascent to stardom took place mainly in the early

[5]. Museum of Television and Radio (MTR), Crystal Gayle Special, November 26, 1980; Gayle was born Brenda Gail Webb, the last of eight children. Dellar, Cackett, and Thompson, *Harmony Illustrated Encyclopedia*, 63; Other controversial Lynn songs include "Rated X," "I Wanna be Free," "One's On the Way," and "Hey Loretta." Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 311.

1980s; she could not rely on her sister's methods and instead opted for a soft persona. Celebrations of rural poverty and assertiveness gave way to glitz and glamour; southern womanhood became reformed and modernized. The differences in these two women, in spite of their relationship and similar backgrounds, became symbolic of the gendered transformation that occurred in the early 1980s.

Individual performers also exhibited the shift toward softer, more feminine images. In the 1970s Parton used hard-core techniques to win an audience, most notably with her autobiographical celebration of rural poverty "Coat of Many Colors" (1971). This song, along with others like "My Tennessee Mountain Home" (1973), contained signifiers that placed Parton within a vein of country music that relied on working-class backgrounds, strong family ties, and triumphs over adversity for its legitimacy. She discussed her childhood home, poverty, hand-me-down clothing, front porches, June bugs, and honeysuckle vines, all symbols that reminded her audience that she was country, and one of them. To accompany her music, Parton created a look that exuded, among other things, ruralism and southernness. Her country-and-western shirts, jeans, and boots became hallmarks of her persona. By the 1980s, however, Parton changed her tune and released softer songs and performed Vegas-style concerts. Her number one hits "Old Flames Can't Hold a Candle to You" (1980) and "I Will Always Love You" (1982) had no country signifiers and instead discussed more pop-oriented topics. Her single "9 to 5" (1980), the title song from Parton's film debut, earned her Grammy Awards for Best Country Vocal Performance by a Female and Best Country Song and simultaneously hit number one on both the pop and adult contemporary charts for two weeks each. The song was also nominated for Song of the Year at the Grammy Awards; for Achievement in Music Original Song at the

Academy Awards; and for Best Song at the Golden Globes. Moreover, the film soundtrack was nominated for Best Album of Original Score Written for a Motion Picture or Television Special.[6] In spite of this success, "9 to 5" was no country song, especially when compared to Parton's earlier work. "9 to 5" had pop background music, no southern signifiers, and no references to country topics. Parton's transformation from the embodiment of hard-core country in the 1970s to a "countrypolitan" star in the early 1980s exemplified the move toward more femininity and softness in female country music. Although Parton addressed women's work in "9 to 5" and in doing so expressed a certain characteristically hard country brand of femininity, the song offered no serious critique of women's continued economic exploitation, and its pop sound made her points seem playful, placing the single soundly within the bounds of eighties softer pop country.

Pre-1980, both Loretta Lynn and Dolly Parton personified the image of the southern farmwife, a long-suffering, working-class archetype who radiated strength and pride. This representation contrasted with, and helped dispel, the "white trash" image commonly associated with working-class ruralism. Whereas society and pop culture generally characterized white trash women as sexually promiscuous, uneducated, lazy, and overly fertile, it portrayed farmwives as married women devoted to their husbands, children, and homes. In the 1970s, Lynn and Parton both used the farmwife image to link themselves to country and working-class traditions, to distance themselves from pop music, and to present the strength needed to be successful without a male partner. To be convincing, they reflected the image in their physical appearances and also in their autobiographical lyrics. Parton and Lynn sang about the rural

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6. Dolly Parton, "Coat of Many Colors," *Coat of Many Colors,* RCA Victor, 1971; Dolly Parton, "My Tennessee Mountain Home," *My Tennessee Mountain Home,* RCA Victor, 1973; Dolly Parton, "9 to 5," *9 to 5 and Odd Jobs,* RCA, 1980; Dolly Parton, "I Will Always Love You," *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas Soundtrack*, MCA, 1982; Dolly Parton, "Old Flames Can't Hold a Candle to You," *Dolly, Dolly, Dolly!* RCA, 1980; Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice,* 370.

South, their own childhoods, and their devotion to their roots, all strategies designed to present the farmwife image. These traits allowed both women to have power while simultaneously reminding their audiences that they were still women.[7]

By 1980 the southern lady stereotype replaced the farmwife image. According to Wilbur J. Cash, the southern lady served as the "South's Palladium … a shield bearing Athena gleaming whitely through the clouds." Compared to the farmwife, the lady was upper class, more feminine, less maternal, and less open about her personal experiences. She spoke in generalities, was educated, and appealed to all. Performers used both the farmwife and lady images to court a certain audience, the farmwife for the working class and the southern lady to more middle-class listeners.[8] Moreover, the farmwife image was working class and allowed the women an escape from the confines of femininity, whereas the southern lady was the epitome of refined, restrained womanhood. Women in post-1980 country music adopted characteristics associated with the southern lady and moved away from the freedoms of the farmwife, instead opting for femininity and all of its accompanying restraints.

For women in country music, femininity included not only ladylike, genteel performances, but also nurturing and maternal elements. At Fan Fair, a yearly event that brought

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[7]. Ruth Banes, "Dixie's Daughters: The Country Music Female," in McLaurin and Peterson, *You Wrote My Life*, 81–84, 90–96. Country music women in the early 1980s were also trying to distance themselves from terms like "hillbilly" and "redneck," labels that women in the 1970s, Loretta Lynn for example, respected. Both "hillbilly" and "redneck" have had long histories themselves and historically have been used both positively and negatively. The words have meant noble Appalachian residents, southern populists, communists, and "white trash," and have also been badges of honor for "true" southerners. Like the farmwife and lady stereotypes, the acceptance or opposition to the terms reflect the social or political conventions of the period. For more information on the terms "hillbilly" and "redneck," see Patrick Huber and Kathleen Drowne, "*Hill Billy*: The Earliest Known African American Usages," *American Speech* 83, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 214–21; Patrick Huber and Kathleen Drowne, "*Redneck*: A New Discovery," *American Speech* 76, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 434–37; Patrick Huber, "*Redneck*: A Short Note from American Labor History," *American Speech* 69 (1994): 106–10; and Patrick Huber, "A Short History of Redneck: The Fashioning of a Southern Masculine Identity," *Southern Cultures* 1 (1995): 145–66.

[8]. Wilbur J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1941; New York, Vintage Books, 1991), 86; Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedastal to Politics, 1830–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 4; Banes, "Dixie's Daughters," 81–84, 90–96.

fans and performers in close contact with each other, many female country stars held breakfasts or other "womanly" functions where they met with fans. "Breakfast with Barbara," an event where enthusiasts could purchase tickets to witness Mandrell cooking and then dine with her and her family, became the most popular of these affairs. Mandrell wore aprons, served up home cooking with her husband and children in supporting roles, and thrilled fans. She also distributed bumper stickers that claimed "Barbara Mandrell ♥s me," as opposed to "I love Barbara Mandrell," a strategy to show her emotions and compassion. To reinforce this belief, she wrote a personal letter for almost every issue of her International Fan Club newsletter, most of them containing information about her triumphs and hardships and occasional pleas for assistance. The phrase "it would really help me" appeared frequently in these letters, and she used it to encourage album sales, letters to television executives, and participation in her charity work. These gendered activities had class implications as well. They represented white, mid- to upper-class beliefs about domestic ideals and how women should conduct themselves, but the standards also trickled down to other classes and influenced their behaviors.[9] Country music women like Mandrell, who traditionally constructed images that implied working-class origins, now apparently had moved up the social ladder and adopted more upper-class notions of femininity. They replaced the hard-core days of Parton and Lynn with softer, more feminine expressions of domestic southern womanhood.

Mandrell's more feminine persona, and Parton and Lynn's hard-core images, represented the farmwife/lady divide, but they also exemplified a contrast that has long existed in country music: the Madonna/whore dichotomy. Like Mandrell's cooking and nurturing displays, this

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9. Country Music Hall of Fame (CMHOF), Barbara Mandrell Folder, Barbara Mandrell International Fan Club, February 1982; CMHOF, Kathleen Betters Collection, Fan Club Related Materials, 97.25, Box 1 of 2; CMHOF, Barbara Mandrell Folder, Fan Club. The newsletter was published six times each year.

dichotomy contained elements of both gender and class.[10] Pre-1980 Parton and Lynn, based on their associations with the working class, risked the possibility of being labeled "whores." They both were married and apparently faithful; however, they also spoke openly of sex, sexual problems, and sexual politics. Mandrell, on the other hand, chose to focus on her family, her femininity, and devotion to her husband. Moreover, her domestic ties extended beyond her nuclear family. Her television show, *Barbara Mandrell and the Mandrell Sisters,* contributed to much of her fame. This series, which Mandrell designed as a down-home, family sing-along, focused on her sisters and other family members. By spotlighting domesticity, Mandrell and others rendered their sexuality invisible. The lack of sexual content encouraged viewers to associate her with the virgin, or Madonna, image: an upper-class, feminine, and controlled version of southern womanhood. Likewise, these depictions coincided with national views of women in the South. As the South moved away from civil rights violence and poverty and towards national prominence, the image of southern womanhood moved from white trash to southern ladies.[11] In this sense, performers used more socially acceptable images for women in country music. Instead of gaining agency through sexual freedom, they chose to focus on power derived from domestic and family ties.

Other women displayed their femininity in songs that emphasized their duties to give men stable homes. A country music woman traditionally protected her man from himself and his

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[10]. John Lynxwiler and Michele Wilson, "The Code of the New Southern Belle: Generating Typifications to Structure Social Interaction," in *Southern Women,* ed. Caroline Matheny Dillman (New York: Hemisphere Publishing Company, 1988), 83; Barbara A. Sims, "'She's Got to Be A Saint, Lord Knows I Ain't': Feminine Masochism in American Country Music," *Journal of Country* Music 5, no. 1 (Spring 1974): 28–29.

[11]. Lynxwiler and Wilson, "Code of the New Southern Belle," 83.

sinful ways. To do this she prevented him from "ramblin'," a decidedly country activity.[12] Janie Fricke's "It Ain't Easy Being Easy" (1982), for example, pleaded for a man to "sit down for a while … and maybe even smile" instead of leaving again. To encourage this behavior she agreed to "be easy," "surrender," and even risk heartbreak if he did choose to ramble. In the 1970s, as women gained more freedom through the women's rights movement, songs showed more criticism of interpersonal relationships. Male reactions expressed in country music suggested that women had become free but simultaneously unrestrained and their songs associated this with female childishness and immaturity.[13] Instead of launching a counterattack, performers in the 1980s retreated back into the "stand-by-your-man" stance. They used their domestic skills to support, shield, and protect their men, even when the men needed protection from themselves.

Many women went to great lengths to maintain the stereotypical southern female trait of passivity.[14] For example, in 1980 Dolly Parton, Jane Fonda, and Lily Tomlin appeared on the *Donahue Show* to promote their upcoming film *9 to 5*. Fonda and Tomlin described the film as an overtly feminist statement about the treatment of working-class women. Fonda then talked about "the man's" power to divide and conquer, how patriarchy separated women based on race and class, and referred to herself as a feminist. When Donahue asked Parton her opinion, she

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[12]. George Lewis, "Mapping the Fault Lines: The Core Values Trap in Country Music," *Popular Music and Society* 9, no. 4 (1984): 14.

[13]. Janie Fricke, "It Ain't Easy," *It Ain't Easy,* Columbia, 1982; George Lewis, "Interpersonal Relations and Sex Role Conflict in Modern American Country Music," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 20 (1989): 236.

14. As women gained more freedom during the 1970s, songs and other forms of popular culture contained criticisms of gender dynamics. However, in response (or in backlash), women started being blamed for leaving their places, the man was seen as righteous and unfortunate for trying to take on her duties, the woman as the source for all trouble. Especially true in the 1980s, the solution was to return to passivity and other more traditional roles. Lewis, "Interpersonal Relations and Sex Role Conflict," 236.

claimed she saw the film as a comedy, nothing more, and insinuated that she knew less than the other guests. She then told the audience about her own secretarial jobs (a reference to her working-class origins) and that her experiences in them had been positive. When audience members questioned the professionalism of Parton's attire and insinuated that she could be a "women's libber," she became uncomfortable and seemed unsure of how to respond. She appeared worried that she might be labeled a feminist and tried to distance herself from Tomlin and Fonda. In other interview or performance venues, Parton usually appeared confident and overtly flirtatious; here she fidgeted, became soft-spoken, and seemed intimidated by the audience, her costars, and the host. During the 1970s women in country music could be somewhat feminist without putting their careers at risk. For example, Parton had a very public break with her singing and performance partner Porter Wagoner and emerged from the split a strong and outspoken solo artist. She recorded the song "Just Because I'm A Woman," an explicitly feminist statement about the double standards in place for males and females in terms of societal expectations. But Parton concealed her strong and blatant feminism in the early 1980s; at that point she portrayed feminism as playful. However, Parton's behavior did indicate a distinct version of feminism, a less explicit, less overt type than that of her costars'. She rejected the idea that the personal was political, and she did not identify with the women's movement; but she was a feminist. Her home-grown, covert feminism, however, existed only for herself. Fonda and Tomlin did correctly state that *9 to 5* demonstrated women's exploitation in the workplace and subsequent revenge and vindication; however, Parton's song and responses to interview questions downplayed these points, and in doing so made the film's politics seem like afterthoughts. Her actions embodied typical moves for country music female performers in the

early 1980s. Since many country fans viewed the women's movement and feminism as distant from working class women, she could have been afraid of alienating her traditional audience.[15]

After *9 to 5,* the three women reunited in "Lily: Sold Out" (1981), a comedy show in which Tomlin played numerous roles. One skit featured Fonda and Tomlin as insane, homeless women discussing extraterrestrials and other topics on a park bench. Parton eventually entered into a dialogue with the two women but never understood the conversation, and eventually told the woman to "go see the *National Enquirer*."[16] In previous interviews Tomlin and Fonda presented united views on *9 to 5* and on feminism, while Parton appeared to prefer the image of a simple, nonpolitical performer. The television special added to this division by insinuating that not only did Parton disagree with Tomlin and Fonda, but she did not understand their claims and considered them, and their views, as sensational and tabloid-worthy. This stance distanced Parton from her costars and also from her previous pre-1980 version of feminism that attacked patriarchy and its restraints.

Even depictions of country music women in other popular culture forms contained passivity. Sissy, the main female character in *Urban Cowboy* (1980), exhibited passivity; she devoted herself to her husband in spite of his immaturity, temper, and adultery, and at one point entered into a relationship with a felon who physically abused her. Her character was also almost exclusively sexual; she existed for the male gaze and seemed overly concerned with her attractiveness and her ability to satisfy men. More importantly, Sissy Spacek also displayed passivity as Loretta Lynn in *Coal Miner's Daughter* (1980). Spacek's portrayal of Lynn in the

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15. CMHOF, Dolly Parton, Jane Fonda, Lily Tomlin on *Donahue*, December 9, 1980, NBC, ¾ cassette; Fillingim, *Redneck Liberation*, 104–5; Dolly Parton, "Just Because I'm a Woman," *Just Because I'm a Woman*, Pickwick, 1968.

16. CMHOF, Folder, Dolly Parton Fan Club Information; MTR, Los Angeles, "Lily: Sold Out" Las Vegas Special.

film differed radically from the book on which it was based. The film depicted Lynn as a singer dependent on her husband, both for her rise to stardom and her continued success in the industry. The book, which Lynn coauthored, gave the performer much more agency. To its credit, the film did show Lynn's tough-talking style, but it did not illustrate her forcefulness in business or her personal life. In addition, the film eliminated Lynn's long collaboration with Conway Twitty, a possible attempt to separate her from all men other than her husband. It furthermore focused as much on her husband, Doolittle, as it did on her. Lynn became transformed from the spirited and aggressive subject of the 1976 book into a domestic and passive co-player in the 1980 film.[17]

Passivity in country music existed in earlier periods; however, the type displayed in the early 1980s had changed. Female lyrics expressed submission, nurturing, love, and forgiveness of male indiscretions, all of which showed women in conventional roles. In some cases this remained true immediately prior to 1980, but lyrics then had hints of feminism.[18] For example, Parton's "Just Because I'm a Woman" had discussed her place as a female but also challenged the double standard. Lynn had numerous songs that did the same. For example, "Rated X" (1973) spoke of the difficulties divorced women faced, and "The Pill" (1975) contrasted the promises men made before marriage with the reality of multiple childbirths and finally the freedom of birth control. Lynn's songs, and her success, in many ways mirrored the new climate for American women. The women's movement had improved women's lives and created spaces for women, and moderate and radical feminism both made women's issues more visible. However, in the early 1980s most feminist references disappeared from country music, and

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[17]. *Urban Cowboy,* dir. James Bridges, 134 min., Paramount, 2002, DVD; *Coal Miner's Daughter,* dir. Michael Apted, 125 min., Universal Pictures, 2003, DVD; Loretta Lynn and George Vecsey, *Coal Miner's Daughter* (New York: Sterling, 1976).

[18]. Karen Saucier Lundy, "Women and Country Music," in *America's Musical Pulse: Popular Music in Twentieth-Century Society,* ed. Kenneth J. Bindas (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992), 214–16.

songs that dealt with heartbreak, an overtly female and passive topic, replaced them. Anne Murray's "Blessed Are the Believers" (1981), for example, told of devastation after a lost love and Janie Fricke's "I'll Need Someone to Hold Me When I Cry" (1981) also described a woman left ruined after a breakup. Fricke sang,

Your bags are packed and waiting
By the door.
If you really want to go
Well, it's alright…

I'll need someone to tell me
That I'll get over you.
And I'll need a friend to lean on
When I'm felling blue.

In this example, tears and passive longing for lost men replaced allusions to feminism or independence.[19]

This newer passivity related to larger ideas on women and their places in the early 1980s. Women had more professional and personal options, but feminism had not eliminated the gendered assumption that women were primarily responsible for taking care of children and home. Thus, many felt pressure to be two things at once: the perfect mother, and the perfect employee. Since most could not do either flawlessly, many undoubtedly felt defeated. In this sense, the new expectations placed on women became hard enough and other challenges, like feminism, seemed too tiring. Instead of continuing the feminist trend in country music from the 1970s, women withdrew into passivity. One could also attribute the retreat to fear, as other popular cultural formats warned women about stepping too far away from the home. For example, *Author! Author!* (1982) depicted women as tramps who abandoned children, and in *Mr. Mom* (1983), the female character entered into a professionally successful, but personally

[19]. Janie Fricke, "I'll Need Someone to Hold Me When I Cry," *I'll Need Someone to Hold Me When I Cry*, Columbia, 1980; Anne Murray, "Blessed Are the Believers," *Where Do You Go When You Dream,* Capitol, 1981.

disastrous, career while her husband became a successful homemaker. In addition, deranged men in slasher films killed independent or sexually liberated women.[20] Defeat and fear pushed women into traditional modes of performance and encouraged passivity.

Country women also became passive in their use of sex, a topic they usually implied but rarely explicitly described. For example, many stars dressed in provocative ways but used nonsexual actions, and their interviews and fan clubs promoted simultaneous images of childlike innocence. Barbara Mandrell's booth at Fan Fair in 1981 contained circus wagon decorations and won first place in the Country Music Association/Grand Ole Opry judging; yet she appeared sexy in performances, either through her clothing or flirtatious behavior. Parton, who exaggerated feminine sexuality with her fetishized appearance, consistently spoke in a childlike voice and giggled and joked like a girl. She also made numerous references to her adolescent sexual experiences, a possible attempt to sexualize her childhood. Parton's discussion of her childhood sexual explorations began in the 1970s, most famously in her *Playboy* interview in 1978. In the interview she stated she had been curious about sex at an early age and never saw it as shameful or wrong. Moreover, she claimed her sexual inquisitiveness made her popular, but for all of the "wrong reasons." She "wore tight clothes and told dirty jokes" and asked questions about sex such as "'does it hurt?'" and "'does it feel good?'" She flirted with the interviewer constantly and wanted him to be intrigued about her adolescent behavior.[21] Parton continued this sexual playfulness in *9 to 5* and in her promotional appearances for the film. In both she

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[20]. Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press): 393–99. For examples of slasher films in the early 1980s, see *Halloween II* (1981), *Halloween III* (1982), *Friday the 13th* (1980), *Friday the 13th II* (1981), and *Friday the 13th III 3D* (1982).

[21]. CMHOF, Barbara Mandrell Folder, Barbara Mandrell International Fan Club, July–August 1981; Lawrence Grobel, "Dolly Parton: A Candid Conversation with the Curvaceous Queen of Country Music," *Playboy* (October 1978): 101; Pamela Wilson, "Mountains of Contradictions: Gender, Class, and Region in the Star Image of Dolly Parton," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 94, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 110–29.

partnered sexual behavior and statements with nervous laughter and childish shyness. Mandrell and Parton's sexualized innocence considerably differed from the feistiness of Patsy Cline, Loretta Lynn's down-home serious demeanor, or even the very mature sexuality of Tanya Tucker. Parton's emphasis on virtue combined with a more mature look provided a nonthreatening and passive way to appear sexual but simultaneously powerless. In this time period, country music women constructed both sexual and wholesome images; they manipulated social standards to gain sexual power and still seemed submissive.

Other aspects of country music, line dancing for example, appeared childlike, innocent, and simultaneously sexual as well. *Urban Cowboy* popularized line dancing, and the new style became immensely popular, which became one of the factors in country music's increased record sales. Individuals could perform line dances without partners, as opposed to other, couple-focused dances like the two-step. Line dancing contained little communication between the dancers, an element that eliminated the flirtation and seduction of the partner dance. Furthermore, line dancing added a camp element to country dance with certain moves meant to be funny or childlike. Line dancers moved their bodies but in innocent, not overtly sexual, ways. In these ways dancing, like women in country music, became more childlike and less sexual.[22]

Fans and the industry reprimanded women who did not conform to the newer stereotypes about sexuality. This became evident to most country music commentators and, on occasion, was explicitly discussed. On *The Crook and Chase Show*, a televised country music magazine program that discussed country music and its stars, Charlie Chase claimed female performers had "groupies" but were more protected than men, were "surrounded by men who work for

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[22]. Jocelyn R. Neal, "Dancing Together: The Rhythms of Gender in the Country Dance Hall," in *A Boy Named Sue: Gender and Country Music,* ed. Kristine M. McCusker and Diane Pecknold (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2004), 137–43.

them," and that their encounters with men were "more discreet." He went on to state, "A woman has the same temptations but her activities are not as blatant. At least not in country music." His cohost, Lorainne Crook, pointed out the obvious double standard: men could have sex and brag about it, while women could not. If women violated this standard, they suffered bad reputations or poor record sales.[23]

Tanya Tucker suffered criticism for her increasingly overt sexuality during the early 1980s. Tucker built her fame on a Lolita image and provocative songs, both themes that continued into her adult years. For example, in 1978 a twenty-year-old Tucker shocked audiences with her album cover for *Tanya Tucker TNT*, which showed her in black leather pants with her back to the camera, a seductive look on her face, and a microphone cord between her legs. Then, in 1981 her album *Should I Do It?* included a cover that showed Tucker in frilly lace-up lingerie with her hands holding the ends of the laces. The album's title and the photograph implied two separate concepts: Should she release her album, or release her laces? In response, she received negative reviews for the music and also for the cover. Most descriptions of the album focused on the photograph first, then turned that negativity into criticism of the songs.[24]

As previously mentioned, Dolly Parton diluted her sexuality with childishness and therefore became one of the only exceptions to the "rule" on discipline. However, Parton's outward appearance displayed far more sexuality than any of her counterparts. In fact, her outer

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[23]. Lorainne Crook and Charlie Chase with Mickey Merskowitz. *Crook and Chase: Our Lives, the Music, and the Stars* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1995) 147–48. Crook also discussed the male/female double standard in terms of alcohol. During one episode Chase joked about having Jack Daniels after the show, then at Christmas one year, Crook made the same claim. In response, viewers made numerous calls and she was forced to address the issue and diffuse it.

[24]. Daniel Cooper, "Tanya Tucker: Almost Grown," *Journal of Country Music* 17, no. 1 (1994): 23–24; Paul Kingsbury and the Country Music Hall of Fame, *Vinyl Hayride: Country Music Album Covers, 1947–1989* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 153; Tanya Tucker, *Should I Do It?* MCA, 1981.

package hugely contributed to her popularity. Her trademark attributes, including large breasts, high heels, wigs, and gaudy clothing, became hallmarks of her style. In her words, "It takes a lot of money to look this cheap!" She was hyper-feminine; a caricature of womanhood. To diffuse her appearance, she combined her sexuality not only with childishness, but also with conservatism. On one hand, she presented herself as a shapely cartoon, a graciously exaggerated sex-symbol; on the other, she embodied strong traditional virtues of family and marriage.[25] She had a successful marriage, spoke of her childhood and conservative upbringing, and emphasized her small-town values.

Women in country music also used self-criticism and humor to diffuse their physical appearances and sexuality. Again, Parton, with her persistent remarks about her clothing and physical attributes, illustrated this trend. After the release of *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* in 1982, Parton made numerous comments about her success in playing a madam. On the *Tonight Show with Johnny Carson* she boasted, "I'm a better whore than a secretary." She also said this at the premiere of the film at Paramount Theatre, the largest opening in Austin history. This comment came in spite of her other claims that *9 to 5* was more enjoyable and a larger success.[26] In addition, she consistently claimed to admire the prostitutes in her hometown and even credited them with her style. Essentially, Parton became a "social parody, a hyperbolic stereotype, a tongue-in-cheek charade that playfully and affectionately subverted the patriarchal iconography of female sexuality."[27] She exaggerated the ideal to the point where it made men uncomfortable to directly talk about it. Instead they, and she, made jokes. Her humor diffused

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[25]. Country Music Foundation, *Country: The Music and the Musicians,* 259, 261–63.

[26]. MTR, *Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, NBC, March 1981; CMHOF, Dolly Parton Fan Club Information, Dolly newsletter, October 1982.

[27]. Wilson, "Mountains of Contradictions," 129.

tension in those who may have criticized or found her sexuality too alluring. She maneuvered social standards and then used those codes to her own advantage without transgressing them. This became a key to her acceptance as a non-threatening but powerful influence.[28]

Parton further criticized herself with frequent references to her weight problem, an issue that made her obviously self-conscious. She grew especially concerned about her appearance in *The Best Little Whorehouse* since she had gained weight between this film and *9 to 5*. Parton's weight embarrassed her during filming, in particular, during a closing scene where Burt Reynolds, her costar, lifted and carried her. Of this she commented, "The cameras rolled, Burt picked me up, and I could hear him groan. I was a real porker at the time, probably the heaviest I have ever been." In 1982, on the *Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, Parton claimed that in order to keep up with the times she wanted to create a new line of clothes, specifically a line of blue jeans similar to Jordache. But her line would be designed for short, wide women like her and called "wide ache," an obvious reference to her size. Parton also discussed her weight in her autobiography *Dolly: My Life and Other Unfinished Business*. Here she revealed her diet secrets, namely, chewing food, then spitting it out. To defer criticism, she wrote, "What's more disgusting? Spitting out food or being a lard ass?" Regardless of Parton's obvious success and sexual clout, she still seemed to feel obligated to critique herself as a means of lessening her power.[29]

Parton's willingness to discuss her weight separated her from other performers-- most women did not dare mention physical unattractiveness. Since women channeled childishness

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[28]. Ibid., 110–16.

29. Dolly Parton, *Dolly: My Life and Other Unfinished Business* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 238, 255; Wilson, "Mountains of Contradictions," 110; Crook and Chase, *Crook and Chase: Our Lives, the Music, and the Stars*, 147–48; MTR, *Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, NBC, June 24, 1982.

combined with sexuality, they also strongly desired youthful beauty. The emphasis on youth and beauty became far more important for country music females than for males. In fact, older and usually unattractive men, the "true" or "hard" country singers, gained the most respect. Many even sang about their lack of physical beauty! Males also composed joking songs about failure. Barbara Ching refers to this as "burlesque" and goes on to theorize that in order to have an effective style of burlesque, one must enjoy some type of power. In other words, in order to be deliberately "uncool," you have to have potential to be the coolest. Women, since they did not possess that type of power, tended to strive for childlike beauty and never discussed their ages or physical unattractiveness. Basically, women did not present themselves as uncool. Unattractive men cried, got drunk at the honky tonk, humiliated themselves, and then sang about it. Women could not do this because they had no power, it would have been pathetic. Therefore, they had to be attractive, but not attractive enough to have more power than men. Beauty and youthfulness became the only options.[30]

The increasing popularity of country music in the 1980s and its return to more conventional gender roles existed simultaneously with the rise of conservatism. The conservative resurgence that helped elect Ronald Reagan included ideas about gender, women's power, and their places within society. In the early 1980s the backlash against feminism intensified; in fact, the Right promoted the ideas that the women's movement contributed to women's unhappiness, had made women abandon children, and destroyed families. In response,

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[30]. Barbara Ching, *Wrong's What I Do Best: Hard Country Music and Contemporary Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 29–32, 36–38;

women lost ground in the early 1980s, politically, socially, and economically. Femininity had a new political meaning and became a powerful tool of social control.[31]

Women's declining status was exemplified by the continuous fight for, and defeat of, the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), a proposal that stated, "'equality of Rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of sex'." The ERA had a long history, beginning in 1920 with Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party's (NWP) and ending in 1982, when the amendment failed to receive the votes necessary for ratification. In 1982 public approval for the ERA *increased* from 50 percent to 63 percent; however, it still did not secure the needed support. When Congress presented the ERA in 1972, thirty states ratified it during its first year, and then support declined. In 1974 three more states ratified, and between 1975 and 1977 two states ratified the amendment; but no state ratified after 1977 despite the 1978 triumph of ERA proponents in persuading Congress to extend the original 1979 deadline to 1982. On 30 June 1982, the Amendment failed with only thirty-five of the required thirty-eight states having ratified it-- essentially by 1982 the ERA politically died. The effort to renew the process in 1983 failed to win a two-thirds majority in the House of Representatives.[32]

One reason for the ERA's defeat was its ties to the 1973 Supreme Court case of *Roe v. Wade*, which stated that prohibiting abortion violated women's rights to privacy. The National Organization for Women (NOW), which had led the campaign to end abortion restrictions, promoted the ERA; and therefore the ERA became connected to *Roe*, an association that led to

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31. Susan J. Douglass, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Times Books, 1995): 222, 224–26, 233–37, 242. The popularity of country music since World War II is directly related to the rise of conservative values. Furthermore, the spread of both country music and conservatism is also a reflection of the "southernization" of America, the diffusion across the nation of cultural and political traits long associated with the South. Stein, "Living Right and Being Free," 1; Virginia Bernhard, et al., *Hidden Histories of Women in the New South* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 79–82.

32. Jane J. Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), ix–x, 13.

its downfall. Opponents linked abortion to murder and increasingly saw women's rights activists as negative, as stepping out of their roles, and as challenges to society. By the early 1980s the Moral Majority and the Republican Party attacked abortion and claimed that women's reproductive freedom harmed society, families, and the moral values of the nation. The debate over abortion helped opponents of the women's movement mobilize support for their efforts to restrict women's roles.

Members of the Right also organized to prevent the ERA's ratification, most notably Phyllis Schlafly's movement, "STOP ERA." Schlafly, a conservative author, attorney, and political activist, and STOP ERA volunteers successfully moved the debate away from equal rights and instead focused it on the belief that the ERA would dramatically alter women's roles. Americans opposed significant changes for women and therefore turned against the amendment. This became especially true for American homemakers, Schlafly's target audience. In the late 1970s Schlafly argued that the ERA would do away with financial support from husbands; women would be drafted; it would decrease Social Security for women; eliminate all-girls schools and other female institutions; and lead to coed bathrooms and prisons.[33] These claims became devastating for the ERA and for the women's movement in general. The ERA's death signaled a new era for American women, one characterized by backlash and a return to older gender norms.

The ERA's defeat demonstrated how women would fare under the New Right, conservative establishment. In its campaign against the ERA, the Republican Party for the first time forged a collation of religious fundamentalists and the traditional radical right. These groups targeted working- and middle-class audiences and framed the ERA as a battle against

[33]. Ibid., 8–12, 16–19, 20, 109–11.

loose sexual morals and rampant radical feminism. They claimed to be protecting, and maintaining, traditional gender roles and proved that the Right could successfully organize. The Republican Party's agenda included elements of antifeminism and the fight against the ERA became the symbol of that agenda. Like the ERA, the women's movement and many of its achieved goals would suffer under the new political climate.[34]

This backlash spread into many areas and appeared in both politics and popular culture. By the mid-1970s NOW and conservative Phyllis Schlafly personified women's struggles over feminism and antifeminism. The media portrayed the debate between the two as a catfight, a gender-loaded spectacle between two belligerent women. Even though the struggle for the ERA involved lobbyists and politicians, the media depicted it as a woman vs. woman affair. For example, in 1977 ABC's televised special "ERA: The War between the Women," Schlafly repeatedly described ERA supporters and feminist as "'petty'," "'vindictive'," and lesbians, all stereotypes many already associated with individuals involved in the women's movement. Moreover, the media attacked NOW's 1977 conference in Houston, Texas, which created twenty-five pro-woman recommendations for President Jimmy Carter. All three major television networks and most news magazines focused on only three of the resolutions: passage of the ERA, federal funding for abortions, and equal rights for lesbians. Television commentators described the conference attendees and protestors outside as catfighting women, and the images of the conference made it appear disorganized and chaotic. All the aforementioned strategies destroyed the idea of "sisterhood," which lessened the threat of a unified female population.

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[34]. Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA*, 1–6; Sara Evans, Donald G. Mathews and Jane Sherron De Hart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of ERA: A State and the Nation* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 44-45; Stein, "Living Right; and Being Free," 20; Pamela Conover and Virginia Gray, *Feminism and the New Right: Conflict over the American Family* (New York: Praeger, 1983); Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* (New York: Anchor Books, 1992), 230.

Furthermore, competitive individualism, a traditionally more American concept, replaced sisterhood. Television shows profited from the public's apparent love of catfights as well with weekly programs like *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, where women's tantrums directed towards each other, and their persistent competition for men and power, "reaffirmed that patriarchal capitalism was the only game in town, the only imaginable way to organize society, and that it was impossible for women, whether they were traditional wives or ambitious vixens, to put forward an alternative."[35]

Women in country music mirrored unease with female equality, the belief that fundamental change damaged society, and the desire for a return to presumably more traditional male/female roles. Conservatism pushed women into nonpolitical roles where it was unacceptable to challenge the status quo. Female performers operated in the public sphere, but with a series of restrictions. They did not unify, did not challenge patriarchy or ask for equality, and participated in capitalism without criticizing its effects on women. Of course, country contained some exceptions; however, women who violated gender norms generally did not achieve commercial or critical success. Instead of continuing the burgeoning feminism of 1970s female country music, women singers presented themselves as feminine, childlike, and glamorous ladies, non-threatening reminders of traditional gender roles.

Race

Just as women in country music obeyed the rules of southern womanhood, they also conformed to racial status quos. Fans generally viewed country music as the domain of whiteness and, in some cases, the music of overt racism; however, in the late 1960s and 1970s this had started to change. African American artists like Charley Pride broke country's racial

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[35]. Douglass, *Where the Girls Are,* 222–26, 232–37.

boundaries, and most singers eliminated racially derogatory lyrics and public statements. But in the early 1980s women in country music ignored prior attempts to integrate and instead reverted to earlier tactics that emphasized whiteness. To accomplish this, women performers primarily used two strategies: they adhered to the rules of whiteness, and they ignored all African American influence in country music.

Female country musicians adhered to images of whiteness, a powerful racial concept. In some cases country music portrayed whiteness as white working-class southernness, in some a reflection of white southern history and accomplishment, or as southern working-class virtue and tradition. Other strategies involved creating an "Other," namely other groups of female singers, rhythm and blues for example, to whom country music women could compare themselves. Women used all of these tactics, but the most prominent example of using whiteness in this time period in female performance involved the uses of their bodies.[36]

In the United States, an "uncontrolled" body is both a signifier of racial inferiority and a threat to the racial status quo. Anything out of control, the body included, acts as a potential threat. Uncontrolled bodies prove that social control is fragile, resented, and potentially escapable. The freedom that uncontrolled bodies imply frightens those in power and therefore, in most cases, it must be restrained. Since the body exerts social power most persuasively, and since "the body is where the power-bearing definitions of social and sexual normality are, literally, embodied," improper bodies have political implications and are especially sensitive to issues of race.[37] Bodies that challenge social norms through their movements or looks present

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36. For further discussion of whiteness as a racial category in and outside of country music, see George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit From Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), and Rebecca Ann Thomas, "The Color of the Music: Race and the Making of America's Country Music" (PhD diss., University of Missouri-Columbia, 2000).

37. John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 69–74, 90–93.

multiple threats to the social order; subsequently, they must be kept in their places. The out-of-control body, in this case the racial minority body, threatens the orderly operation of the status quo. In these ways, the female body becomes the vehicle for racial discourse.[38]

Those in power have used a variety of tactics to control bodies classified as racially inferior. Historically, in many cases this was done through legislation, especially in terms of pleasures and excesses of the body (drunkenness, sexuality, rowdiness, and idleness), and also through constructing social norms that made certain activities and actions offensive. Morality and paternalism also contributed to ideas about proper, and unacceptable, bodies. Moreover, there have historically been attempts to exclude black bodies, as opposed to simply legislating their subordination, and to also categorize them as sexually aggressive.[39] In any case, once the state or those in power established new norms, popular culture helped to enforce the new systems and also to intextuate the public. Female country performers in the early 1980s taught their audience that those in power demonstrated control in their bodies and, in doing so, linked themselves to dominant racial groups.[40]

Women in country music stood still on stages during performances and did very little dancing, moves that implied they had complete control over their bodies. In these ways they portrayed themselves as dignified white southern women, as opposed to rowdy and uncontrolled African American jazz and blues singers or rap stars. They also wore more pop than country clothing, with hats and boots replacing evening gowns, and their attire served to limit their

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[38]. Laura Kipnis with Jennifer Reeder, "White Trash Girl: The Interview," in *White Trash: Race and Class in America*, ed. Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 114–15.

[39]. Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 69–74, 90–93; Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

[40]. Kipnis, "White Trash Girl: The Interview," 114–15; Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 93.

movements. Designer outfits, spiked heels, and show dresses did not allow singers to move on stage in the way that blue jeans and boots did in earlier time periods. To demonstrate the point, Crystal Gayle's video for "Half the Way" showed her on stage, practically motionless, wearing confining electric-blue pants; not country at all, but very stylish and controlled.[41] Barbara Mandrell illustrated the trend as well and became in many ways the essence of self-control and stillness. In a 1981 performance on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, Mandrell performed in a long, red dress with a high neck and long sleeves. She looked as if she "felt" the music and did wiggle a little, but she completely covered her body and remained very much controlled.[42]

Mandrell's bodily control was also evident on her television series *Barbara Mandrell and the Mandrell Sisters*. On the 18 November 1980, episode Mandrell sang "(If Loving You Is Wrong) I Don't Want to Be Right," a song about adultery and the pleasures of forbidden sex. However, Mandrell's stage presence did not mirror the song's themes; she performed in a confining evening gown and stood in one place during the entire song. Although her attire revealed one shoulder and had designs that drew viewers eyes' to her hips, she restricted and controlled her movements. On the 29 November 1980, episode Mandrell sat down on stage as she and her sister Louise sang a Patsy Cline medley, a more dramatic exhibit of bodily control. Mandrell again sat on stage in the 27 February 1982, episode as she sang "Oh Susannah" with legend June Carter Cash. The two women played harmonicas and the song had upbeat elements, but they remained virtually motionless during the performance. In this instance Cash appeared as if she wanted to move around the stage; she fidgeted, used her arms aggressively, and on a

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41. CMHOF, Compilation Reel I, 1982, ¾ cassette, Crystal Gayle, "Half the Way."

42. MTR, LA, *Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, NBC, March 3, 1981.

few occasions almost stood up. Cash, with her extreme southern accent and many references to her working-class upbringing, also appeared noticeably more "country" than Mandrell.[43] It was as if Cash, who achieved stardom in an earlier period, could use her body in ways that Mandrell could not. Mandrell's stillness, and therefore her whiteness, became more pronounced when paired with Cash's freer movements.

Like Cash, some women exhibited non-stereotypical behavior in country acts, but the women who engaged in uncontrolled movements experienced criticism through poor record sales and negative images. For instance, Calamity Jane's video for "I've Just Seen a Face" (1982), one of the first ever released in country music, showed an all-female band along with clips of old western movies. The women moved aggressively; in a desert in a Wild West setting, they ran, fell, chopped wood, danced, and played with knives and guns.[44] But this new visual exposure did not translate into commercial success, possibly due to its obvious differences with other performances. When more successful singers created their own videos, they modeled themselves after Gayle's and Mandrell's, meaning they did not involve dancing or movement.

Tanya Tucker was another, more popular, exception to this rule with her racy and risqué stage shows, but her use of "uncontrolled" African American backup singers downplayed her actions. At the beginning of her televised concert titled "Hot," cartoon hands turned on steaming water, and Tucker herself dripped out. This set the stage for an energetic show, in terms of both movements and attire. Tucker wore skin-tight black spandex pants and stood in front of what

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[43]. *The Best of Barbara Mandrell and the Mandrell Sisters Show*, prod. Sid and Marty Krofft, 180 min., Time Life, 2006. The song "Oh Susanna" itself had a racial past. The song, which was deposited for copyright in 1848 and attributed to Stephen Foster, was originally a minstrel tune. For more information see John Spitzer, "'Oh! Susanna': Oral Transmission and Tune Transformation," *Journal of American Musicological Society* 47, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 90–136.

[44]. CMHOF, Compilation Reel I, 1982, ¾ cassette.

seemed to be a rock band with members playing electric guitars and saxophones. "Tanya" glared in the background in white lights and "hot" flashed in red. The concert appeared to be rock, the lyrics country; for example, "that Georgia sun was blood red and going down." In this way she distinguished herself as a country artist, not a rock or pop performer. The Whitney Family, an all-black choir, sang in the middle of the concert with an entirely African American band. These performers' prominent movements served to deemphasize Tucker's presence.[45] The contrast between Tucker and the all-black musicians gave her room to maneuver in terms of her bodily movements, and their roles as "supporting" elements also emphasized her whiteness. She did not behave as a tranquil southern lady; her ability to manipulate race allowed her in turn to manipulate concepts of gender.[46]

In the early 1980s women in country music also excised the memory of African American influences. Ignoring black contributions did not distinguish this time period from others; but, as previously mentioned, it did serve to end attempts to integrate the music. Their strategies also distanced female country music from the idea of a reformed and integrated South and increased its image as a genre only for whites. Instead of presenting country music as a combination of black and white traditions, and the South as a place that embraced both whites and blacks, women in country music depicted both as a purely white. In reality, country music owed a debt to black performers, a subject that only recently has been explored.[47] Just as black

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[45]. CMHOF, Tanya Tucker "Hot" Cable TV, July 7, 1981, ¾ cassette.

[46]. Tucker's lack of bodily control led to other actions rarely found in female country performers. In 1983, on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, Tucker performed in a sexy, sequined, short red dress that exposed one shoulder. She danced provocatively during the performance and was out of breath during the interview. Her panting and inability to speak were unusual and therefore drew attention to her unrestrained body, MTR, Los Angeles, *Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, NBC, 7 January 1983.

[47]. The Country Music Hall of Fame recently displayed two exhibits that examined the role of African Americans in country music: "Night Train to Nashville: Music City Rhythm & Blues, 1945–1970," which ran from March 1, 2004, to December 31, 2005; and "I Can't Stop Loving You: Ray Charles and Country Music," which ran

artists made major contributions to the South's musical heritage through gospel and blues, they added to country music as well. But in the early twentieth century the industry separated southern music into race and hillbilly categories, acts that reflected social segregation. This elimination of African American artists from the "white" commercial market allowed country to adopt the image of a segregated music that reflected a pure white heritage. Country music constructed itself as an icon of whiteness, creating "historical propaganda" in the music itself.[48]

Moralism saturated the historical denial of African American influence in country music. According to southern logic, blacks naturally were savage, whites inherently respectable, and white women virtuous and in need of protection. These ideas helped promote denial and also impacted white women in country music. The portrayal of blackness as depraved and white womanhood as moral and righteous reduced females in country music to symbols and stereotypes. Women performers had to adhere to codes of white femininity and decency, and both concepts ultimately became products. The public constantly scrutinized female singers, and for that reason women tended to travel with their families (Mandrell and her sisters, for example), and they controlled their physical expressions. Certain instruments, mainly the fiddle, became seen as sinful for both sexes, but more so for women. The fiddle's association with Satan and black men and its connection to sexuality made it inappropriate for any self-respecting female artist. Moreover, overt sexuality itself was off limits for women performers, both in their

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from March 10, 2006, to December 31, 2007, both depicted country music as a genre that was influenced by both whites and African Americans. For more information, see http://www.countrymusichalloffame.com/site/exhibits-detail.aspx?cid=221 and http://www.countrymusichalloffame.com/site/exhibits-detail.aspx?cid=225 (both accessed 20 February 2009).

[48]. Thomas, "The Color of the Music," xiv–xxvi; Nick Toshes, *Country: The Biggest Music in America* (New York: Stein and Day, 1977), 143; Stephen Smith, *Myth, Media, and the Southern Mind* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1985), 269. For more information on the African American influence in country music, see David Sanjek, "Blue Moon of Kentucky Rising over the Mystery Train: The Complex Construction of Country Music," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 94, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 29–55; and Patrick Carr, ed., *The Illustrated History of Country Music* (New York: Random House, 1995).

personal lives and their performances. Women themselves strongly supported this code from the advent of commercial music through the early 1980s.[49] These trends had both gendered and racial aspects. Women adhered to the rules of southern womanhood and the laws of whiteness; they distanced themselves from any activity associated with African Americans and segregated their music and images.

Commercialization also served to eliminate black influence in country music. As in earlier time periods, the industry and performers marketed country in the 1980s, especially female country music, to an exclusively white audience. The industry and musicians also marketed whiteness, a fact emphasized on album covers, promotional posters, and eventually in videos. Advertising campaigns also used exaggerated regionalism to depict the South, a necessary symbol of country music, as entirely white. Although whites and African Americans shared in an inescapably southern culture, female country music did not reflect this.[50] Even though black and white southerners experienced similar class and regional discrimination, this never made its way into female country lyrics. Racial solidarity, even with African American women, did not exist.

Instead of using overt prejudice, women in country music utilized muted racism and covertly negative racial imagery. Women performers in the early 1980s defined themselves as southern ladies, a moniker not extended to black women due to their race, sexuality, and class.[51] Presenting themselves as an exclusive and impenetrable group, singers distanced themselves

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[49]. Rebecca Thomas, "The Cow That's Ugly Has the Sweetest Milk," in *The Women of Country Music: A Reader*, ed. Charles K. Wolfe and James E. Akenson (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 132–42.

[50]. Thomas, "The Color of the Music," 166–67.

[51]. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," in *"We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible: A Reader in Back Women's History,* ed. Darlene Clark Hine, Wilma King, and Linda Reed (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1995), 8–11.

from blacks and created a dichotomy between "good" white country singers and "Others." They constructed gender differently for white and black women, and the distinctions served to separate southern "ladies" from all others. For example, on the January 23, 1982, episode of *Barbara Mandrell and the Mandrell Sisters*, Ray Charles, the guest star, sang a gospel medley with Sylvia, a countrypolitan newcomer, and the siblings. The women dressed in white and black dresses (obvious symbolism?) that had the silhouettes of antebellum southern gowns, and they stood still on stage while Charles sat at the piano. Charles moved more actively than the Mandrells; he swayed and seemed on the verge of jumping off of his bench. The women stood behind his piano, further concealing their bodies from the audience and distancing themselves from Charles.[52] He became the racialized "Other," the stereotypically out-of-control black gospel singer, while they illustrated composed southern ladies.

The musicians and industry did not construct whiteness alone; audiences had active parts in the production of popular culture. In the twentieth century whites created ideas about whiteness and demonized "the Other," moves that distanced them from blacks. Country audiences wanted all-white music, a contributing factor to women's exclusive behaviors and performances. In this time period, due to the backlash against the civil rights movement, many working-class Americans distanced themselves from blacks, the perceived benefactors of social welfare programs. Country music became one avenue that helped distinguish poor whites from African Americans. Society demonized black "welfare queens" and labeled them as "Other," the

[52]. *The Best of Barbara Mandrell and the Mandrell Sisters Show*, prod. Sid and Marty Krofft, 180 min., Time Life, 2006.

group poor whites measured themselves against. In order to do this, the country audience constructed a picture of whiteness, an image reflected in female country music.[53]

The race-related trends in female country music mirrored early 1980s political and economic developments. During this time period President Ronald Reagan's economic plans began to devastate minorities. The popularity of his initiatives showed the growing conservatism of America and also the belief that social programs contributed to many of the nation's woes. Reagan's strategies included reshaping the federal judiciary and the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department, actions that led to an attack on affirmative action programs. Organizations began focusing on programs for individuals, not equality of results for groups.[54] Country music women, through their distance from minorities, reflected conservative politics. Instead of discussing race or including African Americans, they presented themselves and their music as white and for a white audience.

Women in country music could have forged an alliance with African Americans, regardless of the conservative revolution. Country's main audience, even though the music spread, was in the rural South, a region where racial segregation proved hard to maintain. White women in these areas had regular interactions with blacks, and therefore they could have been receptive to more integrated music. Moreover, industrial and urban areas in the South, with their large numbers of African American workers, became some of the most integrated in the country.

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[53]. Thomas, "The Color of Music," 166, 207; Robin D. G. Kelley, "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Folk,'" *American Historical Review* (December 1992): 1405–6.

54. Haynes Johnson, *Sleepwalking through History: America In the Reagan Years* (New York: Norton and Company, 2003), 159–65; Reagan's behavior in terms of race relations did not begin in the 1980s. While he was governor of California, he proposed a repeal of the Rumford Act, which prohibited an owner from offering property for sale or rent and then withdrawing it for religious or racial reasons. In the 1960s he opposed the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act, claiming both were "humiliating" to southerners. Dan T. Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963–1994* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 55, 58–62.

By 1980 black Americans comprised 18 percent of the southern population, the most prominent minority group. But white southerners did not want racially mixed music, and country women did not challenge this.[55] Instead, women in country music remained segregated and sought an all-white audience, instead of courting minorities or challenging racial norms.

Class

Just as women in country music attempted to distance themselves from blackness, they also tried to move away from working-class images while simultaneously appealing to working- and middle-class audiences. Instead of working-class women, they presented themselves as middle-class crossovers who tried to attract fans that had been lost in the rock and roll of the 1970s. Loretta Lynn–styled ruralism became seen as "too country" and "too poor," not acceptable strategies for winning a pop audience. To accomplish their transformations, women performers abandoned many previous country and working-class signifiers and adopted newer images and music that attracted more people, as opposed to music that "reeked too strongly of rural or working class life."[56]

Women's desire for crossover success had a history with the Nashville Sound, an era that featured torch singers, synthesized background music, and sensational clothing and personas. The industry created the Nashville Sound for middle-class housewives who appreciated more melodious and pop-sounding music. While 1950s honky-tonk represented the mourning of displaced, postwar men, and late-1950s rockabilly expressed the sexual desires of their sons, the

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[55]. Orville Vernon Burton, "Race Relations in the Rural South since 1945," in *The Rural South Since World War II*, ed. R. Douglass Hurt (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 30–33, 36–37, 44, 51.

56. Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, USA*, 2nd ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 378.

1960s Nashville Sound became the diluted trance music for suburban housewives.[57] Producers Owen Bradley and Chet Atkins deliberately created the Nashville Sound, also described as "soft-shell" country. These men wanted to distance country from the "hillbilly" music of the early 1950s and in doing so popularized a more pop-like sound. This strategy proved successful, and the popularity of "soft shell" was expressed in the Country Music Association's (CMA) promotions of the Nashville Sound, the Opry's move from the Ryman Auditorium to a new suburban location with air conditioning and a theme park, Olivia Newton-John's winning of the Country Music Female of the Year Award in 1974, and John Denver's 1975 win for Entertainer of the Year. However, not everyone supported country's new look. In response to the Nashville Sound, some musicians formed the Academy of Country Music (ACM) to counter what they perceived as a soft-shell, middle-class bias in the CMA. The creation of the ACM resulted in a traditional, or "hard core," comeback, and performers began attacking the Nashville Sound. Country music's first million-selling album, *Wanted: The Outlaws,* by Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, and Jessi Colter, was not only hard core but explicitly rebellious, and its success seemed to indicate that soft shell's reign had ended. But much to the Outlaws' dismay, by 1980

[57]. Even though the Nashville Sound was seen as for women, particularly middle-class women, it had its own class-based brand of masculinity. While country was catering to middle-class women, the genre's commercial power remained based on the image of the blue-collar man. Other cultural forms like film were showing working-class men as sexually aggressive and violent, while country music celebrated the success of the working-class patriarch, especially his pride as a skilled worker and his ability to provide his family with the consumer goods equated with the good life. The standard interpretation of the Nashville Sound is that its audience was feminized; however, the industry pursued a bifurcated strategy that emphasized working-class masculinity and middle-class femininity. In this way it attracted new buyers and simultaneously kept its traditional audience. Diane Pecknold, "'I Wanna Play House': Configurations of Masculinity in the Nashville Sound Era," in McCusker and Pecknold, *A Boy Named Sue*, 86–89, 95–97; Elaine Tyler May, "Cold War–Warm Hearth: Politics and the Family in Postwar America," in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930–1980,* ed. Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 153–84.

hardcore retreated, as did its links to the working-class rebelliousness, and soft-shell artists occupied the tops of charts.[58]

In contrast to hard-core, working-class displays of the 1970s, performers in the early 1980s became pop-oriented and middle class in their attire and presentations. Entertainers like Janie Fricke, who won the CMA's Best Female Vocalist Award in 1982 and 1983, repeatedly appeared in long dresses and designer outfits, clothing that replaced more working-class apparel. Fricke, who worked extensively as a backup singer in the 1970s, ended her job as a supporting artist, signed her own recording contract, and changed her appearance. She became the embodiment of middle-class, soft, country music with her show-queen gowns, gold lamé jumpsuits, and glitzy dresses she designed herself. Even Dolly Parton lost her boots and jeans and adopted show gowns and heels.[59] This type of dress linked performers to the middle class, at times even the upper class. Country women still called themselves "country," but their garb transformed.

The music changed as well and included less southern, working-class singing styles and instruments, but combined these with "country" lyrics. Mandrell's 1981 "I Was Country When Country Wasn't Cool" was the embodiment of pop-country. She used pop looks and sounds, yet her lyrics focused on country themes; they even included George Jones! The song also incorporated both country and pop strategies, namely the country tradition of autobiographical stories with less personal pop vocal techniques. Mandrell sang of her childhood spent "listenin' to the Opry" when all of her friends "were diggin' Rock 'n' Roll and Rhythm and Blues" but

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[58]. Richard A. Peterson, "The Dialectic of Hard-Core and Soft-Shell Country Music," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 94, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 291–95.

59. John Lomax, *Nashville City, USA* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1985), 191; Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 418–19.

eliminated a southern accent in favor of pop vocal styles. This song contributed to her winning the Country Music Association's Female Vocalist and Entertainer of the Year awards, proof of this style's popularity.[60] Mandrell's pop-country style, which distanced her from a working-class image, helped her achieve crossover success. She successfully removed ruralism from her country music and replaced it with a middle-class construction of country.

Parton's single "9 to 5," a pop-country hit, also had class implications. Again, it sounded pop, it had pop lyrics, but it spoke to working-class, or country, concerns.[61] Parton's song mentioned women's oppression in the workplace, the glass ceiling, and the struggles that women, particularly secretaries, faced; but she sang with a deemphasized accent, and her background music reflected pop, not country, traditions. Like Mandrell, Parton attempted to reach a larger audience through her association with pop music, and she simultaneously identified with the middle and working classes. To further demonstrate the transformation, the depiction of Parton on her album *9 to 5 and Odd Jobs* had both pop and working-class allusions. The cover art showed her with a denim shirt, blue jeans, and working-class tools, but it added glamour, and lessened rurualism, with high heels and elaborately styled hair.[62] Parton's new image with "9 to 5" not only presented middle-class images, but also used acceptable middle-class representations for women in country music. Her traditional audience would not have tolerated certain middle-class behaviors, such as an overt identification with the women's movement. Moreover, an association with feminism, which fans perceived as middle class,

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60. Malone, *Country Music, USA,* 376; Barbara Mandrell, "I Was Country When Country Wasn't Cool" *Barbara Mandrell Live,* MCA, 1981; Banes, "Dixie's Daughters," 95.

61. CMHOF, Kathleen Betters Collection, Box 173, 2E 13.23, Folder 97.25.421.

62. Parton, "9 to 5"; Richard A. Peterson, "Class Unconsciousness in Country Music," in *You Wrote My Life*, 56; Paul Kingsbury and the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, *Vinyl Hayride: Country Music Album Covers, 1947–1989* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2003), 59.

would have conflicted with conservatism. To keep her working-class fans, Parton still used certain country and rural signifiers and avoided controversial middle-class behaviors; to attract a middle-class audience, she changed her music and became pop, a genre with a more middle-class sound and appeal.

"Islands in the Stream," a pop-country duet between Parton and Kenny Rogers, also exemplifies the attempt to gain middle-class approval. Like "9 to 5" and "I Was Country When Country Wasn't Cool," "Islands in the Stream" contained working and middle-class, pop and country, elements. The two singers had established themselves as country stars, but the song itself sounded pop, and for these reasons, "Islands in the Stream" did achieve crossover success. It became one of only two singles in 1983 to be certified platinum and remained number one on country charts for two weeks, in the top ten for seven, and on the pop top forty for fifteen. Other songs succeeded as well, and most used the same formula. Parton's re-release of "I Will Always Love You" (1982) went to number one on the pop charts; Deborah Allen's " Baby I Lied" (1983) hit number four on country charts and number twenty-six on the pop, and her debut RCA album *Cheat the Night* received two Grammy nominations in 1983; Terri Gibbs had a hit in 1981 with "Somebody's Knockin'"; the single reached number eight on the country charts , number thirteen on pop, and she won ACM's Best New Female Vocalist in 1981. Other examples include "Just You and I" (1982) by Eddie Rabbitt with Crystal Gayle; "We've Got Tonight" (1983) by Kenny Rogers and Sheena Easton; Juice Newton's "The Sweetest Thing" (1981); Sylvia with "Nobody" (1982); and Janie Fricke's "Tell Me a Lie" (1983).[63] All of these songs

[63]. Kenny Rogers with Dolly Parton, "Islands in the Stream," *Eyes that See in the Dark*, RCA, 1983; Joel Whitburn, *Joel Whitburn's Top Country Singles, 1944–2001,* 5th ed. (Menomonee Falls, WI: Records Research, 2002), 562, 583–84; Dellar, Cackett, and Thompson, *Harmony Illustrated Encyclopedia of Country Music,* 115, 129; Bob Allen, "After the Flood," *Journal of Country Music* 15, no. 1 (1992): 50–53.

became evidence of the trend towards a more pop/middle-class sound and image. Female performers associated pop with "middle classness," and their strategies proved successful.

Women in country music also used bodily control to link themselves to the middle class. As previously mentioned, bodily control and stillness were associated with race, but they also had class implications. The early 1980s women dramatically decreased the sizes of their bodies, a trend that continued throughout the decade. Previously, fans expected women to be somewhat attractive; however, they did not subject them to the weight restraints usually associated with rock music or even pop. For example, Patsy Cline had a curvy silhouette, Loretta Lynn had a womanly figure, and Kitty Wells had the chubby cheeks of a young girl. However, the 1980s witnessed a remarkable increase in thinness for women in popular culture (it became almost a requirement) and country female bodies slimmed down in response. Physical beauty suddenly included a thin physique, and most female singers conformed to the new standard. The overweight body was significantly burdened with downwardly mobile class connotations, and since country performers wanted to present themselves as middle class, they had to accept the latest model of beauty.[64] Even Parton, one of the few exceptions to this rule, did eventually conform. In fact, Parton went beyond acceptable thinness and ultimately became waif-like, breasts not included. In the early 1980s she discussed her body, but she diffused this with self-effacing humor, her typical strategy to distract her audience. The disciplined, overly thin, and seemingly middle-class body replaced the indulgent, working-class, and heavier body of times past.

As previously discussed, women also remained motionless on stage, a performance tactic that linked them to whiteness and also to the middle class. Since society associated bodily

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[64]. Kipnis, "White Trash Girl: The Interview," 116.

control with social power, the stiller the body, the higher the class it became. The lack of movement contained similarities with earlier time periods; however, women's noncountry clothing helped link their bodies to both whiteness and the middle class. But bodily control distinguished itself from what might otherwise be associated with the upper class since in some cases women's lyrics, and at times their speech, connected them with the working class. Other female singers in rock and pop, Joan Jett for example, used their bodies more aggressively and seemingly freed themselves from traditional ideas of how women should behave, but women in country music generally avoided this and opted for complete motionlessness. As true with crossover songs, lack of movement became a successful approach towards winning a middle-class audience.

Country women's use of class also related to the concept of the southern lady. The southern lady was upper class, as opposed to the working-class farmwife, an image to which pre-1980 performers adhered. Country women linked themselves to the southern lady image through their dress and their movements. For women, this type of association conveyed a great deal of information about their class; southern ladies were upper class and farm wives were not. For women, these types of associations conveyed a great deal of information. The connection to the southern lady implied whiteness, a class association, and an age connection (there is a huge difference between the southern lady, or southern belle, and the old dame). In contrast, fans and the industry defined male categories in more general terms. The good-old-boy category, for example, was classed, but the males in this group could be any age. Women's identification with the southern lady helped link them to the middle class; however, it also impeded their freedom. Anne Firor Scott noted that the southern lady was exalted as the "most perfect example of womankind on earth," and perfection was a difficult standard. Moreover, according to Margaret

Ripley Wolfe, "the image of the southern lady ... impede[d] the development of southern women." Ladyhood came with restrictions, her expectations included perfection, passivity, and constant restraint. It also demonstrated how fans subjected women to far more categories and requirements than males.[65]

The trends in middle-class images mirrored the glamour and decadence of the 1980s. Reagan's inauguration set the tone for the decade, a display of wealth and privilege that became the most expensive, most lavish, inauguration in American history. The 1980s also saw the rise of individualistic and successful yuppies, the Sunbelt had newfound wealth, and Silicon Valley prospered.[66] Women linked themselves to these new trends and in doing so conformed to the social and economic standards of the early 1980s.

The decadence of the early 1980s existed simultaneously with increases in poverty and backlash, especially for American women. During his first administration, Reagan aimed one-third of his budget cuts at programs that benefited women, and as a result, poverty became feminized as millions of women, and female-headed households, fell below the poverty line. In addition, child support fell, sex-related murders increased 160 percent between 1976 and 1984 (while the overall homicide rate declined). Among women who remained employed, sexual discrimination complaints went up 25 percent. Politically, new female judicial appointments fell, female White House staff members decreased from 123 in 1980 to 62 in 1981 (most in lower-ranking jobs), and many high-ranking women in Reagan's administration became disillusioned. Jeane Kirkpatrick, Reagan's United Nations ambassador, and Faith Whittles, the

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[65]. Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 4; Margaret Ripley Wolfe, "The Southern Lady: Long Suffering Counterpart of the Good Ole Boy," *Journal of Popular Culture* 11 (Summer 1977): 25–26; John Shelton Reed, *Southern Folk: Plain and Fancy* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 48–50.

[66]. Johnson, *Sleepwalking through History*, 19–22, 124, 131.

Assistant to the President for Public Liaison, both claimed to feel out of place in the White House and described the atmosphere as similar to a boys club. The backlash extended into the military as well, even as defense spending increased. The number of women in the military rose 800 percent between the mid-1970s and 1980; however, after Reagan's election his army chief of staff stated, "'I have caused a pause to further increases in the number or army women.'" By 1982, the army had amended combat classifications to exclude women from an additional twenty-three military-related occupations.[67]

This backlash extended even to founding members of Second Wave feminism. Betty Friedan published *The Second Stage* in 1981 and in it claimed the movement had ignored motherhood, had become too "masculine," and that women should volunteer instead of being confrontational. She went on to explain that feminists made mistakes in the 1970s, namely with their choices to gain power through careers instead of their families. In general, Friedan criticized women, not men, and advised women to volunteer within their own communities instead of in politics.[68] These ideas attacked women's employment and career choices. In spite of the facts that more women were single parents, and that most two-parent households needed dual incomes, Friedan encouraged women to focus on domesticity and volunteer work instead of outside employment. Women in country music, like Friedan, distanced themselves from feminism and appealed to middle-class ideas of domesticity.

For women in country music and women in general, television became another important factor in transmitting middle-class images to a larger audience. By 1981, 99 percent of American homes had one TV, and adults watched approximately seven hours of programming

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67. Faludi, *Backlash,* xviii–3, 257–58, 367–68.

[68]. Ibid., 318–23; Betty Friedan, *The Second Stage* (New York: Summit Books, 1981).

each day. TV influenced public opinion, in terms of popular culture, economics, and politics. During the late 1970s the Iran hostage crisis coverage helped sway public opinion away from President Carter and assisted Reagan in the 1980 election. Reagan was also wonderful on television; his one-liners and simple slogans attracted millions of viewers. Country music women used this medium as well, most notably Mandrell's *Barbara Mandrell and the Mandrell Sisters.* This series aired on NBC from November 1980 to June 1982 and presented a considerably different look than previous country-inspired shows like *Hee Haw* and *The Beverly Hillbillies.* The sisters dressed impeccably, instead of in rural attire or Daisy Duke shorts, and the sets and skits reflected Vegas rather than Nashville. NBC cancelled the *Mandrell* show due to Barbara Mandrell's exhaustion, not to low ratings, and the series considerably boosted her popularity.[69] For Reagan and female performers, television assisted in popularity and in transmitting the new class-based standards. Reagan demonized the lower classes on television, the medium helped spread obsessions with opulence and decadence, and women like Mandrell displayed their new class-based identities through network shows.

Women in country music also generally did not sing or speak about work, another indication that they had adopted more middle-class personas. Except for "9 to 5," women rarely mentioned working outside or inside the home. In 1981, 95 percent of Billboard's Top 40 female country music songs had a male/female theme, the other 5 percent dealt with nature or the South, and none mentioned labor. Women performers did not discuss employment and therefore completely ignored women's domestic and public work. Traditionally, especially in country music, a women's power was linked to her husband. This trend persisted into the early 1980s; if status was linked to economic power, and songs did not mention women working, then their

[69]. Country Music Television Programming, 80.

power must have come from men.[70] This had been true of previous time periods as well; however, in the early 1980s more women entered the workforce and headed families, and so it seemed logical that country music would reflect this trend. Male and female performers traditionally glorified individual heroes, especially workers (Lynn's "Coal Miner's Daughter," for example). Yet in the early 1980s women performers fell silent about labor and labor-related concerns. In country music the individual received the most attention, not the collective. And in female country music the individual, a woman, existed in relation to her man.

One can attribute this class-based development to the growing individualism in American society and also to the antiunion sentiments that increased throughout the decade. Reagan's 1981 decision to fire all striking members of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization and the public's positive reaction to the firing indicate that America had become more suspicious of unions. In 1936, according to a Gallup Poll, 72 percent of Americans approved of unions; however, in 1981 this fell to 55 percent. Americans still backed workers and believed workers should have more power, but did not support unions. By 1984, labor became characterized as "just another special interest."[71] Female country musicians, instead of celebrating working-class men and women, transformed their images into mirrors of American society. They presented themselves as middle-class women with invisible work, and since they occupied the status of nonworkers, they could not be the subjects of songs about everyday heroes.

Region

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[70]. Karen A. Saucier, "Healers and Heartbreakers: Images of Women and Men in Country Music," *Journal of Popular Culture* 20, no. 3 (Winter 1986): 154–56.

71. Tom Juravich, "Workers and Unions in Country Music: A Look at Some Recent Releases," *Labor Studies Journal* (Summer 1988): 51–55, 58–60; Johnson, *Sleepwalking through History,* 159–65.

Women in country music also changed in terms of their depictions of the South. Country music's portrayal of the South differed from national depictions of the South and also from the South of history. As previously mentioned, performers displayed the South in country music as exclusively white; women performers ignored all African American influences. Politically, this overlapped with the ascent of the South in national politics and the Republican Party's focus on that region. Conservatism involved both grassroots and national ideas about race, and white southerners in particular willingly ignored African American influences and instead focused on whiteness and segregation. White flight, the continued struggles for school integration (even though they became framed as fights for individual rights, not desegregation), muted racism, and state's rights all served to move overt racism into the background and replace it with superficially race-neutral conservatism. These strategies did not represent new trends, having begun in earnest in the 1970s; but by the early 1980s they became so accepted that race did, in many ways, become relatively invisible.[72] Women in country music learned from these examples and accepted racial status quos rather than challenge them. They presented the South as exclusively white instead of discussing its racism or racial politics.

Fans also saw the South as predominantly working class, a representation most singers glorified. Even as women presented themselves as middle-class crossovers, they paid homage to a working-class South and its working-class traditions. This became evident in public appearances and in writings. Parton's fan club newsletter described the album *9 to 5* in this way:

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72. John B. Boles, *The South through Time*: A History of an American Region, vol. 11, 2nd. ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), 572–74. For detailed discussions on the rise of conservatism, the 1970s, and racial politics, see Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006); and Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).

"the basic concept of the new album is working class people—songs about waitresses, truck drivers, etc., etc. and to give the album a real down home flavor, Dolly's recording in Nashville again after many years." When asked about her 1981 Vegas show in the Riviera Hotel and its extreme departure from her rural past performances, she claimed, "they'll never let me back in Nashville now!"[73] Country songs and performances became more pop than country, a strategy that associated women performers with the middle classes; but their glorification of the South as their home, and the home of the working classes, helped them keep their traditional southern, working-class audience. Their links to the South, the home of country music, also gave women legitimacy.

By the early 1980s the South and country music had both gone national. The spread of country music reflected the "southernization" of America, the national dissemination of social, cultural, and political traits generally associated with the South.[74] Country music's popularity was linked to the popularity of the South, and as the South became more accepted, so did country music. By 1980 the South moved away from its shameful past of overt racism and therefore become a more attractive region for businesses and new residents. Country's long association with the South had tainted its image, but the new Sunbelt helped improve this. As the South and country music's images improved, both spread beyond the Mason-Dixon Line. This new exposure translated into increased record sales and success.[75]

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73. CMHOF, Dolly Parton Fan Club Information, Dolly Newsletter, July 1980; CMHOF, Dolly on *Mike Douglass*, ¾ cassette.

[74]. Stein, "Living Right and Being Free," 1.

[75]. Teresa Goddu, "Bloody Daggers and Lonesome Graveyards: The Gothic and Country Music," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 94 (Winter 1995): 58–59.

As the South and country music went national, they each received increasing attention and support from the White House. The Republican Party's associations with the South have been widely documented and discussed, and as these increased so did presidential support of country music. Ronald Reagan called county music one of the "true American art forms, recognized internationally for its commitment to freedom, country, and God." He honored Bill Monroe in 1983 and declared June 30 "Bill Monroe Day" in the state of Tennessee. Vice President George Bush became known for playing the Oak Ridge Boys in the Oval Office during Reagan's presidency and publicly stated his love of country music.[76] Presidential sanctions, like the southernization of the country, helped add new legitimacy and credibility to country music, its messages, and its depictions of the South.

The country music South also become modern and progressive. As the Sunbelt economy grew, southernness itself began to change and started to spread its new contemporary look outside the South. Country music went national as well, and the industry restructured itself to accommodate the newfound outlets.[77] Producer Jimmy Bowen changed the way Nashville recorded country music and modernized the industry. He led the move to digital recording, which significantly raised the costs of making albums and also notably increased record sales. In fact, rock, which was generally recorded in New York or Los Angeles, avoided digital, since the musical style worked better with analog tapes. Bowen's decision to move country music towards digital, while rock stayed with analog, led country into uncharted territory and also

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76. Thomas, "The Color of the Music," xvi.

77. These images exclude the tumultuous history of racial conflict, poverty, economic exploitation, inferior education, and sectional violence. Johnson, *Sleepwalking through History*, 116–25; For information about the nationalization of the South and country music, see Bill Malone and David Stricklin, *Southern Music/American Music,* rev. ed. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), and John Egerton, *The Americanization of Dixie: The Southernization of America* (New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1974).

helped make the genre seem contemporary. Bowen also moved the center of country music away from Los Angeles and New York to Nashville, country's new southern home.[78] These developments served to update the industry and also to create a new, modern, and progressive image for country music.

To accompany its progressive and modern stance, the South in country music also became hip and cool. Rosanne Cash, daughter of country music legend Johnny Cash, embodied the trendy new country music. "Seven Year Ache" (1981), the title song for her album of the same name, hit number one on country music charts, stayed on the charts for eighty weeks, and also appeared on the pop chart's top twenty. Cash dressed like a rock star, her hair went from black to purple to orange, and in performances she wore younger and fashionable attire such as rhinestone bandanas with evening gowns and spiked hair.[79] This differed from women in previous time periods who either presented themselves as either the girl next door, cowgirls, mothers, or rural farm women. Cash was "ladylike," presented herself as middle class and urban (not as a farmwife), and in doing so helped the country music South become cool.

The image of the South also became redeemed and beyond. The region reconciled its relationship with the North (Mandrell sang "Battle Hymn of the Republic" in her Vegas show "The Lady is a Champ") and in some ways became seen as superior.[80] For example, in the film

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78. Jimmy Bowen and Jim Jerome, *Rough Mix* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 144–45, 195–97; Ralph Emery with Patsi Bale Cox, *50 Years down a Country Road* (New York: William Morrow, 2000), 279–81.

79. Dellar, Cackett, and Thompson, *Harmony Illustrated Encyclopedia,* 31; Bob Allen, "Rosanne Cash and Rodney Crowell: Both Sides Now," *Journal of Country Music* 10, no. 2 (1985): 23; Mary Bufwack, "Girls with Guitars and Fringe and Sequins and Rhinestones, Silk, Lace, and Leather," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 94, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 208.

80. Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice,* 397. It is very popular for men's country music to celebrate southern pride and the belief that the South is becoming superior to the North. This trend intensified as the decade progressed; not only was the South hip, it and country music were both more popular. In the early 1980s other evidence of this could be seen in *Honky Tonk Man* (1982), a film produced, directed, and starring Clint Eastwood that portrays a country music singer looking for fame. *Tender Mercies*, the story of an old country music

The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas (1982), Melvin P. Thorpe (Dom DeLuise), a TV personality and "Yankee" liar with a huge ego, attempted to change the South with his northern phony morality. *The Best Little Whorehouse* portrayed him as less masculine than his rival, the southern sheriff played by Burt Reynolds. The sheriff's masculinity was further elevated through his relationship with the town's madam, played by curvaceous Dolly Parton. Thorpe, on the other hand, wore a sock in his pants and had feminine hair and mannerisms, flamboyant clothing, and a corset; at one point the sheriff called him a "farcified fart." Moreover, southern women, including Parton, expected the sheriff to protect them. When he fought Thorpe, they screamed and seemed sexually aroused. The sheriff personified the masculine South, big gun and all. This interpretation of the South differed from the gothic or rural characterizations of past periods. Previously, films like *Deliverance* (1972) showed a depraved South where masculinity appeared to be under attack. However, by the early 1980s the South had become masculine and strong, worthy of celebration.[81]

Film in general used similar strategies, and males in film became increasingly masculine. This move mirrored Reagan's manly image, in contrast to effeminate depictions of former president Carter. One of the major ideological projects of the 1980s became the recuperation of traditional masculinity, and Reagan's ideology and rhetoric became reflected in films like *Best Little Whorehouse.* Moreover, films like *First Blood* (1982) elevated men (like *Best Little Whorehouse*), justified aggressive American foreign policy, and attacked feminism and women's power. Macho films and the Reagan Revolution also both sought to put men back where they

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singer attempting to rebuild his career, won Robert Duvall an Academy Award for Best Actor. Stein, "Living Right and Being Free," 78.

81. *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*, prod. Robert L. Boyett, dir. Colin Higgins, 114 min., RKO Pictures, 1982, videocassette.

belonged: "on a throne, holding a bazooka and talking tough while exposing their big, beefy, American chests."[82] In these ways, the early 1980s became an era of male bodies and masculinity. Reagan, the "Celebrity in Chief," saved masculinity and America from feminism, military defeat in Vietnam, and "girly" pessimism and presented instead a heroic male figure. Popular culture, and most notably films, became sites for political reordering. As country music infiltrated film, it presented a masculine South that female performers supported. If they supported the manly South, then they in turn could be construed as supporting the president and conservative politics as well.[83]

Female singers used religion as well to link them to the South. In their songs and performances, they presented religious affiliation as a southern quality, and they consistently used rural church imagery in their lyrics and shows. Historically, the South followed its own patterns of religious development that distinguished it from other regions. The South generally did not accept Social Gospel beliefs about using Christianity to help others and instead clung to ideas of individualism and personal responsibility. When northern and western churches gradually became more liberal in the twentieth century, southern churches turned towards fundamentalism and conservatism. Country music reflected these trends during the 1980s and helped create the myth of a rural, traditional South that preserved its most cherished traditions in spite of national change and regional prosperity.[84] Of course, this presented a contradiction in country music's depictions of the South. In some cases women performers presented the South

82. Susan Douglass and Meredith Michaels, "Up Where We Belong," *Nation* 258, no. 15 (April 18, 1994: 527–28.

83. Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 6-14; Edward D. C. Campbell, *The Celluloid South: Hollywood and the Southern Myth* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), xiii.

84. Gene Edward Veith and Thomas L. Wilmeth, *Honky Tonk Gospel: The Story of Sin and Salvation in Country Music* (New York: Baker Books, 2001): 79–83.

as progressive or redeemed, but in religion it remained traditional, conservative, and rural. In this way the early 1980s construction of the South differed from previous depictions. In the 1970s country music portrayed religion as a southern trait but did not attempt to simultaneously represent the South as modern.

Performance reviews tended to mention how singers used the South and religion in their concerts, attempts to give the music legitimacy and to link it to traditional ideas of the South. Many women performed outside of the South with overly produced and pop-oriented stage shows; therefore, they used religion to keep them tied to a country fan base. A review of Parton's concert at the Riviera hotel in Las Vegas claimed the show appeared "country" and "southern," and that "faith, in particular, wove its way through the entire performance."[85] On her television show, Mandrell frequently spoke of her faith, an act that won her the praise of numerous writers. Women performers commonly thanked God for their success or spoke of their religious backgrounds. Mandrell repeatedly attributed her success to God's love and also claimed that God wanted her to sing country music instead of gospel so that she could reach more prospective converts.[86] These religious proclamations almost always accompanied discussions of traditional southern values and the simple yet strong principles of southern congregations.

Religion also helped justify previously unacceptable behaviors for country music women. For example, *The Best Little Whorehouse* referenced Mary Magdalene and showed the madam with a Bible, both of which rationalized prostitution. Reynolds claimed that God forgave all people, so why should anyone have a problem with women who engaged in sex work? To

85. CMHOF, Dolly Parton Fan Club Folder, Dolly Newsletter, July 1981.

86. Curtis Ellison, "Keeping Faith: Evangelical Performance in Country Music," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 94, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 145–46.

complicate the issue further, *Best Little Whorehouse* then included a scene in which Reynolds told the governor to not legislate morality and to not confuse sin with crime, statements somewhat at odds with Bible Belt fundamentalism. Parton's character agreed with these theories, an action that previously could have led to criticism.[87] But country music women used religious icons in their performances and attacked only the most stereotypical southern religious behaviors, strategies that linked them to the South and its religion, but also to others who saw southern faith as too fundamentalist and restricting.

The use of religion in female country music reflected larger trends in the early 1980s. This era witnessed the beginning of the huge growth in televangelists and a rise in their exposure and power. Between 1980 and 1984 the number of televangelists on TV dramatically increased, not only in terms of their visibility, but in their influence as well. Regular television appearances and modern fund-raising techniques meant more followers and a larger audience gave televangelists financial security and leverage in national politics. Historically, evangelical Christians generally did not become overly involved in politics; however, by the early 1980s they transformed into the most politically active religious group. Public support gave religious leaders political capital, and by 1980, the Religious Right had become a major component in neoconservatism and factored significantly in the GOP's success. After 1980, evangelical leaders gained legitimacy through their access to the Oval Office and to Reagan, who endorsed their basic beliefs. They, like him, discussed economics, conservative values, morals, religion, and patriotism. They also sanctioned his politics. For example, Jerry Falwell of the Moral Majority stated, "The Equal Rights Amendment strikes at the foundation of our entire social structure," a view Reagan and other conservatives shared. The Conservative Caucus expanded

87. *Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*, film.

on this issue and deemed the ERA one of "the most destructive pieces of legislation to ever pass Congress." Falwell also supported Reagan's economic programs with his interpretations of scripture. For instance, in the early 1980s he claimed that the Book of Proverbs outlined the free enterprise system. Most Moral Majority leaders had southern connections as well, a development that linked them to the newfound popularity of the South, its influence on Republican politics, and concepts of southern religious traditions. They embodied the latest visions of the Sunbelt, a place of wealth and modernity combined with old-time values and morals. Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker of South Carolina controlled the Heritage USA theme park, used the television effectively, and had opulent homes. Jimmy Swaggart of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Jerry Falwell of Lynchburg, Virginia, Marion (Pat) Robertson of Virginia Beach, and Oral Roberts of Tulsa, Oklahoma, all used similar strategies and succeeded. Southern religion became popular, national, and wealthy; country music women linked themselves to these trends and reaped the benefits.[88]

By 1983 women in country music would again change their personas and performances. The early 1980s were significant years for women in country music, both in terms of fame and commercial success; however, the tactics women used to achieve stardom eventually became cliché. Pop country, or countrypolitan, and its accompanying images served women well; but in the mid 1980s this style of country would slowly come under attack. As political and social conservatism increased, women learned that the road to success would have to include even more traditional constructions of femininity, increasing emphasis on whiteness, a return to working-class depictions, and rural depictions of the South. Moreover, Country Music Television and The Nashville Network would each visually introduce country's leading ladies to

88. Johnson, *Sleepwalking through History,* 196–203; Faludi, *Backlash,* 232–38; Stein, "Living Right and Being Free," 81–83.

millions of viewers, thereby creating an atmosphere in which every move could be scrutinized, accepted, or attacked. Once again, in the mid-1980s women in country music would adopt new images of gender, race, class, and the South and contribute to the continued popularity of the music and its changing styles.

CHAPTER TWO

VIDEO KILLED THE URBAN COWGIRL, 1983–1986

In 1983, female country music performers enjoyed their third straight year topping the charts with pop-inspired sounds and glamorous personas. Women singers had no reason to believe the trend was over; in fact, it seemed only to improve. President Ronald Reagan attended the 1983 Country Music Awards (CMA) show, Robert Duvall won an Academy Award in 1984 for the country-inspired *Tender Mercies*, and both Country Music Television (CMT) and The Nashville Network (TNN) began broadcasting country music and its values into millions of homes. Stars like Barbara Mandrell and Dolly Parton had crossover success, middle-class acceptance, and seemingly never-ending strings of hits on radio and the silver screen. Television, film, and presidential endorsements all became vehicles for exposure, and women in country music used each to their advantage.[1]

By 1985, however, the upward trend in country ended. Record sales slipped by 75 million a year, and a number-one country single fell from approximately 350,000 units to 100,000. The revamped Nashville Sound, or "countrypolitan," became old and presumably more pop than country, an association fans resented. Women singers suffered under the backlash against the glitz and glam of the early 1980s, and many performers who experienced success between 1980 and 1982 struggled to remain on the charts at all.[2]

Then, in 1986, stars reversed the downward cycle and bounced back with new looks and refurbished sounds. Women returned to more traditional styles and started presenting themselves as unabashedly country, southern, working class, and family-oriented. These moves

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[1]. Country Music Foundation, *Country: The Music and the Musicians, From the Beginnings to the '90s* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1994), 362–63.

[2]. Bill Malone, *Country Music, USA*, 2nd ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 371–74.

coincided with larger political and social trends, namely more overt conservatism and the intensifying backlash against feminism and the civil rights movement.[3] The image changes succeeded, and women again returned to the tops of country's charts. They also won back the support of fans who felt betrayed by the early 1980s "countrypolitan" style.

The mid-1980s served as transitional years for women in country music, a time when singers worked out their public identities. During this era female performers tried on new personas and styles: some remained true to pop country, others appeared with unique and controversial looks, and others adopted older strategies. By 1987 one thing was clear: the early 1980s images and sounds no longer led to success. To reestablish their places in country music, women moved away from the showy and crossover-focused early 1980s and towards more "traditional" images. These new looks and performance styles, which the industry labeled "neotraditional," proved successful, and by 1986 most women in country music adhered to them. Traditional for country music meant a focus on home, family, and womanly duties. Women stood by their men, presented themselves as working-class performers from the rural South, displayed adamant pride in their southern homes, stressed their whiteness, and deemphasized their sexuality and financial success. These changes became evident in their physical appearances and in the revamped focus on blue grass–inspired music, performances, and videos.

New looks for women in country music corresponded to changes in the American political landscape. As the nation became increasingly politically conservative, women in country music retreated into older, more "traditional" roles. Religious fundamentalism and its links to the Republican Party, the Cold War, and the backlashes against feminism and the civil rights movement all affected female performers. Other popular culture forms like television,

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[3]. Ibid.

film, and rock music reflected these changes as well, as each genre relegated women to the domestic sphere or punished them for overstepping boundaries. Media and society discouraged independence for American women, conservatism blamed women and minorities for many of society's problems, and in response country music changed.

Political conservatism did not solely influence women's return to tradition. New media outlets, which broadcasted more videos, concerts, and country-inspired shows, contributed as well. CMT debuted in March 1983 and allowed millions of viewers visual access to country music's leading ladies. Other music channels like Music Television (MTV) served as the network's inspirations and CMT strove to give country fans the videos that made rock performers stars. Initially, country videos involved simple clips shot by producers set to music; however, this format improved immediately, and after a few months CMT showed 120–130 videos per week. By November 1983 the station had signed contracts with twelve major advertisers and by 1984 had over seven million subscribers. The music industry responded favorably as well. In 1985 videos became so successful that the Country Music Association (CMA) added an award for "Video of the Year." By the end of 1986 all major country labels committed to videos.[4]

Forty-eight hours after CMT's debut, TNN joined it as a country-focused channel. Executives designed TNN, a joint venture of WSM and Group W Satellite Communications in Stamford, Connecticut, to center on Nashville and to showcase country music and the country way of life. On March 7, 1983, Ralph Emery introduced the network with the statement,

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[4]. Country Music Foundation, *Country Music Television Programming, 1948–1987: A Preliminary Survey* (unpublished source, prepared for Group W Communications), Country Music Hall of Fame Archives, 1987; Hal Himmelstein, *Television, Myth, and the American Mind*, 2nd ed. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), 2–5; Mary A. Bufwack and Robert K. Oermann, *Finding Her Voice: The Sage of Women in Country Music* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1993), 483.

"Welcome to the Nashville Network! It's a coast-to-coast party and we've invited twenty million people to join us." Emery's enthusiasm proved correct; country music historians see the network's debut as important as the date the Grand Ole Opry went on the air in 1925. It premiered with the largest audience of any cable network, with some 21 million viewers representing seven million homes and 725 different cable systems. TNN had an eighteen-hour schedule of all country TV programming and repeatedly ranked as America's most-watched cable channel. By September 1986 TNN had approximately 27 million subscribers, up from 24 million in July 1985.[5]

TNN offered viewers a variety of country-related programs that included performers and fans alike. Concerts, talk shows, situation comedies, interviews and news programs all gave country musicians exposure. TNN broadcasted weekly concerts from the Grand Ole Opry; songwriter series like *Bobby Bare and Friends*; *I-40 Paradise*, a country situation comedy; the country-music dance program *Dancin' USA*; *Fandango*, a game show with country trivia; and *Yesteryear in Nashville*, a music history show. TNN also included *Crook and Chase*, a news program that reported on stars, music concerts, and performances. Ralph Emery's *Nashville Now*, which debuted in 1983, became one of the most popular music and interview programs and arguably the most significant show in TNN's lineup.[6]

Other television networks also promoted women country music performers. *Austin City Limits*, a Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) program, showcased country music from Austin, Texas, home of country's Outlaw movement. The show premiered in 1976 and became

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[5]. Ralph Emery with Patsi Bale Cox, *50 Years down a Country Road* (New York: William Morrow, 2000), 265–67; Country Music Foundation, *Country Music Television Programming, 1948–1987*; Himmelstein, *Television, Myth, and the American Mind*, 2–5.

[6]. Emery, *50 Years down a Country Road*, 265–67.

increasing popular as the 1980s progressed. By 1987 it was the longest-running PBS musical series in history. *Austin City Limits* had ties to "traditional" or "hard" country music, and its success in this period was a testament to country's acceptance of older styles. It also became a place where newer, more mainstream female stars introduced themselves. In this way, by the mid-1980s, the show no longer represented a small segment of country's audience; it became increasingly mainstream. In addition, country awards shows honored performers in front of national audiences. The CMA Awards Show aired live each year from the Grand Ole Opry and became country music's premier annual broadcast. The Academy of Country Music (ACM) had a yearly show as well that aired on NBC. These shows, along with those on TNN and the videos on CMT, made images more important than ever before.[7]

Television, and to a lesser degree film, gave women in country music publicity; however, in doing so it also exposed them to new kinds of critiques. Country women appeared on television in the early 1980s as well, *Barbara Mandrell and the Mandrell Sisters* for example; but by the mid-1980s they experienced more and different types of exposure. Fans had different expectations in this period, and evening gowns and elaborate stage shows did not fit in with networks that sold a "country" way of life. Nor did early 1980s country performances compliment the increasing political and religious conservatism that used television so effectively. Television and conservatism helped usher in a transitional period for female performers and for performers, the mid-1980s became an intermediary interlude characterized by a search for more acceptable styles.

Television helped construct myths and created a discourse that involved authenticity, power, and dominant ideology. Women used television to construct images that would adhere to

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[7]. Country Music Foundation, *Country Music Television Programming, 1948–1987*, 31–32, 36–37.

social norms and traditions. As the popularity of videos and television shows increased, so too did the need to present a more "authentic" image to an increasingly conservative audience and nation.[8] Authenticity in country music became associated with conservatism, traditional values, religious fundamentalism, ruralism, whiteness, glorification of the South, and the working class. Conservatives linked themselves to these ideas as well. Through television, women in country music showed their audiences their authenticity, traditionalism, and acceptance of conservative politics.[9]

Conservative rhetoric endorsed women's retreat to traditional roles in both country music and popular culture. In the mid-1980s, women in country music stopped depicting themselves as independent or sexual and typically gained agency through their husbands and homes. Other prime-time hits like *The Cosby Show, Family Ties,* and *Growing Pains* pursued similar strategies, namely the focus on the family, and in doing so attained success. Most situation comedies had patriarchs who controlled nuclear families; and if women had careers, which on occasion they did, they focused primarily on motherhood and rarely challenged sexism or the status quo. Television, and other media formats influenced women in country music and helped mold their new constructed personas.[10]

Gender

Aligning themselves with conservatism and distancing themselves from the independent performers of the early 1980s, female singers began to appear more emotional, a "feminine" and

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[8]. Emery, *50 Years down a Country Road*, 265–67; Country Music Foundation, *Country Music Television Programming, 1948–1987*; Himmelstein, *Television, Myth, and the American Mind*, 2–5.

[9]. Bonnie J. Dow, *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women's Movement Since 1970* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 86–98; Himmelstein, *Television, Myth and the American Mind*, 2–11.

[10]. Dow, *Prime-Time Feminism,* 86–98.

older country music trait. In 1984 Barbara Mandrell became the victim of an automobile accident that killed the teenage driver at fault. Mandrell herself was hospitalized for nineteen days and suffered a severe concussion and leg injuries. While the accident did not represent a deliberate attempt on Mandrell's part to attract sympathy, her actions afterward did seem designed to make her appear expressive, and thereby more womanly. After she recovered, Mandrell participated in many press conferences where she reassured fans that she did not intend to quit country music. She also openly cried and spoke of her sympathy for the victim's family and her relief that her two children did not get hurt. In addition, Mandrell claimed she had always loved her fans, but did not realize until the accident how much they loved her. The next year Mandrell, who at this point was very pregnant, cried almost hysterically as she made her first performance on the Grand Ole Opry stage.[11] Mandrell rarely displayed this type of emotionalism. When the CMA honored her in the early 1980s with numerous awards, she never shed a tear; nor did she cry on her highly rated television show, *Barbara Mandrell and the Mandrell Sisters*. In fact, to many she generally appeared somewhat cool and unemotional. However, by the mid-1980s she adhered to different, more conservative, standards in her television appearances. The backlash against feminism led many women to return to traditional roles, Mandrell included. Success required a focus on traditional femininity, in this case emotionalism, to lessen women's power. For this reason Mandrell had to develop a new persona to please country's mid-1980s fans.

Conservatism in country music also incorporated a stronger, more overt emphasis on motherhood. For example, Mandrell used her fan club newsletters as platforms to describe her

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[11]. CMHOF, VHS 0186, "News Coverage of Mandrell's 1st Press Conference after her September 84 Accident"; CMHOF, VHS 0658, Channel 4 Magazine, "Coverage of 1985 Music City News Awards, Interview with Barbara Mandrell."

children, their lives, and her activities with them. Moreover, to make her stories personal, she referred to them by name: "Nathan needs lunch and I like to fix it," or "Matt had to get stitches but will be fine and is leaving for church summer camp soon." During her 1986 "Get to the Heart" tour, she wrote from the road about her six-month-old son who traveled with her. Her public appearances served as displays of motherhood and femininity as well. During her pregnancy Mandrell became highly emotional and seemed to deliberately emphasize her stomach. She frequently wore baby doll–style dresses, short, lacy, unstructured attire that made her look both pregnant and childlike. She was also consistently photographed wearing an "I'm not fat, I'm pregnant!" button. This, along with her comments, reminded her audience that she was first a mother and had not left her place. Moreover, her behavior tied her to country music's long-standing "cult of motherhood," a concept that exalted mothers and accepted their performances only if they stayed within the bounds of motherhood, meaning as long as they identified as mothers first. This contrasted with the immediately preceding era, when women rarely mentioned their children and instead presented themselves as glamorous, sensual, and feminine superstars worthy of attention and sexual advances. In many ways Mandrell transformed herself into a spectacle for the male gaze, her performance serving to lessen the threat her independence and economic value insinuated. Furthermore, she adhered to the concept that "woman," at best, meant an ideal, asexual, and nurturing mother.[12]

Mandrell and other women also presented themselves as homemakers, a theme related to motherhood. At her annual Fan Fair breakfast, Mandrell created the "Homemaker Game," in which three men competed in diapering dolls, paying bills, making lunches, and washing dishes

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[12]. CMHOF, Barbara Mandrell Folder, Barbara Mandrell International Fan Club, March 1986; CMHOF, VHS 0658, Channel 4 Magazine, coverage of 1985 Music City News Awards, Interview With Barbara Mandrell; Bill C. Malone, *Don't Get above Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 59–60.

for a panel of all-female judges. She intended to show women's superiority at all domestic tasks, even if they did also have successful music careers. Moreover, Mandrell's game reinforced a type of gender essentialism, namely that women possessed innate homemaking abilities. In addition, her display condoned a particular sexual division of labor, one in which women belonged in homes, even if they simultaneously had careers. To further emphasize her feminine qualities, Mandrell labeled her Fan Fair booth, which won her first place in the judging and also allowed her to sign autographs for five and a half hours, "Barbara Mandrell Fans Are Sweet" and then covered it in candy, a feminine, domestic, and nonthreatening approach. The marathon autograph session also proved her devotion, another quality that connected her to traditional constructions of domestic femininity.[13]

Mandrell's booth and its candy theme represented another facet of the homemaker ideal, women and their associations with food. To create images as homemakers, female country performers began emphasizing their connections to food and cooking. In a television commercial for Swift Premium Brown and Serve sausage, Mandrell and her sisters claimed, in a country kitchen setting, that they loved fast country sausage, a statement that showed their domesticity. Not only did they love the taste, but they happily cooked it themselves. Other performers associated themselves with food as well; for example, the Forester Sisters included recipes in their fan club newsletter.[14] These attempts, which showcased the performer's female

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[13]. CMHOF, Barbara Mandrell Folder, Barbara Mandrell International Fan Club, June 1986; Lorianne Crook and Charlie Chase, with Mickey Herskowitz, *Crook and Chase: Our Lives, the Music, and the Stars* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1995), 131–33.

[14]. CMHOF, Forester Sisters Box; CMHOF, American Music Awards, January 27, 1986; E. Ann Kaplan, *Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism, and Consumer Culture* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 56–64.

qualities (as opposed to their careers), bonded women performers with their female and male fans.

Ironically, the images of country women as homemakers coincided with the fact that they actually worked, performed, and traveled extensively to support their albums. Since trends in country music generally incorporated more conservatism and traditionalism than other genres, women needed to diffuse the power they gained from work with constant references to their "places." Furthermore, they attempted to make their work seem less like labor, more childlike, as more of a distraction or hobby rather than a career. Their jobs, according to their images, involved mothering and homemaking; all else became secondary. To bridge the gaps between successful mother, homemaker, and star/breadwinner, singers like Barbara Mandrell regularly mentioned their supportive husbands and happy homes. In Mandrell's case, her husband managed her finances (women cannot do math or hire an accountant?) and therefore maintained a conventionally masculine role. Her children also traveled with her, thereby preventing any claims that she had abandoned them. Mandrell worked but did not neglect her duties, nor did she receive too much power from her career.[15] She also buttressed masculinity; in particular, she reinforced the belief in her husband's patriarchal status. Previously, women displayed their success through huge stage shows and bold performances. Now they attributed much of their success to others.

Along with motherhood and the home, women also emphasized family values. In 1983, before the Judds released their first single, they went on a tour of country radio stations where they promoted their song and their strong mother/daughter relationship. Naomi Judd, the mother, recalled their first radio appearance, "The first catchy words out of the DJ's mouth were

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[15]. Crook and Chase, *Crook and Chase: Our Lives, the Music, and the Stars*, 131–33.

'too bad this is radio folks, cause you gotta see this mother/daughter duo to believe it! They look like sisters and have red hair!'" In 1984 the Judds made their first televised appearance on *Hee Haw*, a rite of passage for country stars. After their performance, Naomi discussed her previous career as a nurse and how it helped her as a single mother. She also claimed that even though her daughter and partner Wynonna was grown and successful, she still felt a "strong parental responsibility toward her" and was always "her mother first." This image as a tight-knit family contributed to their success, and their first single, 1983's "Had a Dream," received rave reviews. Their music and personas impressed fans who saw them as an affectionate team with a great relationship.[16]

To further highlight their family relationship, the Judds recorded and performed songs with family-oriented themes. *Why Not Me*, their first full-length album, included the single "Mama He's Crazy," a conversation between mother and daughter about a love affair. In the song the daughter tells her mother "I found someone, like you said would come along" and that she disregarded her mother's advice to "look before you leap." These lyrics insinuate a close relationship between two women who have discussed love and its consequences before. To further emphasize their strong family values, the duo filmed the video at their home and wore their own clothes, both strategies that implied domesticity and simplicity. The "Mama He's Crazy" video was the Judds' first foray into the video genre, and they found it to be an easy way to reach fans and to spread their message. Their 1985 album *Rockin' with the Rhythm* included "Grandpa (Tell Me 'bout the Good Old Days)," another single that focused on family and home. "Grandpa" featured Wynonna asking her grandfather to tell her about simpler times and included

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[16]. Sam Lovullo and Marc Eliot, *Life in the Kornfield: My Twenty-Five Years at* Hee Haw (New York: Boulevard Books, 1996), 171–72; Naomi Judd, *Love Can Build a Bridge* (New York: Villard Books, 1993), 269–78.

the traditional country tropes of religion, families that stuck together through tough episodes, and rural values. These songs won the Judds critical acclaim, proof that their audiences appreciated the music and the themes. Naomi and Wynonna also received the CMA's Horizon Award in 1984, an honor given to the most promising new group. In 1985 they won a Grammy for Best Duo or Group for "Mama He's Crazy" and received a nomination for Best New Artist and Song the same year, a feat that only one country act had accomplished before. "Grandpa" won them CMA's Vocal Group of the Year award in 1986, and they won a Grammy for the song in 1987.[17] Their emphasis on family values, along with their considerable talent, helped jump-start what would become a long and successful career in country music.

In spite of the Judds' outward appearance, they did have a few family dramas and conflicts. Musically, Wynonna seemed to channel artists like Elvis with her vibrato vocal techniques and bodily movements, while Naomi relied more on sweeter, less aggressive songs and actions. In terms of fashion, Naomi presented herself as overtly feminine with short, ruffled dresses, while Wynonna, who frequently appeared in black leather and jeans, dressed more masculine and rockabilly. These differences led to conflicts within the duo, as they struggled not only to make a name for themselves but also to create a unified image. Naomi and Wynonna fought constantly, a fact frequently documented in Naomi's autobiography. Moreover, the family-oriented persona they presented to the public did not apply to Naomi's youngest daughter, Ashley. The singing duo virtually ignored Ashley, although Naomi claimed this was due to Ashley's shyness, not other factors. Naomi also wrote that Ashley did not need parental attention; she could take care of herself, and Naomi "allowed" her to be in a few videos and paid

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[17]. Judd, *Love Can Build a Bridge*, 283, 296–97, 302, 323, 356, 363; CMHOF, American Music Awards, January 27, 1986; CMHOF, Cohn and Wolfe Marlboro Country Music Videos, VHS, 1984; The Judds, *Why Not Me*, RCA, 1984; The Judds, *Rockin' with the Rhythm*, RCA, 1985.

her to clean the tour bus. Regardless of their problems, the Judds did present a strong family image to the public. To counter any criticism, both mother and daughter assured fans that they were in fact devoted to their family. In *Love Can Build a Bridge* Naomi wrote, "I believe whatever appeal we have goes beyond the music. I think women see themselves in us … They've seen Wy and me successfully working out our particularly difficult parent-child relationship."[18] Fans had to see them as a united family, and this became an essential element in their success. Women performers in the mid-1980s learned that they had to project family values, even if the values did not necessarily represent reality.

In addition, the Judds presented themselves as both traditional and feminist, although their version of feminism focused on female unity, not critiques of sexism or exploitation. This duality represented another example of women performers working out their images in the transitional mid-1980s. In interviews and other public appearances, Naomi Judd reminded her fans of her background as a nurse (nurturing) and her difficult experiences as a single mother raising two young children. Naomi divorced her husband in the early 1970s when she was poor, unemployed, and uneducated, but managed to raise her children without male support and also embarked upon a variety of careers. However, Naomi always asserted her motherhood first, describing her employment as secondary. Moreover, both Wynonna and Naomi claimed they intentionally avoided being cast as victims and instead wanted to be seen as strong, successful women. Each knew from experience how it felt to be "over domesticated, trapped, fearful, and uncreative."[19] In spite of these statements, both women still fell into, or played into, stereotypes. They depicted themselves as working-class women who knew the difficulties of single parents;

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[18]. Judd, *Love Can Build a Bridge* (New York: Villard Books, 1993), 302–4, 315, 326, 365.

[19]. Ibid., 269–74, 315, 326, 365–66; David Sanjek, "Muddying the Clear Water: The Dubious Transparency of Country Music," in McCusker and Pecknold, *A Boy Named Sue*, vii–viii.

but instead of criticizing the system, they adopted the characteristics of long-suffering women who overcame hardships. They wanted to be seen as simultaneously strong and as dependent on the other. They neglected to focus on the reality of their lives as a family that traveled all over the country as Naomi searched for employment or their roles as touring country performers, since these would have linked them to the Jimmie Rodgers concept of rambling, an unacceptable role for women in country music. Instead they focused on a mix of feminism, family, and tradition.

The above cases exemplify what can be described as a new version of feminism for women in country music. This home-grown brand of feminism came from, and gained power through, domesticity and experiences related to homemakers and mothers. It celebrated female culture and focused on female unity and sisterhood. This represented a friendly form of feminism, which did not directly challenge patriarchy. It differed dramatically from radical feminism or the fight for the Equal Rights Amendment in the early 1980s. Country's embrace of this version of female empowerment exemplified the new conservative focus on submissiveness and traditional roles for women.

Other performers also encountered conflicts between their images and reality. Mandrell, for example, experienced a few contradictions in her public persona and her personal life. In 1986 Mandrell wrote a personal letter in her Fan Club newsletter that described the taping of her CBS Christmas special, which was the first time she had performed with her sisters Louise and Irlene since 1982. She wrote that it was "her show" and that her sisters were "her guests," as were the other members of her immediate family. These comments, along with others, indicated what many had long suspected: sibling rivalry.[20] Mandrell, like the Judds, knew how to diffuse

this situation. When asked, Mandrell spoke of her family loyalty and her close relationships with her siblings.

Even as women depicted themselves as belonging to strong families, on occasion they also presented themselves as helpless victims. This image made them appear as vulnerable women, which diffused their power and also allowed them to create direct relationships with their fans. Women could plead for help, and their fans obliged. Mandrell used this tactic a great deal; she repeatedly asked fans to write letters, to pray, and to let music executives know they believed in her. For example, before the premiere of her made-for-TV movie *Burning Rage*, Mandrell wrote a personal letter in her fan club magazine asking her fans not only to view, but to respond to the show. She ended the letter with a plea to fans to write CBS to let executives know she still had an audience. She wrote that the letters would "help her," a phrase Mandrell used repeatedly throughout the mid-1980s in her letters to fans.[21] At times these pleas seemed uncomfortable, almost desperate. The statements did not reflect an award-winning performer with her own television show and hit records, but instead the worried cries of a *woman* in need of help.

The shift to more traditional presentations in many ways can be described as a move from one female stereotype to another. From 1980 to 1983 country performers adhered to traits associated with southern ladies: mid- to upper-class, feminine, girlish, sensual but coy, and nonthreatening. After 1983 country music performers adopted characteristics of the farmwife: a working-class southern icon of wifely devotion, family-related hard work, and keeper of tradition. The two did possess a few similarities, for example, good manners, demureness, kindness and gentleness, and the shared beliefs that southern women should be sensible and

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[20]. CMHOF, Barbara Mandrell Folder, Barbara Mandrell International Fan Club, November 1986.

[21]. Ibid.

practical and should strive to be perfect wives, devoted mothers, and impeccable homemakers. Both believed that women's goals should involve marriage and motherhood; however, these ideas became stronger and more apparent after 1983. Moreover, farmwives' disapproval of ladies also incorporated criticism of the previous period. Farmwives believed ladies neglected their duties since they allowed others to raise their children; many performers made references to early 1980s performers who "went pop" and deserted their fans. These "new traditionalists" of the mid-1980s believed their work represented the working class and expressed more authenticity than pop-country, and women performers made references to a return to tradition or the reemergence of "real" country.[22]

Reba McEntire personified the move from southern lady to farmwife. McEntire received her first record deal in the late 1970s but did not truly achieve commercial success until 1984, when she moved to MCA from Mercury/PolyGram. Her first album, *Just a Little Love*, exemplified pop rather than country and barely made the charts. Her next album however, *My Kind of Country*, represented complete "country" and moved her into country's mainstream. Not only did McEntire use more traditional music, she also altered her appearance. On the cover of *Just a Little Love*, McEntire dressed as a temptress in a frilly white Victorian dress; for *My Kind of Country*, she wore jeans and a huge belt buckle. To explain her transformation McEntire claimed she and her musicians wanted "to go traditional country—no I'll take that back—we wanted to go new country. We wanted to go new Loretta Lynn—to get new pickers, young pickers who are like me and want to stay country." McEntire not only described a change in style and music but also criticized the performers of the early 1980s. She became the farmwife, a "good ol' woman" with conventional values and taste in music, who criticized early 1980s

[22]. D. Harland Hagler, "The Ideal Woman in the Antebellum South: Lady or Farmwife?" *Journal of Southern History* 46, no. 3 (August 1980): 405–10.

ladies who presented themselves as middle class, pop, and less traditional. To further illustrate her point, her next album, *Have I Got a Deal for You,* which is now seen as a hard-country masterpiece, represented a more country version of country. Fans and critics agreed; both of her country albums resulted in her winning the 1984 and 1985 CMA awards for Female Vocalist of the Year. McEntire's move towards traditional country, classified as "neotraditionalism," became firmly established in the mid-1980s, and other performers like the Judds used the same tactics. The closer they moved to "traditional" country music, the more popular they became.[23]

The mid-1980s changes helped connect female performers to older and perceivably more authentic country acts. Since the advent of commercial country music in the 1920s, performers linked themselves to those before them in attempts to appear authentic and legitimate. This served to show that performers knew the history and traditions of country music, and it also linked them to country's past and added them to country music's story. Whereas in the early 1980s, singers associated themselves with the Nashville Sound, a more pop and middle-class period in country music, in the mid-1980s their images inspired comparisons to the Carter Family, a group thought to be more "authentic," more "country." The Carter Family, as its name implies, was a family act, another theme to which women allied themselves. Traditional, or "new traditional," became the new sound for the mid-1980s, and therefore women's roles became traditional as well.[24]

The move in country music toward more traditional displays coincided with political

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[23]. Country Music Foundation, *Country: The Music and the Musicians*, 377–378; Fred Dellar, Alan Cackett, and Roy Thompson, *The Harmony Illustrated Encyclopedia of Country Music* (New York: Harmony Books, 1986), 103; Reba McEntire, *Just a Little Love*, MCA, 1984; Reba McEntire, *My Kind of Country*, MCA, 1984; Reba McEntire, *Have I Got a Deal for You,* MCA, 1985.

[24]. Lovullo and Eliot, *Life in the Kornfield*, 171–72; David Sanjek, "Muddying the Clear Water: The Dubious Transparency of Country Music," in McCusker and Pecknold, *A Boy Named Sue*, vii–viii. There are two original "authentic" acts in country music, and both represent opposite ends of the spectrum. The Carter Family is home and tradition, whereas Jimmie Rodgers is the rambler, an unacceptable role for women.

trends that increasingly stressed conservatism and family values. In the early 1980s political culture shifted further away from the New Deal/New Left coalition toward conservatism, and that trend became more apparent as the decade progressed. By the mid-1980s traditional members of the Democratic Party, blue-collar workers, the lower middle class, and Christians adopted the Republican Party's *cultural* stance. These Americans, who usually embraced economic liberalism, simultaneously accepted conservative ideas about women's places.[25] Conservatism relegated women to the domestic sphere and also blamed working women for many of society's problems. According to the new political climate, women should be mothers or wives and in both cases remain passive. The images of women as submissive mothers or wives comforted many in a time of increasing military involvement, threats of nuclear conflict, and an impersonal society. These views also went hand in hand with concepts the Moral Majority and the Religious Right endorsed. The Religious Right attacked working women and claimed feminists worked to destroy the country.[26] As Americans accepted conservatism and rejected liberalism, country music women transformed themselves from overtly successful, glamorous show queens of the early 1980s into mothers and wives, shining examples of family values.

Conservatism could be seen in other popular culture forms; in particular, film reflected the trend with attacks on nonconformist women. *9½ Weeks* (1986) depicted a single career woman in need of control, and *Terms of Endearment* (1983) and *Tender Mercies* (1983) both focused on women (housewives) protecting their families from predatory lonely women. Even

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[25]. John Kenneth White, "What to Do? The Democratic Party in the 1980s," *Polity* 21, no. 3 (Spring 1989): 623.

[26]. Malone, *Don't Get above Your Raisin'*, 59–60; Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* (New York: Anchor Books, 1992), xiii, 116.

the strong female lead in *Aliens* (1986) invoked maternalism by protecting a child from female extraterrestrials. Hollywood love stories also increasingly showed the dangers of change, especially for women. C*hildren of a Lesser God* (1986) depicted a deaf woman's refusal to compromise, her eventual transformation, and the torment her change brought. Other films like *The Fly* (1986) took this theme further and showed change as a physical metamorphosis, in this case from a human to an insect. Even the farmwife ideal, which country music embraced, could be seen on the silver screen in films like *Places in the Heart* (1984).[27] Film, and country music as well, pushed women towards the domestic sphere or portrayed them as being punished when they overstepped conservative boundaries.

Other musical genres also adopted the ideals of conservatism. Heavy metal, for example, became hugely popular in the mid-1980s and expressed its own conservative worldview. Women rarely succeeded as heavy metal musicians; however, they made regular appearances in videos, usually as sexualized objects subject to the male gaze. These tendencies provided a fantasy world for males, especially working-class men, who felt powerless in their lives. Instead of attacking the system that oppressed them, they struck out against women.[28] This happened in country music as well; however, in country, women did perform. But while they performed, they lessened their power and adhered to the newer, more conservative standards.

The techniques in film and heavy metal, like the trends in country music, exemplified the increasing backlash against feminism and the women's movement. The Reagan administration had been hostile towards feminism since his inauguration, but as the decade progressed and as

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[27]. Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 391–402.

[28]. Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover, NH, and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 108–17.

his ties to the Religious Right became stronger, so did the backlash. In 1984, for example, former ambassador and member of the senior White House staff Faith Whittlesey delivered "Radical Feminism in Retreat," the Reagan White House's only speech on the status of American women. In this speech Whittlesey described feminism as a "straightjacket," hardly a pro-woman comment. For Whittlesey and other conservative Americans, the women's movement had encouraged women to leave their homes, in essence, to abandon their families and traditional roles. This rhetoric also included claims that most working women experienced unhappiness and that they longed to be back in their domestic spheres. To accompany and to reinforce these claims, conservatives also popularized the idea that public spaces presented dangers for women and that if women chose to enter them, they did so at their own risk. For example, in 1986 the U.S. Attorney General's Commission on Pornography suggested that women's increasing roles in the workplace could be responsible for the rising incidents of rape. Even some prior female activists fell victim to the backlash. For example, Germaine Greer, who wrote *The Female Eunuch* in 1970, a book on female independence and sexuality, became one of the casualties. In 1984 Greer published *Sex and Destiny*, which described the joys of arranged marriages, chastity, and the chador.[29]

Geraldine Ferraro's 1984 campaign for the vice presidency also exemplified the changing ideas toward women and their public personas. The Democrats' selection of a female candidate helped earn the new support of millions of female voters who contributed more money to Ferraro's campaign fund than women had ever donated before. In fact, for the first time a Democratic vice presidential candidate received as much in political contributions as did the presidential candidate. The campaign also inspired other politically minded women; the number

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[29]. Faludi, *Backlash*, xiii, 320.

of women running for the Senate tripled, and women in Congress reached record highs. In response, the Right attacked Ferraro not for her political ideology, but as a woman. They depicted her as incapable due to her femininity, criticized her husband and labeled him "weak," and circulated rumors about her sexuality. After the election, the Right's attacks affected Ferraro; she became convinced that running for office had not been fair to her husband and stated that she would not do it again. Ferraro experienced punishment for stepping out of her traditional role, and politicians, the media, media personalities, and those in the spotlight learned from her example.[30]

Attacks against women came from the political arena and from other social/political groups as well. In 1986 Randall Terry started Operation Rescue, an antiabortion organization that played on the fears of young, lower-class men who felt threatened by women in the workforce. These men spoke of father's rights and their loss of control. In reality, abortions decreased; however, reproductive freedom did increase women's power.[31] Operation Rescue's tactics, which reflected the ones used to silence Ferraro during her campaign, punished women who stepped out of bounds.

Women in country music witnessed their own forms of reprimands, with bodies that received criticism for being either too sexual or too out of control. Music writers participated, or fell in line with, the backlash and did not accept women with sexual or other types of power. Deborah Allen's risqué album cover earned her the following music review, "Deborah Allen is the unconditional winner of the Nashville Living, Breathing, Hot Number Sweepstakes. Ms. Allen, do you own any whips?" This came after numerous comments about her husband and

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[30]. Ibid., 267–69, 320, 401–3.

[31]. Ibid., 401–3.

included no discussion of her music. Allen did have a string of hits in 1984, most notably with "Baby I Lied" and "I've Been Wrong Before," but the review focused on her body instead of her successes.[32] By focusing on her body, the review mocked, criticized, and contained her sexuality, which could have been seen as giving her a certain type of power. Moreover, Allen's decision to use this album cover proved that she did not oppose objectifying her body. In many ways the cover distanced her from feminism and showed audiences that she did not consider herself to be part of the women's movement. However, she still received criticism, proving that audiences and the industry accepted domestic or maternal depictions more than sexual.

Dolly Parton's weight problem became the focus of many interviews, and she also received punishment for being overweight and simultaneously sexy. After a particularly lively and sensual performance on *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson*, Carson coerced her into discussing her film *Rhinestone* with Sylvester Stallone; yet instead of talking about the plot, the conversation focused on what her costar thought about her weight and her failed attempts to diet. Parton became nervous, fidgeted, and stumbled over her words. When asked about her food choices, Parton, in her signature self-depreciating fashion, commented on the Wonder bread and Velveeta in her refrigerator, which she described as staples of her nutritional regime. She then claimed that even though *Rhinestone* financially and professionally "flopped," it actually helped her (hard times are always transcended?) lose weight, since she appeared too heavy in the film. Afterwards she began a diet that included chewing food for long periods of time then spitting it out.[33] She arrived at the couch confident; yet as the interview progressed, she uncomfortably

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[32]. CMHOF, Deborah Allen, Fan Club Folder, *Deborah Allen–Front Row Features*, 1985; Vladimir Bogdanov, Chris Woodstra, and Stephen Thomas Erlewine, eds. *All Music Guide to Country: The Definitive Guide to Country Music* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), 8.

admitted to what can only be described as an eating disorder. She resorted to self-depreciating humor to diffuse the focus on her body.

Dottie West experienced a similar situation after a performance on TNN's *Nashville Now*. West appeared totally secure and displayed her confidence in her attire: she donned large blond hair, excessive makeup, electric-blue skintight spandex pants, sequined boots, a black sequined top, and silver belt! The performance included extreme and unflattering close-ups (a possible attempt to show her age), and afterwards the host, Ralph Emery, admired her outfit and her body, both of which became the focus of the interview. Emery asked her to stand even though she was visibly out of breath, and eventually West had to ask if she could be seated. When the conversation shifted from her body, it moved to men who helped her career and her views on a Pizza Hut commercial she recently starred in (she claimed it was unattractive to eat on TV), and Emery then asked about an accusation that she appeared in an adult magazine.[34] Her sexual confidence apparently had to be diffused; she received reprimands for her overt strength and confidence.

Tanya Tucker also experienced punishment for her sexuality and freedom. In 1985 Tucker claimed, "I was ready for Nashville … but Nashville wasn't ready for me," an appropriate statement in light of her declining popularity and regular appearances in tabloids. Reviews described her as washed up, she lost fans due to her relationship with an older man (Glen Campbell) and her drinking and drug use, and her record labels turned against her. Tucker signed with Capitol in 1983, claiming it was the only label that would take her, and toured for

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[33]. Museum of Television and Radio (MTR), Los Angeles, *Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson,* NBC, June 15, 1984; Dolly Parton, *Dolly: My Life and Other Unfinished Business* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 253–55.

[34]. CMHOF, VHS 1211, *Nashville Now*, February 5, 1985; Tanya Tucker with Patsi Bale Cox, *Nickel Dreams: My Life* (New York: Hyperion, 1997), 203–13.

the first few years of her contract. She then had one hit single in 1986 titled "One Love at a Time." She still used drugs and partied, and as a result her music suffered. She would not release another album for years, and it would be even longer before she shed her bad-girl reputation.[35]

Within country music, the industry and fans generally did not see female bodies as authentic; therefore they became open to criticism and punishment. Fans and the industry equated authenticity with hard-core country; and even though women became more "country," they did not achieve hardness. As a genre, hard-core country was described as more traditional and more authentic than soft shell, a pop-influenced and presumably "un-country" country. To be hard meant to be authentic, and since country returned to tradition in this period, hard country became more acceptable than before. If women wanted acceptance in this environment, they would have to take on elements of hard core; however, the label also included associations with masculinity and all-male country culture, including drinking, hard living, and rambling. Fans perceived these activities as unacceptable for women and criticized those who participated in them. Moreover, in hard-core country the body was the principal locus of work, rebellion, excess, pain, and joy. Males expressed their hardness through rugged appearances, bodies that reflected the effects of alcohol and the road, and, in their songs and concerts, showed and discussed blood, sweat, and tears. In doing this the body increasingly became the badge of hard-core country, and it served to distinguish itself from other bodies, namely those associated with the intellectual/professional arena of middle-class culture. For women this shift posed numerous problems. Women historically, in terms of country music authenticity, had been restricted to the pure and natural or the carnivalesque; they had limited options in terms of hard or authentic

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[35]. Tucker, *Nickel Dreams*, 203–13.

country. In general their choices were virgins, matrons, whores, or jokes.[36] In the early 1980s female performers adopted images of teasing virgins, a construction connected to the upper class, and the association worked. However, between 1983 and 1986 country's audience demanded changes: fans wanted more authentic images. The only acceptable option for women performers became the traditional, passive, working-class matron in complete control of her body. The alternative involved taking on male roles, freeing the body, and suffering the consequences. In either case, passive or hard, women became more susceptible to punishment.

Ideas about bodily control within country music reflected other beliefs concerning women in the mid-1980s. By this time period the media co-opted feminism and portrayed women's liberation as being free to buy whatever one wanted. This freedom, however, did not apply to the body but only to consumerism. Bodies had to be either tamed through decorations or transformed with products or exercise. In essence, the female body became a site of consumerism, and if women resisted bodily conspicuous consumption, then they became subject to social disapproval. Televised commercials encouraged these ideas with advertisements designed to prompt women between the ages of eighteen and forty-nine, the prime consumer group, to buy beauty. For example, Cybill Shepherd's "I'm worth it" L'Oreal television campaign equated worth with consumerism; she and other women were important or worthy enough to buy cosmetics. The beauty industry also used "science" in their advertisements for anti-aging products "proven" to reduce wrinkles and other indicators of age. Other trends like home video recorders and Jane Fonda's workout tapes encouraged women to sculpt their bodies as visual examples of restraint and consumerism. Society expected bodies to show hard work

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[36]. Pamela Fox, "Recycled 'Trash': Gender and Authenticity in Country Music Autobiography," *American Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (1998): 246; Barbara Ching, *Wrong's What I Do Best: Hard Country Music and Contemporary Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 52–59.

and discipline and to ultimately indicate class and success. Society also identified overweight bodies, or bodies that did not exhibit consumerism, as lower class, out of control, and open for ridicule. Beauty standards also adopted an equivalent to Reagan's "trickle down" theory as magazines that targeted women in lower socioeconomic stratas increasingly used advertisements for products designed to help them change their bodies and push them towards middle-class values. By the mid-1980s, society encouraged women of all classes to conform. These styles of narcissism worked only if women felt empty and therefore could be compelled to purchase products to fill their voids and buy happiness.[37] The never-ending focus on consumerism accompanied a constant focus on the body and also on bodily control.

This period also witnessed a renewed focus on sexual control, especially for women. Exercise and beauty products became tools to create sexy appearances, but women could obtain only certain types of sexual power. In essence, sex could not imply women had power; they had to remain passive, decorated ornaments for the pleasure of men. In order to be submissive, the female body could not experience pleasure; therefore, women continuously strove for a perfection that they could never truly enjoy.[38] Females in country music had to contend with these changing standards as well. They had to be attractive, but not too attractive. They had to be sexual, but received criticism if they overstepped their bounds.

The new ideas about beauty, bodily control, and sexuality represented a reconfigured discourse for women in and outside of country music. Due to the women's movement, women in the early 1980s enjoyed more freedom and more opportunities in employment and also in

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[37]. Susan J. Douglass, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Times Books, 1995), 245–68; John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 93; Dow, *Prime-Time Feminism*, xix–xx.

[38]. Laura Kipnis with Jennifer Reader, "White Trash Girl: The Interview," in *White Trash :Race and Class in America,* ed. Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 114–15.

entertainment. However, during the mid-1980s the backlash against the women's movement intensified, and women experienced new restraints. Bodily restrictions symbolized social control, and conservatives attempted to manage women and their behaviors. The body personified social and sexual norms and therefore, when it displayed freedom, became the site of punishment and discipline. Those in power saw the uncontrolled body as a sign of freedom, and for women, bodily autonomy was unacceptable. Since uncontrolled, or improper, bodies (and women) posed multiple threats, they had to be constrained.[39] In these ways the mid-1980s became years of transition for women, where punishment and restraint replaced previous gains. Women's happiness, employment, freedom, and sexuality were all subject to control.

Women who rejected societal control threatened the status quo. In country music this was no truer than in the case of kd lang, a rising star of questionable sexuality. Country music did not accept sexuality and certainly did not approve of lesbianism. Morever, lang also refused to participate in the beauty industry, another affront to country's industry and fans. Regardless of her sexual orientation or appearance, which she did not address, lang appeared confident, she used her body aggressively on stage, danced until the point of exhaustion, and had no interest in makeup or looking feminine. Her display did not represent overt sexuality, but her confidence and her refusal to conform to stereotypes did make her attractive. The industry attributed her popularity to her enormous talent and also to her as a spectacle; initially, music executives treated her as a fleeting fad. As her career progressed, her behavior became more bold; in her "Polly Ann" video she threw off a wig to reveal a crew cut; invited fans at concerts on stage to dance with her; accepted a Juno Award for Most Promising Female Vocalist in a wedding dress and stated "I promise that I continue to sing for only the right reasons"; and wore Nudie Suits,

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[39]. Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 69, 75, 90–93.

hats, and other presumably non-feminine attire. In fact, her most common costume was a country skirt with various charms hanging from the hem and a pair of sawed-off cowboy boots. lang consistently, and confidently, stared into the camera during performances and videos and appeared very sure of herself and her appearance. Her 1984 video for "Bopalena," a song about dancing with another woman, showed a shoeless lang running and hurling her body all over the stage. She also discussed controversial topics; her performance for "Johnny Get Angry" included an animated display of lang throwing herself across the stage, a tactic designed to look like domestic violence. Ironically, lang punished herself when she *did* conform to traditional ideas. In response to her newfound fame, lang claimed, she became narcissistic and, as a solution, deliberately gave herself an awful haircut immediately before a performance.[40] In this way she avoided acceptable beauty and sexual standards and did not allow herself to become a passive object of the male gaze or desire.

The industry and fans reacted to lang's behavior. She was a newcomer in this period, and initially many seemed unsure of how best to respond to her. Some accepted lang due to her incredible voice and self-depreciating humor, but over time this acceptance gave way to criticism. As the 1980s progressed, fans and the industry both attacked lang, mainly for her perceived homosexuality. This response reflected larger societal trends, namely the shift away from growing acceptance of homosexuality in the 1970s to 1980s homophobia. The gay liberation movement began in the late 1960s as a radical struggle against homonormativity, but in the 1970s the movement adopted a more moderate stance. Gay rights activists started working towards equality within the system, as opposed to previous attempts at systemic changes. The softer, more inclusive version of 1970s gay rights, and 1970s culture, led to increasing

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[40]. kd lang, *Harvest of Seven Years (Cropped and Chronicled*), prod. Carl Scott, dir. Jim Gable, 60 min., Warner Reprise Video, DVD; Victoria Starr, *k.d. lang: All You Get is Me* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 67.

acceptance of homosexuality. Lesbian feminism also succeeded in making lesbians more open and in creating spaces for lesbian culture. However, in the late 1970s the New Right and Moral Majority targeted the gay movement and worked to end public acceptance of gay rights. For example, the "Save Our Children" campaign in Dade County, Florida, portrayed gay Americans as depraved, views that conservatives supported. The backlash spread across the country, and by the 1980s states overturned many gay gains. In general, conservatives portrayed homosexual men and women as anti–family values, anti-Christian, and as detrimental to society. Moreover, in the mid-1980s the American public saw the AIDS epidemic as a gay disease, another contributing factor to homophobia. Reagan's administration appeared to endorse this idea; in fact, Reagan did not publicly mention AIDS until 1985 and gave his first major speech on the disease in 1987. Eventually AIDS, and AIDS activism, would unite the gay community and lead to greater acceptance; however, in the mid-1980s, society and conservatism endorsed and accepted homophobia.[41] kd lang existed within this environment, and her struggles in country music reflected larger political issues.

lang's arrival in country music as a unique and controversial performer and McEntire's decision to create a new, more traditional, persona existed simultaneously. The coexistence of these two women, and their successes, exemplified the transitional nature of the mid-1980s. Women performers in this period searched for ways to achieve the acceptance and fame that female performers in the early 1980s enjoyed. This transitional environment allowed a few exceptional singers to appear, and it also gave women opportunities to experiment with their

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[41]. John D'Emilio, "After Stonewall," in *Queer Cultures*, ed. Deborah Carlin and Jennifer DiGrazia (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2004), 3–33.

looks and styles. However, over time it became apparent that traditional tactics represented the quickest road to success.

Race

lang's use of her body as rebellion, as a physical manifestation of her refusal to conform, represented a bodily discourse that also applied to race in country music or, more specifically, to whiteness. Country music women used bodily control to adhere to gendered ideas, but they also used it as a signifier of social control and as a means to distinguish themselves from minorities. As in earlier periods, performers stood on stage and in videos became almost motionless, tactics used to distance themselves from rap and R 'n' B singers who danced and moved. Like singers from other genres, lang's lack of control made her dangerous; bodily freedom defied not only gender norms, but racial norms as well. In general, popular culture sells and helps endorse a sense of "us" vs. "them"; fans join one group and oppose another. In the case of female country music, the "us" referenced white female performers; "them" referred to presumably uncontrolled African American rappers, R 'n' B artists, or "white trash," a category separate from the farmwife.[42] To accomplish this distinction, country performers controlled their movements; even when the dress or songs seemed upbeat, the body remained stationary. In this way, as in the early 1980s, country music women used bodily control to identify them with whiteness and to separate them from racial minorities and "trashy" whites.

In the early 1980s female country performers used bodily control to link them to whiteness and also to the middle class. Since physical control signified class, stillness on stage contributed to crossover success and middle class acceptance. However, in the mid-1980s, country's leading ladies increasingly linked themselves to the working class and to more

[42]. Kipnis, "White Trash Girl," 114–15.

"authentic" country music. The move towards working-class images could have involved more movement, but women also had to maintain their whiteness. They accepted certain characteristics of the working class, such as speech patterns, clothing styles, and working-class pride, but only if they signified the white working class, not African Americans. Even class-conscious performers like the Judds maintained their whiteness on stage; the video for "Mama He's Crazy" shows the duo in green glitter and black attire, but both are virtually motionless. Moreover, it seems as if they took steps to purposefully exaggerate their white skin; each looks almost transparent.[43] Their controlled movements identified them as working-class, southern, *white* women.

Women in country music did not want fans to associate them, their music, or their performances with "the Other," especially a racialized Other. To accomplish this, they used coded racial language and behavior; they remained still and did not discuss or appear with African Americans or other minorities. They did not make overtly racist comments but they also distinguished themselves from minorities, mainly African Americans. These tactics mirrored America's "us" vs. "them" foreign policy, which also contained covert racism. With contras in Nicaragua, hostages in Iran and Lebanon, and conflicts in North Korea, Libya, and Cuba, Reagan presented the world in terms of Americans vs. "the racialized Other."[44] "The Other" was usually darker and always inferior, either culturally, socially, politically, or religiously. This disguised or concealed use of race meant less emphasis on actual skin color or ethnicity.

Throughout this time period the Reagan administration reheated the Cold War and increased U.S. interventions, especially in Latin America and the Middle East. In spite of

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[43]. CMHOF, Cohn and Wolfe Marlboro Country Music Videos, VHS, 1984.

[44]. Haynes Johnson, *Sleepwalking through History: America In the Reagan Years* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2003), 275–91; Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 69-93.

congressional bans, the Reagan White House consistently conducted operations in Nicaragua against the Sandinista government and approved arms shipments to Iran, a move that violated Reagan's own policies. Iran, according to Reagan, had ties to Nicaragua, North Korea, Libya, and Cuba, all places of "otherness" and "evil." Moreover, in 1983 Reagan sent Marines to Grenada, overthrew its Marxist government, and installed pro-U.S. leadership. That same year, in response to Israel's invasion of Lebanon, the United States intervened, a move that resulted in an Arab suicide bomber attack against the U.S. military barracks in Beirut. In all cases the Reagan administration portrayed recipients of American intervention as the racialized Other, a category that had connections to either communism or terrorism. Then in 1985, a Shiite hijacker murdered a U.S. Navy diver on a TWA flight to Beirut. For many Americans, this event helped solidify the belief that "Middle Eastern" was synonymous with "terrorist."[45] American attitudes towards terrorism supported U.S. intervention in nations populated with nonwhites; "brown" countries produce "brown" terrorists and communists.

"Us" vs. "them" existed in domestic policy as well. In the mid-1980s disguised racism became a significant aspect of Reagan's social and economic policies. Reagan used race-neutral language while he simultaneously attacked minorities, specifically African Americans. He focused on eliminating big government, a concept that many whites saw as synonymous with welfare and affirmative action, programs many believed assisted blacks at the expense of whites. He eventually directly attacked affirmative action and attempted to eliminate it altogether. He cloaked this under the guise of eliminating big government, not slashing programs at the expense of black Americans. Reagan also cut federal aid to education, refused to challenge segregated education, housing, and hiring, and vetoed the Civil Rights Restoration Act, which reaffirmed

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[45]. Johnson, *Sleepwalking through History*, 275–83; Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001), 221–24.

antidiscrimination protections for minorities (also for women, the disabled, and the elderly). In 1983 he dismissed three liberal members of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. He also appointed conservative justices Antonin Scalia and Anthony Kennedy to the Supreme Court and nominated William Rehnquist as chief justice. These appointments denoted a fundamental turning point in civil rights history as the court began eroding civil rights. They also exemplified one of the Right's most effective strategies: using race to attract working-class voters, who had suffered due to economic stagflation since the mid-1970s and who believed women and minorities took their jobs, away from the Democratic Party.[46]

As a result of Reagan's policies, African Americans and other minorities, along with women, suffered while family income for the highest-paid Americans rose 11 percent. During the 1980s childhood malnutrition, poverty (especially for the poorest), and homelessness all increased. Economically, African Americans, especially black teenagers, trailed far behind every other demographic group. Moreover, the white beneficiaries of Reagan's policies did not see how whiteness benefited them. Their whiteness became invisible in spite of the fact that they claimed they suffered due to their race (reverse racism) and that blacks benefited from their situations.[47] This invisible whiteness and race-neutral, yet raced, behavior became evident in

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[46]. George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 18–20, 72–75; Nicholas Laham, *The Reagan Presidency and the Politics of Race: In Pursuit of Colorblind Justice and Limited Government* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 72–75. In *Right Turn*, Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers claim that multicultural corporations and their allies contributed to the Democratic Party's downfall in the 1980s and that Reagan's racial and economic policies did not have as much of an impact as Democrats' reliance on multinational conglomerates. This account, however, ignores voters themselves, their perceptions of liberalism in the 1970s, and America's shift towards social conservatism in the 1970s and 1980s. Voters saw Democrats as weak on foreign policy and as a party equated with high taxes and minorities, all factors in its decline. For more information, see Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers, *Right Turn: The Decline of the Democrats and the Future of American Politics* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 58, 189, 195.

[47]. Haynes Johnson, *Sleepwalking through History*, 243; Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945–2006,* 3rd ed. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 195.

female country music as well. Women performers sang of the working class, oppressed white individuals who struggled and overcame challenges, and never mentioned racial minorities.

Coded racism represented more than a top-down phenomenon; it also had links to grassroots organizing. Internal developments within southern and national cities helped transform regions into Republican strongholds. In cities and suburbs across the country, white Americans engaged in debates over schools and housing, coded discussions that involved race. White Americans framed these debates in terms of local control or state's rights, a strategy that helped disguise race and that also served to separate whites from past racial violence and massive resistance. Specifically, southern whites claimed they did not oppose racial integration per se, but they did not accept an intrusive federal government that forced policies upon them. For example, antibusing became about property rights and neighborhood schools, not about racial integration. In this way whites in the suburbs avoided overtly racist language and replaced it with dialogue that condemned big government. Moreover, as whites moved outside of cities to escape integrated schools and housing, inner cities lost their political power. White flight equaled new segregation, and Republicans tailored their platform to garner the support of these suburban men and women.[48]

Women in country music used the government's "us" vs. "them" strategies as well as suburban coded language and images. Anne Murray's 1984 song "A Little Good News" and its video presented America and Americans in opposition to racialized others; however, Murray never explicitly discussed race. Instead, the video opened with images of American black poverty; poor whites were strangely absent. The video then moved to tumultuous Middle

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[48]. Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 169, 214, 262; Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 18, 121.

Eastern scenes, mainly from Lebanon, and focused on terrorists and terrorist activities. To conclude, the video showed images of American glory, namely the space shuttle and American flags. Murray's only image of African Americans presented them as representations of poverty. It was not explicit racism, but the message was clear: blacks were poor and whites were not. In addition, whites were part of American glory and African Americans were excluded. Moreover, the images of poor blacks coupled with Middle Eastern suicide bombers and hijackers seemed to imply a link between African Americans and terrorism, or at the very least, African Americans and the nation's woes. The lyrics accompanied the video, "Bryant Gumbel was talkin' 'bout the fighting in Lebanon, some senator was squawking 'bout the bad economy." The lyrics themselves also contained additional examples of subtle racism. Murray sang of her perfect day when "nobody robbed a liquor store in the lower part of town" (read the *black* part of town). She mentioned the bad economy while the video simultaneously showed scenes of African American poverty, a tactic that blamed economic conditions on black Americans. She also wanted to watch the news and hear that "nobody OD'd," a possible reference to crack or the escalating drug crisis. Murray's "A Little Good News" won CMA's award for Single of the Year against a slew of formidable opponents (Earl Thomas Conley, Julio Iglesias, the Judds, Willie Nelson, Dolly Parton, and Kenny Rogers) and the song largely contributed to her album of the same name winning Album of the Year; presumably, fans and critics agreed with the messages.[49]

Murray's "A Little Good News" also spoke to another 1980s racial construction, the dichotomy between urban and suburban, or even rural, America. Murray's lyrics claimed to want the "anchor man" to "talk about a country fair," a rural reference that implied whiteness as opposed to inner-city blackness. As inner cities became associated with blackness, many

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[49]. Bogdanov, Woodstra, and Erlewine, *All Music Guide to Country*, 522–23; CMHOF, Anne Murray Video Collection, 0474.

perceived other areas, the suburbs or countrysides, as white. Since African Americans occupied cities, they became associated with crime, poverty, and homelessness while suburbs and rural areas enjoyed images of harmony, progress, or traditional values. Of course rural poverty continued, as did suburban crime, but white Americans seemed satisfied with the myths of city deviance and rural/suburban or non-urban success.[50] Murray's video did not portray rural poverty or poor whites, nor did it show suburban scenes. Instead she focused on inner-city African Americans, crime, and national terrorism, all of which invoked a coded racism.

Certainly this covert racism, or assertion of whiteness, existed pre-1980 as well. Historically, fans saw country music as the music of the South and therefore of conservatism and religious fundamentalism. In the 1970s it went national along with southern values and traditions and, by the mid-1970s, became the music of the Silent Majority, relocated southerners, and conservatives across America. During this time country music did not exhibit overt racism or politics, but it did use race and fears of changes in race relations. The industry and performers marketed the music, which they depicted as the music of the white working classes, to an almost exclusively white audience. Country's southern imagery focused on country homes, churches, and the good ol' days; never segregation, the good ol' days of slavery, or racial violence. Country performers used disguised racism as a tactic to present themselves in opposition to other groups. They denied the benefits of whiteness and linked their whiteness to other issues like conservatism.[51]

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[50]. Kruse, *White Flight*, 234–39.

[51]. Malone, *Don't Get above Your Raisin'*, 125–32. For more information on the spread of southern values see John Egerton, *The Americanization of Dixie: The Southernization of America* (New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1974).

In some cases, however, performers used more explicit racial comments and actions than in previous time periods. In general, women in country music avoided racial issues and instead focused on whiteness; but as the decade progressed, their actions became increasingly overt. In 1985 Mandrell, at a luncheon to publicize her upcoming benefit concert for the Alabama Sheriffs Boys and Girls ranches, was photographed kissing George Wallace (she also wore an "I'm not fat, I'm pregnant!" button).[52] Wallace, by this point a born-again Christian, had apologized for his past racism; but this did not explain Mandrell's decision. Mandrell rarely took photographs with political figures; in fact, she tended to distance herself from politics. Her decision to be photographed with Wallace indicated that she saw no problem with being associated with him or his image. In some ways her action linked her to the "old South," a possible attempt to associate herself with southern conservatism. The photograph also coupled Mandrell to a former segregationist, a move that demonstrated her whiteness.

Other artists used more overtly racist images as well, although they did not describe them in these terms. In the video for "Grandpa," African Americans and Mexican Americans hassled and sexually harassed Wynonna Judd as she walked through the "big city." She appeared frightened, miserable, lonely, and strikingly white in contrast to others in the video. The video also showed the homeless, handicapped individuals, and all the miseries of the city (as if the South had no poverty) and linked these not only to urbanization, but also to racial diversity. The video depicted poor individuals as either black, Hispanic, or, if white, as whites who congregated with racial minorities. The song's themes involved loss of innocence and the desire for a return to tradition; however, tradition for the Judds seemed to be related to a pure white society.[53]

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[52]. CMHOF, Barbara Mandrell Folder, Barbara Mandrell International Fan Club, July 1985.

[53]. CMHOF, Cohn and Wolfe Marlboro Country Music Videos, VHS, 1984.

These unambiguous acts distinguished the use of race from previous time periods. In the early 1980s women used their bodies and whiteness; but as conservatism increased, country music females slowly adopted overt racial references.

Overt racism in country music correlated with more overt racism in American social and political life. By the mid 1980s the backlash against the civil rights movement was in full swing. Society blamed African Americans for America's problems; many perceived blacks as the undeserving beneficiaries of big government social programs. African Americans' economic status declined in this period and they simultaneously experienced negative portrayals as recipients of huge welfare and affirmative action benefits. Moreover, the new drug culture, much of it surrounding crack cocaine and the violence associated with it, led to negative stereotypes for all blacks. One result involved a dramatic increase of blacks in federal and state prisons. This environment made open hostility towards African Americans more acceptable than in the early 1980s. In fact, some describe this period as the "new nadir" of American race relations.[54]

Jesse Jackson and his bids in the Democratic primaries also elicited examples of the move towards more overt racism. In December 1983 Jackson announced that he would run for the Democratic presidential nomination, and his campaign presented a problem for Democrats; they did not want to be seen as a party that catered to special interests or to black Americans. The Republicans charged them with both and also linked them to racist assumptions, namely that African Americans cheated the welfare system.[55] Then, in January 1984 Jackson negotiated the

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[54]. Nelson George, *Post-Soul Nation: The Explosive, Contradictory, Triumphant, and Tragic 1980s as Experienced by African Americans (Previously Known as Blacks and Before That Negroes)* (New York: Viking, 2004), 74–75.

[55]. Ibid.; Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*, 183.

release of U.S. Navy pilot Robert Goodman from a Syrian prison, a move that many saw as self-serving. In June 1984 Jackson once again made waves with his claim to the United Nations that Reagan administration's policy on South Africa represented an "act of barbarism" that allowed American companies to exploit and benefit from apartheid. He called for the immediate departure of U.S. companies, specifically General Motors, IBM, Ford, Chrysler, and Exxon, from South Africa, a move that won him a standing ovation from the UN and criticism from the United States.[56] Jackson's actions angered Republicans; he had criticized American racial policies to an international audience and also succeeded where Republicans had failed. He had stepped out of his racial place and as a result would suffer numerous political and personal attacks.

A counterattack in popular culture also accompanied the political backlash. For example, the 1986 film *Soul Man*, a reactionary Reagan-era comedy, played on most of America's racial stereotypes. The film's main character Mark Watson, a privileged white high school graduate, found his dream of attending Harvard ruined after his father refused to pay for his education. Watson took tanning pills, received a minority scholarship, and proceeded to transform into a racist stereotype. He dressed like a Black Panther in fatigues and a beret, made jokes about his "manhood" and sexual potency, experienced racism, and had difficult encounters with a black professor, played by James Earl Jones. The film's theme was that racism existed in spite of attempts to pay lip service to racial equality, but the film's attempts at humor at the expense of African Americans undercut any anti-racist message. Moreover, *Soul Man* suggested that white men experienced discrimination as well and that many African Americans deserved racism.[57]

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[56]. George, *Post-Soul Nation*, 80–83, 92.

[57]. *Soul Man*, dir. Steve Miner, 104 min. Starz/Anchor Bay, 1986, DVD.

On the other hand, African Americans also succeeded in popular culture. In 1984 Michael Jackson won eight Grammys for *Thriller* and its hit single "Beat It." Jackson also visited the White House and received an honor from President Reagan for donating "Beat It" to the anti–drunk driving campaign. Rap emerged as well; in 1984 Run DMC released its first album, and their singles "It's Like That," "Sucker MCs," and "Rock Box" received airplay on MTV. Other rappers Kurtis Blow, Whoodini, and the Fat Boys increased in popularity as did rap's accompanying break dancing, which the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles showcased. Prince entered the mainstream with his film and album *Purple Rain*. In September 1984 the *Cosby Show* debuted on NBC, a situation comedy that presented a harmonious, upper-middle-class black family.[58] In 1985 "We Are the World," Michael Jackson's attempt to raise money for famine relief in Africa, became the biggest-selling record of all time. Spike Lee began a film career with 1986's *She's Gotta Have It*, and that same year *The Oprah Winfrey Show* appeared on 181 channels and rivaled Phil Donahue for daytime talk television. Then, to epitomize racial harmony, new rap artists Run DMC and Aerosmith, time-honored white rockers, had a number-one hit with "Walk This Way."[59] But acceptance of African Americans reflected cultural, not social or political changes. Blacks on television became more acceptable than in white neighborhoods or schools. Whites could mimic black music and black men and women on television, but then not vote for black political candidates or want their children in racially mixed schools. White Americans could interact with black culture without understanding or supporting blacks themselves.[60]

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[58]. George, *Post-Soul Nation*, 81–83, 95–99.

[59]. Ibid., 134–38.

[60]. Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*, 187.

Since America did apparently accept some forms of racial equality, namely African Americans in popular culture, some country music women supported it as well. For example, in a handwritten letter to fans, Deborah Allen proclaimed, "I hope someday I wake up to find the whole world has turned color blind".[61] However, Allen did not take action to end racism or discrimination, she did not promote racial equality, and she did not include black men and women in her videos or performances. She merely "hoped" the country would change. Allen's comment distinguished her from other artists who ignored race or who used negative racial imagery but the statement was also an example of empty platitudes about equality articulated in a society increasingly characterized by inequality. Allen's attempt to mention racism proved that superficially, the country embraced equality. But the nature of "equality" in the 1980s meant that it was enough for Allen to simply mention race and to not call for any type of action. This strategy allowed her to keep her traditional, conservative, white audience while also attempting to appeal to more liberal listeners.

Conservatives also played lip service to racial equality, even though their actions proved otherwise. For example, in November 1983 Ronald Reagan made Martin Luther King's birthday a national holiday, while he simultaneously supported programs that harmed African Americans.[62] Moreover, by the mid-1980s American society became more integrated than ever before, even though residential segregation still existed. Plus, African Americans, although underrepresented, appeared in politics, the workplace, and in popular culture.[63] Those in power

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[61]. CMHOF, Deborah Allen, Fan Club Folder, *Deborah Allen–Front Row Features*, newsletter, 1985.

[62]. George, *Post-Soul Nation*, 71.

[63]. Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*, 182–83.

had to acknowledge their accomplishments but did so without totally supporting racial equality. Women in country music mirrored this and in doing so continued to receive support from fans.

Region

The use of region in female country music also contained elements of race. The mid-1980s witnessed a renewed celebration of Appalachia, a trend that spoke to racism and racial invisibility. Appalachia had been a recurring theme within country music, and its popularity varied from decade to decade. However, in country music Appalachia had always been depicted as a region of simpler times, family values, white folk traditions, and pride. It never received criticism from country music. For example, in the 1970s the country music Appalachia involved rugged individualism; Appalachians made do, worked with what they had, and ultimately survived in spite of hardships. This image of Appalachia set the stage for Loretta Lynn's book and film *Coal Miner's Daughter*, a rags-to-riches story about innocence versus worldliness, poverty and individual ambition, and traditional family values.[64] This construction neglected other pervasive themes like racism, poverty, and the clash between industrialization and Appalachian society. It also depicted Appalachia and its music as all white and ignored African American contributions. As this example illustrates, country music used Appalachia for its own purposes, creating it as a region of traditional, white, pure pride.

These images did not mirror the many depictions of Appalachia in American popular and political culture. In the 1890s, as a result of increased immigration, Appalachians came to be seen as noble savages of pure Anglo-Saxon heritage. The press described mountain people as far from perfect; in fact, most felt they should be educated and trained before they could be saved.

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[64]. Allen W. Batteau, *The Invention of Appalachia* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990), 1–7, 194–96; *Coal Miner's Daughter,* dir. Michael Apted, 125 min., Universal Pictures, 2003, DVD; Loretta Lynn and George Vecsey, *Coal Miner's Daughter* (New York: Sterling, 1976).

Then in the early 1900s, paternalism dominated depictions of Appalachia. The residents stood in the way of "progress," and more progressive Americans became determined to save them from themselves. Many viewed them as criminal, uneducated, dirty, and overly sexual; however, conversion remained an option. In the 1920s, intellectuals and artists searched for uniquely American sources of literature and art and in doing so constructed Appalachia as a place of authentic folk handicrafts and of white national identity. The White Top Folk Festival in the 1930s led to depictions of Appalachian music as white, southern, and traditional. It also became a way to distinguish white culture from that of African Americans or even immigrants. After World War II depictions of Appalachia varied; some focused on its depravity (the film *Deliverance*, for example); others, like the *Beverly Hillbillies* or *Snuffy Smith*, on its ignorance; and still others claimed Appalachians suffered from perpetual poverty, laziness, backwardness, and alcoholism. Moreover, writers and "folk" singers constructed the region as a natural and wild haven, a place untouched by urbanization and therefore uncorrupted. In this way Appalachia became a "creature of the urban imagination," a place that existed in the minds of Americans who had no actual or physical contact with it. It was a social construction used to justify behaviors or attitudes or one used to celebrate white American traditions.[65] Female country music did not mention Appalachia's negative qualities and instead focused only on its perceived positive attributes.

In the early 1980s country music mentioned Appalachia, especially in *Coal Miner's Daughter* (1980), but did not depict the region as the scene of country music. Instead, the newly

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[65]. Jane S. Becker, *Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk, 1930–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 236; David E. Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 181–90; *Long Journey Home,* dir. Elizabeth Barrett, 58 min., Appalshop Film and Video, 1987, VHS; *Strangers and Kin,* dir. Herb E. Smith, 58 min., Appalshop Film and Video, 1984, VHS.

glitzy Nashville, Atlanta, Dallas, and other Sunbelt cities became country's homes. Moreover, even when women in the early 1980s spoke of ruralism, they rarely specified Appalachia. As female performers moved away from the pop-country of the early 1980s and its links to the white Sunbelt (a modern and progressive region that embraced middle-class values) and towards more "authenticity," they identified themselves with Appalachia, a decidedly country, white, pure, and working-class (not poor) area.[66] In essence, Appalachia became the South in female country music in the mid-1980s, and women performers celebrated the region's traditionalism.

If Appalachia replaced the Sunbelt in the mid-1980s, it did not replace country music's tendency to ignore historical or current realities. Women in country music did not sing of Appalachia's poverty, the social and economic problems industrialization caused, or of persistent racism. According to women in country music, Appalachia was all white, a result of its historic isolation, and also morally and environmentally pure. In this way white women performers ignored race and presented the region as untainted. The also focused on the region's presumed links to tradition, the working classes, authenticity, and conservatism. By 1983 country music increasingly claimed that Appalachia was the South, a whiter, working class, and traditional construction.[67] In this way the mid-1980s became a transitional period in terms of region in female country music; it moved away from the Sunbelt and towards Appalachia.

Dollywood, Dolly Parton's theme park in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, exemplified the shift from Sunbelt to Appalachia. The park originally opened in the 1960s, underwent a series of ownership changes, and operated under the names Rebel Railroad, Goldrush Junction, Goldrush, and Silver Dollar City. Parton took control of the park in 1986,

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[66]. Batteau, *Invention of Appalachia*, 1–7, 194–96.

[67]. Ibid., 1–4, 194–95; Rebecca Ann Thomas, "The Color of Music: Race and the Making of America's Country Music" (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri-Columbia, 2000), 206–7.

and that year it drew over one million visitors, a 75 percent increase from the previous year. The Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the nation's most visited park, along with Parton's name, contributed to Dollywood's success. Parton also added new areas like Aunt Granny's restaurant (Parton's nickname from her nieces and nephews); Dolly's Tennessee Mountain Home, a two-room replica of Parton's childhood residence on Locust Ridge; and the Back Porch Theater, a musical rags-to-riches story featuring Parton's own kinfolks and their friends in a tribute to Parton and her music.[68] All exhibits depicted an imagined version of Appalachia; they included log cabins, "home cookin'," and real-life hillbillies who sang and danced in "traditional" fashions. Dollywood and its image both dramatically differed from Parton's pre-1986 persona. The park celebrated the working class, not the middle class; it did not reference Vegas shows or crossover success; and it included country, not pop, music and performances. Country became country again, and Appalachia represented the music, not the Sunbelt.

Dolly Parton also contributed to the rediscovered fixation on Appalachia with her made-for-TV special, *A Smoky Mountain Christmas*, which aired on ABC in 1986. Parton coauthored the story and starred in the special alongside Lee Majors, who played her mountain man love interest. *A Smoky Mountain Christmas* opened with Parton filming a modern video while singing about country memories. Physically, Parton fit into the urban scene; she wore tight, leather-like clothing, her thin body seemed more urban than rural, and she appeared as if she belonged in New York City. However, inside she still felt like a country girl. In mid-song Parton abruptly stopped taping, claimed the video had "the wrong setting," and that it was "not country." After her outburst, she decided to escape the city, faked her own kidnapping, and ran off to Appalachia. In the Great Smoky Mountains she found a cabin with seven orphans,

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[68]. Dollywood, http://www.dollywood.com (accessed April 10, 2006).

morphed into their mother figure, and in the process encountered a man (Majors) who sparked her interest, a witch who wanted to kill her, and a variety of other characters. Parton eventually lost the children to the police, suffered an arrest and imprisonment, and subsequently relied on her love interest for rescue. A witch also placed her under a spell that a male orphan eventual cured with his tears. In the end Parton got the kids and her man, and they all had a country Christmas.[69] *A Smoky Mountain Christmas*, like Dollywood, focused on Appalachia, traditions, and presumably more authentic country music. Moreover, the television special depicted Appalachia as preferable to other regions, especially northern cities. The ruralism of Appalachia replaced both northern and southern urbanism.

The mid-1980s also experienced a new dimension to regionalism in female country music. By 1985 women in country music depicted the South not only as Appalachia but also as the American West, another transition away from the Sunbelt. Like Appalachia, country constructed the West as older, more in the Hank Williams honky-tonk tradition, and less middle class or urban. In addition, country music represented the West as more working class than the Sunbelt, an image female country music embraced. Emmylou Harris, a newcomer to country music, exemplified the western trend. Harris, who first achieved fame with Gram Parsons in the early 1970s, spent the 1970s and early 1980s within rock-inspired country music. She worked with artists like Dolly Parton, Neil Young, Roy Orbison, and Bob Dylan, and these relationships contributed to her unique style of music that blended traditional country with rock and folk. However, Harris always seemed to be on the sidelines of country music. By the mid-1980s this started to change, as country embraced its new traditional image. Harris became country's new "cool" performer, and the industry and fans took more notice of the singer/songwriter. Her 1985

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[69]. CMHOF, VHS 0938, *A Smoky Mountain Christmas*, December 14, 1986, ABC, 8–10 PM, starring Dolly Parton and Lee Majors.

concept album *The Ballad of Sally Rose*, a semiautobiographical account inspired by her time with Parsons, received rave reviews and elevated Harris's status (she cowrote all of the songs). The album also focused on, and promoted the idea of, the West. The album told the story of a fatherless girl who escaped poverty on an Indian reservation to become a singer and entertainer. This rags-to-riches love story involved many western scenes and motifs. Sally Rose, the album's heroine, was "born in the Black Hills of Dakota," on the "old reservation," but "had stars in her eyes and greater expectations." Sally eventually escaped her "roots" through driving, like her absent father had done years before, past "the valley of the shadow of Roosevelt's nose" and on to a better life.[70] In this album Harris embraced not only the new focuses on working-class issues and traditionalism, but added the West as a site for country music. She did not sing of country homes or ruralism and instead focused all songs on the West and western signifiers.

Reba McEntire also did a great deal to depict the South as the West and to associate the West with tradition. McEntire made personal changes that reflected the western trend in country music; in particular, she altered her appearance from that of an upper-class temptress to a blue-jean-and-hat-wearing country western star. McEntire changed her music as well and emerged as one of the pioneers of country's "neotraditional" movement, a new style that embraced bluegrass and older sounds and instruments and criticized the early 1980s pop country. McEntire's shift from countrypolitan (Sunbelt) to neotradition (in this case, the West) resulted in overwhelming success- she even earned the title of "hard country," a moniker that alluded most women. Critics loved her as well and showered her with praise for saving country music and restoring the West as an essential component of country. In 1986 country music critic Ken Tucker wrote of McEntire's music that it represented "hard country—the stripped-down, back to basic country

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[70]. Emmylou Harris, *Ballad of Sally Rose,* Warner Brothers, 1985; Bogdanov, Woodstra, and Erlewine, *All Music Guide to Country*, 322–25.

and the most interesting and exciting thing to happen to the country music industry in years." He went on to claim that McEntire's music stood in a "blunt rebuke to the watery pop-country of such best selling acts as the Oak Ridge Boys, Alabama and Exile."[71] As Tucker's statements illustrate, the transition away from the Sunbelt and towards the West, as in the move from the Sunbelt towards Appalachia, led to ideas that mid-1980s female music was better and more traditional than in previous periods.[72]

If singers did not sing of the West or Appalachia, they sang of more traditionally southern, conservative, or working-class themes. Again, they used these subjects to transition away from the early 1980s, when women tried to disguise their southernness, deemphasized ruralism, and depicted the South as prosperous and more open to change. In 1986 the Forester Sisters embraced southern values and tradition and used their fan club newsletters to described their experiences on the road watching "young 4-Hers raising crops" and "American Quarter Horses grazing along freeways." They also made references to their father's profession as a farmer and their Georgia home. The women claimed they chose the clothes they wore on the album cover for *Perfume* because they looked like *Gone with the Wind* and linked their home in Lookout Mountain, Georgia, to the Civil War. Their newsletters even mentioned country cooking and included recipes. To associate themselves with tradition and possibly with Appalachia, they purchased and used Parton's old tour bus, which served as her dressing room in *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*, had leaded glass windows from Parton's Sevierville, Tennessee, church and a stained-glass butterfly from the TV show *Dolly*.[73] The Forester Sisters

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[71]. Ken Tucker, "Why Ricky, Reba, and George are Hard at It," *Journal of Country Music* 11, no. 2 (1986): 2.

[72]. Country Music Foundation, *Country: The Music and the Musicians*, 373.

also used their fan club magazine to describe their history, a past that included a religious upbringing and strong ties to southern history. The sisters even exhibited shyness, a respected trait for southern women. One fan club article included explicit details about a video shoot for "I Fell in Love Again" that included a scene in which Christy Forester kissed a man in a Tennessee farmhouse. She described her anxiety about the scene and expressed relief that they only had to do a few takes.[74] In these ways the Forester Sisters incorporated traditional themes of conservatism and southernness into their music and images.

Country's moves towards tradition and conservatism existed alongside national acceptance of a more conservative and "country" South. Throughout the 1980s the South and southern culture moved into the national mainstream, a trend that started in the late 1970s. In the early 1980s the economic growth of the Sunbelt led many to move to the South and experience southern culture for themselves. The media also broadcast southern themes to the nation. The early 1980s Sunbelt helped the South become politically and economically important and shed many negative stereotypes; as a result, it could make image adjustments. In addition, America seemed drawn to older, more traditional, depictions of southern life and culture. In essence, by the mid-1980s, the nation wanted more country in its country and more South in its South. All of this applied to, and was reflected in, country music. Moreover, along with music, film and television helped spread the newly southern South. In 1984 the country film *Tender Mercies* won several Academy Awards, and Robert Duvall won for Best Actor. Televised awards shows and country-inspired TV specials also contributed. Media outlets, especially CMT and TNN, equaled more exposure for the new country style and, in some instances, gave the style

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[73]. CMHOF, Forester Sisters Box, *Perfume, Ribbons, and Pearls,* vol. 1, no. 2, August 1986; CMHOF, Foresters Sisters Box, The Forester Sisters Newsletter, vol. 1, no. 1, April 1986.

[74]. CMHOF, Forester Sisters Box, The Forester Sisters Newsletter, vol. 1, no. 1, April 1986.

legitimacy. In 1983 country music allied with presidential politics; the CMA held its Awards Show (its twenty-fifth anniversary) in Washington, DC, and Reagan and his wife attended.[75] Country's return to "tradition" appealed to audiences and received a presidential sanction.

Women in country music also increasingly discussed religion and linked religious devotion to the South. In the mid-1980s Barbara Mandrell attributed her success to her faith and claimed that God wanted her to sing country music instead of gospel so that she could reach more people. Dolly Parton began focusing more on Christianity and its ability to help individuals stay on the straight and narrow. In "Appalachian Memories" (1983) she sang of a family that moved north and struggled to remain true to themselves. To survive, they kept "leaning on sweet Jesus" because he would help them. To add emphasis, Parton portrayed the North as a corrupt place and the South as pure and innocent, and then linked evangelical faith to the past and to tradition. In Parton's song the South and evangelical Christianity helped her survive; the last line of the refrain states, "Appalachian memories keep us strong."[76] In this way, women in country music associated the South with religion and religion with the past.

Religion had always been a theme in country music; in particular, the Bible served as an important motif, as did religious experience (conversion, prayer, praise). Historically, religion in country music generally emphasized personal morality, not political activism or charity. But in the mid-1980s southern evangelicals did practice political activism as the Religious Right and the Moral Majority became integral components of the Republican Party. These new evangelicals still believed in personal responsibility and individualism, and they continued to focus on moral and cultural issues; but they used American politics, as well as churches, to

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[75]. Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, USA,* 2nd ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 370–73.

[76]. Curtis W. Ellison, "Keeping Faith: Evangelical Performance in Country Music," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 94 (Winter 1995): 145–47; Dolly Parton, "Appalachian Memories," *Burlap and Satin,* RCA, 1983.

organize and spread their messages. As evangelical Christianity became more prominent and powerful, women in country music also began to openly discuss religion without fear of a backlash. Moreover, the Religious Right's rhetoric of traditional values linked religion to earlier times when America was more "innocent," less corrupt. This echoed country music's claims about evil American cities and superior rural areas. By the mid-80s, female country music performers and religious leaders both expressed nostalgia for simpler times and places.[77]

As conservatism increased and the South became a significant region in politics, country's women frequently portrayed the region as not only equal to, but better than the North. This existed in early time periods as well, but became more pronounced as the decade progressed. For example, the 1984 film *Rhinestone,* starring Dolly Parton and Sylvester Stallone, opened with the song "Tennessee Mountain Home," Parton's expression of her desire to leave the contaminated city and return to the South. In the film Parton played Jake, a country music singer virtually held captive by her big-city New York nightclub boss. Jake bet her boss that she could transform Nick Martinelli (Stallone), an Italian cab driver, into a country music singer. Initially, Nick criticized Jake's countryness, called her a "hillbilly bimbo" and "reject from *Hee Haw*," but then gradually came to accept and even appreciate her values and country life. Jake took Nick to her home in Tennessee, a place portrayed as simple and pure. In contrast, the film depicted New York and her New York boss as corrupt and somewhat silly for encouraging meaningless values. Nick, the Italian New Yorker, started out as laughable and ignorant but redeemed himself after he traveled to the South and adopted its music and values. He also eventually fell in love with Jake, the epitome of southern, farmwife womanhood. In the

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[77]. Gene Edward Veith and Thomas L. Wilmeth, *Honky Tonk Gospel: The Story of Sin and Salvation in Country Music* (Grand Rapids, MI: Barker Books, 2001), 73–91; Johnson, *Sleepwalking through History*, 208–10.

end Jake and Nick defeated the evil New York boss, and the South rose again.[78] Parton used her promotional campaigns for *Rhinestone*, most of which appeared on television, as attempts to expose the film and also its messages to a national audience. In 1984 Parton appeared on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, where she sang "Tennessee Homesick Blues," the film's theme song, and in her interview with Carson, she discussed the film itself but added that she believed the South was more pure, more innocent than the North.[79] *Rhinestone* and Parton herself now expressed a version of southern pride that country women had deemphasized in the early 1980s.

Other artists used their song lyrics to exalt the South and to criticize other regions. In "Why Not Me" Wynonna Judd asked a southern man who had been out ramblin' why he "looked for love all around the world," even in Singapore, and never considered her. The man had recently returned to the South, his "old hometown," where his Kentucky girl was "waiting patiently." She, like the South, was enduring, kind, and worthy of a long-term commitment. Reba McEntire added to this with her 1986 hit "Whoever's in New England." McEntire described New England, and her lover's secret companion who lived there, as "cold" and then claimed that the women and place would soon be "through with" him, statements that insinuated the North was fickle and uncaring. However, she, and the South, remained devoted and he would "always have a place to go."[80]

A Smoky Mountain Christmas also depicted the South, or Appalachia, as better than the

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[78]. *Rhinestone*, dir. Bob Clark, coprod. Sandy Gallin and Ray Katz, 111 min., Twentieth Century Fox, 1984, DVD.

[79]. MTR, *Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, NBC, June 15, 1984.

[80]. The Judds, "Why Not Me," *Why Not Me,* MCA, 1984; Reba McEntire, "Whoever's in New England," *Whoever's in New England,* MCA, 1986.

North. The show featured Parton, a singer who escaped the evil northern music industry to return to an isolated and pure (albeit witch-infested) Appalachia. But the film presented a witch (who had no southern accent), orphans, and evil spells as better than the North. Plus, she found a man![81] The Judds's video for "Grandpa," which showed northern cities as terrible places where minorities harassed good southern women, also echoed these themes.[82] In both cases women in country music longed for the good ol' days when the South protected them. The consistent theme was that the North was a place where country music and values could not survive and that the South, even if strange and traditional, was the best place to be.

Class

Just as women in country music depicted the South as all white, they also portrayed the mid-1980s South as exclusively working class. In the early 1980s, women depicted the South as the Sunbelt; but as country music embraced new ideas about tradition, the prosperous and savvy South gave way to a South filled with working-class people and their down-home values. This transition, however, did not accurately reflect the South or its inhabitants. In reality southerners experienced more affluence than in previous periods, although they also shared the region with a large working-class population. By 1984 the early 1980s recession ended and for white middle-class Americans, there seemed to be a return to prosperity. *Newsweek* called 1984 "The Year of the Yuppie" and many southerners benefited from the service and technical jobs that moved south.[83] However, in country music, the prosperous South disappeared, and the working classes reigned supreme. Women in country music rarely mentioned middle-class values and instead

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[81]. CMHOF, VHS 0938, *A Smoky Mountain Christmas*, December 14, 1986, ABC, 2 hours.

[82]. CMHOF, Cohn and Wolfe Marlboro Country Music Videos, VHS, 1984.

[83]. John B. Boles, *The South through Time: A History of an American Region,* 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), 574; Schulman, *The Seventies*, 219.

focused almost exclusively on the working class.

The lyrics in female country music did not represent destitute southerners, union organizers, or those doomed to lives of poverty. Instead they spoke of white Americans, individuals who pulled themselves up from their bootstraps and who had access to the American dream. They neither needed nor requested government assistance and could achieve all of their goals through a little hard work. Women accepted those who remained poor as well, as long as poverty included employment. These themes, which had existed in male country music for years, were new for women. In general, women did not sing about work, nor did they usually discuss class. The few exceptions included women who spoke of their own childhoods; they rarely discussed those of others. The trends in female country music also mirrored conservative politics, which promoted tradition and family values along with ideas about rags-to-riches success stories and rugged individualism. New conservatives charged that liberal systems encouraged apathy through social programs and handouts, both of which presumably drained the white middle class. Instead, conservatives argued, it was up to each person to work and achieve the American dream. Many country love songs from the mid-1980s reflected this and stressed that individuals should strive to overcome the difficulties of working-class life. This pursuit, however, never included an attack against the system or structural problems. These views corresponded with Reagan's statements on American economic troubles, namely that poverty and unemployment represented individual issues solved only through hard work, not government assistance. Artists like Dolly Parton glorified economic conditions and romanticized poverty instead of criticizing its causes. Parton's "Tennessee Homesick Blues," for example, represented her attempt to exalt working-class activities like fishing, coon hunting, and eating working-class southern staples like "grits and gravy and country ham." In addition, Emmylou Harris's album

Ballad of Sally Rose exalted single motherhood, absent fathers, and poverty. In both cases, if one could not escape poverty it could be described as the "simple life," an existence preferable to the material needs, pressures, and desires of the modern world. [84]

Singers discussed working-class experiences, but their songs often diminished the class-based nature of those themes. Other categories like region or religion appeared more commonly, perhaps because appealing to other kinds of allegiances allowed performers to appeal across class lines to middle- and working-class audiences. In this way the lyrics invoked a working-class consciousness but at the same time diffused it with suggestions that it was really better to be working class. In some cases they also appealed to other loyalties. For example, McEntire's single "Little Rock" discussed all kinds of class issues but did not suggest explicit class consciousness. "Little Rock" focused on an upper-class woman who drove a "new Mercedes" and played "tennis with the ladies" but simultaneously felt sexually unsatisfied. In spite of her wealth and privilege, she could not get a "good night's loving" from her wealthy husband. For that reason she decided to remove her "little rock" (her wedding ring) in an attempt to find a more amorous, and presumably working-class, lover. McEntire's song addressed wealthy women and also working-class males and females. She criticized upper-class men, who generally did not buy country music, and insinuated that working-class men had more sexual prowess. She also gave working-class women a reason to be proud; they usually dated or

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[84]. Jack Holgate, "Love, Lust, and Loneliness: A Critical Examination of Country Music Videos" (PhD diss., University of Southern Mississippi, 1997), 46; Fox, "Recycled 'Trash,'" 234; Dellar, Cackett, and Thompson, *Harmony Illustrated Encyclopedia of Country Music*, 76; Tom Juravich, "Workers and Unions in Country Music: A Look at Some Recent Releases," *Labor Studies Journal* 13 (1988): 56; Dolly Parton, "Tennessee Homesick Blues," *Rhinestone*, RCA, 1984; Emmylou Harris, *Ballad of Sally Rose,* Warner Brothers, 1985.

married McEntire's desirable working-class men! In reality, McEntire had wealth, had a wealthy husband, and, as a businesswoman, utilized strategies that would win fans.[85]

In some cases country music blamed individuals for poverty, but it never blamed the system, or systematic problems. For example, in 1984 Barbara Mandrell and Tom Wopat starred in *Burning Rage*, a Lifetime Network special about a small, rural coal-mining town in danger from an underground coal mine fire. Mandrell played a strong investigator who interviewed unemployed coal miners. The investigator eventually uncovered a conspiracy that involved government officials and wealthy men in the town who devised a sinister plan to buy the land in order to own the coal. Mandrell's character stood up to the men and cracked the case.[86] In this instance, wealthy individual men caused poverty, not the system, capitalism, or legislation that negatively impacted the working classes. Country music, as Mandrell demonstrated in *Burning Rage,* depicted the working class as innocent of any wrongdoing and as triumphant.

To add legitimacy to their music, female musicians adopted characteristics of the southern, white working classes and therefore on occasion performed southern poverty. They exaggerated southern drawls, wore patched-up overalls, and used country and class-based signifiers like rural identity. In most cases performers sang of lives they no longer lived. Women in country music had become wealthy businesswomen, yet they never sang of their own experiences on the road or as wealthy celebrities. Other musical genres echoed this theme as well, namely rock 'n' roll. Rock, like country music, celebrated the working class but did not

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[85]. Richard A. Peterson, "Class Unconsciousness in Country Music," in *You Wrote My Life: Lyrical Themes in Country Music,* ed. Melton McLaurin and Richard A. Peterson (Philadelphia: Gordon and Breach, 1992), 5, 46–59; Reba McEntire, "Little Rock," *Whoever's in New England,* MCA, 1986.

[86]. CMHOF, VHS 0171, *Burning Rage*, starring Barbara Mandrell and Tom Wopat, 1984.

propose collective action. In this way each genre could self-consciously perform, rather than live, abjection.[87]

Some female country music performers did have direct childhood experiences with poverty; but when they discussed their lives, they mentioned overcoming poverty, not its causes. Singers like the Judds, Parton, and McEntire also mourned the loss of their former "simple" lives to material needs, pressures, and desires. The themes of overcoming and romanticizing poverty, they believed, appealed to fans in the mid-1980s. Their audience identified with their views and accepted their uncritical portrayals of white poverty. According to Naomi Judd, "I believe whatever appeal we have goes beyond the music. I think women see themselves in us … They knew I was a single mother who was struggling to raise my children on my own, working as a waitress, clerk, secretary, model, and nurse (the largest female workforce in America). They knew we were from a small town and blue-collar background. They've seen Wy and me successfully working out our particularly difficult parent-child relationship."[88] Working-class Americans saw themselves in women in country music, and they agreed with their interpretations, and presentations, of poverty.

Greed, especially for women, was intolerable and had severe consequences. Since women in country music and their fans romanticized poverty, they criticized wealth and the quest for financial success. After her 1984 car accident, Tennessee law required Mandrell to file a lawsuit against the teenager responsible for the wreck, Mark White. White had crossed the center lane and hit Mandrell and her children head-on, a collision that resulted in White's death

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[87]. Peterson, "Class Unconsciousness in Country Music,", 35–52, 56–59; James R. McDonald, "Rock and Roll and the Working Class," in *America's Musical Pulse: Popular Music in Twentieth-Century Society,* ed. Kenneth J. Bindas (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992), 83–84.

[88]. Fox, "Recycled 'Trash,'" 242–44; Judd, *Love Can Build a Bridge*, 365.

and numerous medical problems for Mandrell. In order for Mandrell to collect insurance, a court judge had to declare White at fault; therefore, Mandrell's lawyers had to file a suit against White's estate. The public believed Mandrell wanted to sue White's family, thereby taking money from grieving parents. Mandrell could not defend herself; her lawyers prohibited her from commenting on the case. Then, in the midst of the scandal, Mandrell's insurance company declared bankruptcy, an event many fans saw as karmic punishment. Mandrell's perceived greed not only damaged her image, but her career as well. Her album sales dropped, and she never again had a number-one single. Even celebrity support proved ineffective. Dolly Parton, "who opened for no one," opened for Mandrell's February 28, 1986, comeback show at the Universal Amphitheater in Los Angeles; but the show received low ratings and did not result in record sales.[89] Greed, or supposed greed, destroyed the woman who ruled early 1980s country music.

Country music also perpetuated a distinction between respectable poverty and "white trash." Women performers depicted working-class or poor Appalachians as honorable; however, those seen as white trash did not receive this respect. Singers discussed poor Appalachians in terms of their white European ancestry (Celts and Anglo-Saxons), their historical isolation, and the belief that slavery had not tainted them. These ideas led to depictions of them as moral, even if they lived in abject poverty. White trash, on the other hand, was a separate, less honorable category. Not only did white trash indicate a more severe level of poverty, it also meant certain unacceptable behaviors. White trash had connections to promiscuity, overt racism, and

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[89]. Other popular cultural forms mirrored this celebration of "working classness" as well. For example, the television series *Dallas* showed upper-class southern women as evil and vindictive. Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 298–92.

ignorance, as opposed to the morally pure, religious, and good Appalachians like Dolly Parton and Loretta Lynn.[90]

The mid-1980s functioned as a transitional period for women in country music. They abandoned the glamour and crossover attractiveness of pop-country for presumably more traditional constructions. The South in country music became a land of working-class values and women celebrated as asexual homemakers, wives, and mothers. New conservatism and the Religious Right influenced this shift, and as Republican power increased throughout the 1980s, so would the retreat within the country movement. The success of female stars and the visibility given to each through television and film served as evidence that many Americans supported these new roles for women. White, female, and southern in America became equated with maternity, domesticity, and, in the words of the Judds, "the good ole days." Women entered into the late post-1986 period with traditional looks and sounds, strategies that would serve them well during the increasing social and political conservatism of the late 1980s.

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[90]. Thomas, "The Color of Music," 206–15, 224.

CHAPTER THREE

"NOW WE'RE 80'S LADIES," 1987–1989

In 1985 the *New York Times* ran a front-page story that declared country music dead. Country music journalists described this piece as an "obituary," as the death blow to countrypolitan and, in many ways, to country music in general.[1] At first glance this seemed premature. During the mid-1980s women in country music experienced unprecedented media exposure, and new outlets like The Nashville Network (TNN) and Country Music Television (CMT) ensured that millions of viewers and fans saw and heard country's leading ladies. This exposure initially led to commercial success, and women in country music rivaled their male counterparts. As the decade progressed, however, videos and television became problematic for women in country music. Their images and songs, which transitioned during the mid-1980s, caused many fans to turn against them and their music. This was especially true of the glamorous and glitzy personas that fans found so appealing from 1980 to 1983. Artists who held on to pop-country and its accompanying styles alienated their traditional core audience. The performers who succeeded moved towards more traditional, "hard," and "country" personas. In response, beginning in 1987, female performers reinvented themselves once again, and the transformations proved successful. Women in country music returned to "traditional" images and "conventional" roles, both in their performances and their music.

These "80's Ladies" used their talents to accomplish success; however, by 1987 the climate in country music had changed. Since by the late 1980s TNN and CMT had become mainstays in country music, and since increasing exposure for country's leading ladies led to a backlash against their pop-oriented music and middle-class personas, women had to adjust. In

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[1]. Robert Palmer, "Nashville Sound: Country Music in Decline," *New York Times*, September 17, 1985, A1; Paul Kingsbury, "Women Walk the Line," *Journal of Country Music* 15, no. 1 (1992): 21.

response, in the late 1980s, women's images in country music reflected working-class customs, family values, southern pride, and presumably more authentic country music. These moves corresponded with the Republican Party's success in promoting the same ideals; conservatives and the Religious Right endorsed morals and a return to tradition, and they increasingly focused on the South. These strategies succeeded and women in country music and conservatives both triumphed.

Performers like Emmylou Harris, KT Oslin, Reba McEntire, and the Judds all overtly endorsed not only a return to traditional country music, but also new styles for female performers. Cowboy hats and boots replaced less rural attire; southern accents reappeared; an emphasis on whiteness emerged that contrasted with ideas of "the Other"; and the South experienced new portrayals as a place filled with pride, family values, and tradition. These shifts helped many performers disassociate themselves from the claims that they presented themselves as "un-country" and also rescued them from declining record sales. The late 1980s transformations, known as "neotraditionalism" or "hard-core," differed dramatically from prior eras when women concerned themselves with crossover success, middle-class acceptance, and more region-neutral appearances. "Hard core," a label generally used only for males, was a badge of honor in country music. To be "hard" meant aligning yourself with traditional artists and performing "real" country, music that included traditional instruments and sounds. By becoming "hard," and by criticizing "soft" women, female performers once again reached the tops of charts.

The ascent of "hard-core," or "traditional," country music was not merely a silent trend. Musicians, fans, and Nashville label heads discussed hard core, its leading musicians, and the impact each had on country music. According to CBS's Rick Blackburn, country had two

markets in the late 1980s: contemporary and traditional. He described "traditional" as older recordings and "contemporary" as newer songs with older sounds. In either case, the focus was on conservative themes and time-honored instruments. The new artists, or "neotraditionalists," appealed to both markets and therefore experienced a great deal of success. In particular, Blackburn felt that the Judds, with their emphasis on family values and older sounds, exemplified country's shift to tradition. Joe Galante of RCA agreed with Blackburn and added that contemporary music was the *only* way to achieve financial success in country. By the late 1980s, according to Galante, contemporary music had the most vocal and loyal fans. He then attacked countrypolitan, or pop-country, and claimed that it was not only out of fashion, but a stain on the image of "real" country music. He also took pride in the fact that Nashville had turned its back on countrypolitan and instead embraced neotraditionalism. According to Galante, "there are no pop records coming out of Nashville. There hasn't been a pop record since 1982 and that was 'Islands in the Stream.' There are no records on the pop stations from Nashville today, and there hasn't been a Nashville record in the Hot 100 for the last three years." Jimmy Bowen, head of MCA, believed that country's shift was "not a return *to* a more traditional sound" but a "return *of* a more traditional sound." All agreed that the move towards neotraditionalism, and the new emphasis on videos as advertisements, would win back fans for hard-core women and men in country music.[2]

"Hard core," even though it was a distinguished title, did not translate in women in country music being seen or treated as equals. "Hard" did not mean the same for women and men. For men, "hard" indicated the ability to ramble, be overly self-confident, drink and yell without criticism, and to openly endorse conservatism, whiteness, America, and southern and

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[2]. Paul Kingsbury, "The Hard Realities of Hard Country: Conversations with Nashville Label Heads," *Journal of Country Music* 11, no. 1 (1986): 15.

working-class pride. For women, "hard" exclusively meant tradition. Women could sing with accents and use fiddles and banjos, but they simultaneously had to conform to ideas about women's proper places and behaviors. This interpretation of "hard" led most women in country music to endorse traditional roles for women and to not challenge patriarchy. In this way they presented themselves not as strong, independent women, but as keepers of home and tradition. They did not speak about women's declining status, violence against women, or continued racism and classism. They, like other women in popular culture, represented the backlash against the women's movement and feminism. Society blamed women, especially working-class women in the late 1980s, for many of America's problems. Popular culture reflected ideas about women and their roles by encouraging female performers to return to their "proper places."[3]

Gender

In 1987 Dolly Parton, Emmylou Harris, and Linda Ronstadt released the album *Trio*, their hugely anticipated, bluegrass-inspired collaboration. The threesome had discussed a collaboration since 1977, and for most fans the album was worth the wait. *Trio* achieved incredible success both in terms of critical acceptance and record sales. The performers won a Grammy for Best Country Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocals and also won the Academy of County Music's (ACM) Album of the Year. The single "To Know Him Is to Love Him" reached number one on the country charts, while "Telling Me Lies" went to number three, "Those Memories of You" to number five and "Wildflowers" to number six.[4]

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[3]. The backlash was so extensive that the media rarely portrayed women constructively. In 1987, for example, the American Women in Radio and Television could not award its annual prize for advertisements that featured women in positive ways; no advertisement qualified. Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* (New York: Anchor Books, 1992), xxi.

[4]. Vladimir Bogdanov, Chris Woodstra, and Stephen Thomas Erlewine, eds. *All Music Guide to Country: The Definitive Guide to Country Music* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), 756–57.

Trio definitively represented the shift in female country music towards more traditional recordings. Many of the songs were remakes that either retained their original sounds or added bluegrass to formerly pop hits. Written by Phil Spector, "To Know Him Is to Love Him" first became a number-one hit for the Teddy Bears in 1958; subsequently, the Beatles (as "To Know Her Is to Love Her"), Marc Bolan, Peter and Gordon, Bobby Vinton, and Gloria Jones recorded it in the 1960s. The *Trio* version included traditional country themes, namely Harris's breaking voice and the somber sounds of a mandolin. In essence, *Trio*'s interpretation took a pop hit and made it a successful bluegrass chart-topper. Other remakes on this album represented more traditional country tunes, for example, "Hobo's Meditation" was a 1930s hit for Jimmie Rogers, the Father of Country Music known for his songs of the rails, boxcars, and the American heartland. "Rosewood Casket" was a traditional ballad, and "Farther Along" a time-honored country gospel song. Porter Wagoner and Dolly Parton, country royalty in the late 1960s and early 1970s, originally recorded both "Making Plans" and "The Pain of Loving You." All remakes on *Trio* had bluegrass components; they included traditional instruments (banjos, dobros, fiddles), and the women sang with accents and with the long, mournful tones of previous decades.[5]

In 1987 on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson,* Parton, Harris, and Ronstadt performed songs from *Trio*, with each woman taking a turn at leading. Parton sang "Those Memories of You" with her exaggerated drawl, Harris performed "To Know Him Is To Love Him," and Ronstadt sang "Hobo's Meditation." Each performer was accompanied by a live band comprised of a mandolin, fiddle, dobro, and steel guitar. During the interview, Ronstadt

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[5]. Dolly Parton, Emmylou Harris, and Linda Ronstadt, *Trio,* Warner Brothers, 1987; Bogdanov, Woodstra, and Erlewine, *All Music Guide to Country*, 756–57.

stated that they intentionally recorded an album to "sound old-fashioned."[6] Bluegrass music was not unique to the late 1980s (many artists recorded these types of songs in the mid-1980s as well) but the trend intensified at the end of the decade. Moreover, *Trio*'s success and the success of other roots-style albums showed that traditional music was becoming mainstream, not simply a fad.

Emmylou Harris also had her own independent forays into traditional music. In 1987 she released *Angel Band* with Warner Brothers, an acoustic gospel country album with traditional instruments. Vince Gill played mandolin on many of the singles, and other musicians accompanied him with dobros and fiddles. The resulting album sounded very similar to *Trio*, a traditional work that paid homage to roots music. In 1990 she released *Duets*, an album that produced hits with "Heartbreak Hill," "Heaven Only Knows," and "I Still Miss Someone." It included songs with Neil Young, Willie Nelson, George Jones, and John Denver, all country legends. On *Duets* Harris's voice wailed as if she was a torch singer of the 1950s, another link between the late 1980s and earlier periods.[7] Harris emerged as a leader in the neotraditional movement, and her albums exemplified the return to hard country.

Patty Loveless also recorded more traditional music in the late 1980s. The Kentucky-born Loveless claimed to be "raised on" mountain bluegrass, and her songs reflected it. In mid-1987 she released a more pop-inspired album, *Patty Loveless*, which became a moderate success. This album served as a source of shame for Loveless, who claimed she got "trapped into" recording pop and rock in order to put "food on the table." In 1988 she repeatedly apologized

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[6]. Museum of Television and Radio (MTR), Los Angeles, *Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, NBC, March 13, 1987.

[7]. Bogdanov, Woodstra, and Erlewine, *All Music Guide to Country*, 323–25; Emmylou Harris, *Angel Band,* Warner Brothers, 1987.

for her forays into pop and emphasized her country roots. Then, in 1988, she released *If My Heart Had Windows* and *Honky Tonk Angel,* both of which represented retreats from her previous ventures into pop-country. *If My Heart Had Windows* produced two top-ten hits, while *Honky Tonk Angel* led to her first number-one song and ultimately made her a star.[8] Not only did Loveless embrace neotraditionalism and reap the benefits, she explicitly criticized other genres of country music, namely countrypolitan.

Loveless's comments came not only during a period of changes for women in country music but also during significant increases in the backlash against feminism and the women's movement. Women in the late 1980s experienced criticism at every turn, even women in power. For example, in 1987 Mikhail Gorbachev visited Washington for a summit and Nancy Reagan gave his wife, Raisa, a tour of the White House. The press overly criticized the premier's wife for being too eager to speak to them. They also attacked her clothing (she wore a black dress and rhinestone stockings in the middle of the day) and insinuated that she was not ladylike. The press also portrayed the Nancy/Raisa affair as a catfight, a common theme. The media consistently depicted women as competing with each other; the thought of female unity was nonexistent.[9] In response, instead of attacking patriarchy, women attacked each other and, in doing so, remained in their places. Women in country music adhered to ideas about traditional, demure women (like Nancy Reagan), and they attacked women (as the press attacked Raisa Gorbachev) in the early 1980s who "sold out" to pop music. Loveless, for example, chose to

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[8]. Country Music Hall of Fame (CMHOF), "Heart to Heart," 1988, CMT Patty Loveless, VHS 1356.

[9]. Susan J. Douglass, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Times Books, 1995), 243. Women in power complained about their treatment as well. Peggy Noonan, Reagan's speechwriter, wrote that "the battle for the mind of Ronald Reagan was like trench warfare of World War I: never have so many fought so hard for such barren terrain." She also described the White House as an exclusive "boy's club." Peggy Noonan, *What I Saw at the Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1990), 134.

remain silent about sexism and backlash in female country music and instead criticized women who "went pop" in the early 1980s.

Hee Haw's twentieth anniversary celebration in 1988 helped promote the women in country music who exhibited more traditional, as opposed to pop, sounds. Older acts like Barbara Mandrell and Loretta Lynn performed alongside newcomers Kathy Mattea, Sweethearts of the Rodeo, Holly Dunn, and Highway 101. All sang traditional country songs, Louise Mandrell played fiddle with Roy Clark, and Holly Dun and Paulette Carlson of Highway 101 played country guitar.[10] *Hee Haw's* celebration added legitimacy to the ascent of hard core. *Hee Haw* received credit for introducing many trends and artists to the country music world. Its acceptance of neotraditionalism indicated that it had entered the mainstream of country music.

Women's music also became more traditional in terms of content. Kathy Mattea's "Eighteen Wheels and a Dozen Roses" dealt with a traditional subject, a working-class man (a truck driver) coming home to his long-waiting and devoted wife. The song's subject then added another decidedly country topic: the truck driver was retiring and making his last "four-day run." He had his "gold watch" and looked forward to spending "the rest of his life with the one that he loved." There was no mention of his wife's profession or her views on his retirement, only that she would accompany him on his Winnebago quest to "find America." In this song, listeners heard many traditional country motifs: working-class men, family values, and Americana.[11] The song's popularity also showed that these topics pleased many country music fans.

Many songs and albums in the late 1980s focused on religion, another traditional country theme. Emmylou Harris's *Angel Band* consisted entirely of gospel music, and *Trio's* "Farther

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[10]. CMHOF, *Hee Haw*'s Twentieth Anniversary, CBS, April 20, 1988, VHS 0187.

[11]. Kathy Mattea, "Eighteen Wheels and a Dozen Roses," *Untasted Honey,* MCA, 1987.

Along" was a gospel song. "Farther Along" also spoke to another country theme intertwined with religion: death. "Farther Along" discussed finding answers and redemption in death, not in the joys of life. The focus on death was a new development for late 1980s country, even though death had served as a consistent theme in bluegrass since the early 1900s. But by this period bluegrass and its themes became associated with tradition and for that reason country adopted elements of bluegrass, including its focus on death.[12] Whereas in the early 1980s most songs dealt with love or relationships, by the late 1980s older themes took center stage.

Trio's "Hobo's Meditation" also dealt with traditional themes, including death. This Jimmie Rogers remake centered on "what will become of a hobo, whenever his time comes to die?" The song asked if there would "be any freight trains in heaven" or boxcars to hide in. Will there be "tough cops" or "brake men?" Or will the hobo be allowed to "continue to roam?"[13] In this way the song dealt with death, but it also referenced another older country theme: rambling. Country culture generally did not allow women to ramble, nor could they sing of it. However, Linda Ronstadt sang about these traditional themes and, in doing so, invoked the lonely, down-on-his-luck musician who retreated to the trains, a symbol of American freedom.

These topics and traditional themes helped link women musicians to the past, and in country music, the past equaled authenticity. This served as an avenue to gain power, the respect of the industry, and fans. It also helped allow female performers to prove that they could be hard. Since they still could not live a hard life (they could not ramble on the rails, for example), they at least could sing of it. Moreover, past themes distanced them from other musical genres or popular cultural forms. Country's fans saw women as keepers of tradition and as traditional

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[12]. Parton, Harris, and Ronstadt, "Farther Along," *Trio*; Emmylou Harris, *Angel Band,* Warner Brothers, 1987.

[13]. Dolly Parton, Emmylou Harris, and Linda Ronstadt, "Hobo's Meditation," *Trio*.

guardians of family values, not as individuals embracing newer trends. In these ways tradition, even though it could be confining, offered women one way to achieve authenticity and respect.

Women performers also used other strategies to link themselves to the past and to authenticity. As previously mentioned, some collaborative albums included numerous remakes of older country songs. Individual artists did this as well by including single remakes on their albums with most choosing older songs that had no links to pop or pop country. In this way women used the past to help them gain power and authenticity. They also wanted to be tied to respected artists, a strategy not unique to this time period or to other genres, but one that became more pronounced as the 1980s progressed. The use of older songs also appeared more deliberate, meaning performers chose songs with significance to their lives and that would create conversations and interest among fans.

In 1987 Rosanne Cash released "Tennessee Flat Top Box," a single from *King's Record Shop*. A remake of Johnny Cash's 1962 song of the same name, Rosanne Cash's version remained true to her father's; little was changed in terms of sound. The accompanying video showed scenes of trailers, people at an auction, and other rural scenes. This single became a number-one hit for Rosanne Cash, an artist previously considered a rebel in country music. In the early 1980s she wore rock-inspired clothing, sang pop-country songs, and seemed more influenced by pop than country.[14] By the late 1980s she embraced her place in the Cash lineage and in doing so "went country." She used her father to link her to authenticity and also to make her mark in the neotraditional movement.

kd lang, like Rosanne Cash, struggled with her image and with her place in country music. lang, however, did not have a country music legend as a father; she would have to use a

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[14]. CMHOF, CBS Records, Compilation Reel VI, 1987, ¾ cassette.

different strategy. Since lang's entrance into country music, she very vocally claimed to be a fan of Patsy Cline; in fact, on occasion she claimed to be Cline reincarnated. lang did sound remarkably similar to Cline; both had voices that dripped with tears, both sang wrenching love songs, and both were torch singers. lang solidified her link to Cline in her 1988 album *Shadowland,* an album produced by Owen Bradley, who was credited with creating the Nashville Sound and who had worked with Cline. *Shadowland* reeked of Cline: lang imitated her voice and sang songs that reminded listeners of Cline's hits. "Down to My Last Cigarette," for example, harkened back to Cline's 1957 "Three Cigarettes (In an Ashtray)." "Down to My Last Cigarette" went to number twenty-one on Billboard's Top Country Singles chart, while *Shadowland* went to number nine and then stayed on the chart for 121 weeks, proving that fans saw lang's strategies as effective.[15]

Shadowland also included the single "Honky Tonk Angels' Medley," with Loretta Lynn, Kitty Wells, and Brenda Lee, all country legends. The song, whose title itself referenced Kitty Wells's 1952 hit, combined "In the Evening When the Sun Goes Down," a folk song; Ernest Tubb's (who helped popularize the honky-tonk style in the 1940s) "You Nearly Lose Your Mind"; and "Blues, Stay Away from Me" by the Delmore Brothers (country legends from the 1930s). By including this single, lang proved she could perform with well-established artists and sing authentic songs. The video showed lang singing, joking, and interacting with the female legends even though lang looked out of place. The others had large hair, were older, and wore flashy clothing while lang had her typical short coif and wore masculine attire, a jacket and jeans. She also obviously did not wear makeup; however, in spite of it all she was accepted.[16]

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[15]. Victoria Starr, *k.d. lang: All You Get Is Me* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 93–98, 102; kd lang, *Shadowland*, Sire, 1988.

Shadowland led to more exposure and more success for lang. She attended Fan Fair in 1988, a rite of passage for all country artists, and was a hit. She then toured with Lyle Lovett, performed on *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson*, and was included in Home Box Office's (HBO) special "Country Music: A New Tradition," which also featured the Judds and Rosanne Cash. lang and Cash performed "You Ain't Woman Enough to Take My Man," a staple of female country music The success of *Shadowland* finally ended lang's obsession with Cline, something that previously made her appear strange and controversial. After *Shadowland*, lang received greater acceptance into country music.[17]

lang was not the only performer to honor Cline; other artists revived her as well. At the 1987 ACM's Awards Show, Reba McEntire performed an a cappella version of Cline's "Sweet Dreams," a strategy that made the song more dramatic and that also highlighted McEntire's voice. By the late 1980s McEntire was hugely popular (she won Top Female Vocalist at that show) and her decision to sing Cline's song was telling.[18] McEntire and other newer, or neo, artists explicitly linked themselves to tradition in more instances than ever before.

lang and McEntire both used Cline to link them to the past, but their uses of her music also changed country's perception of Cline. In the 1970s Patsy Cline was virtually unknown, her obscurity caused by her lifestyle and her style of music. Personally she was rough; she cursed, smoked, drank, and allegedly had many lovers. By the late 1970s audiences generally saw her as a "sellout" for being part of the Nashville Sound, a softer brand of country music that followed the hard honky-tonk of the 1950s. Then in the 1980s country music rediscovered Cline and her

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[16]. *kd lang, Harvest of Seven Years (Cropped and Chronicled*), prod. Carl Scott, dir. Jim Gable, 60 min., Warner Reprise Video, DVD; Starr, *k.d. lang*, 100, 102.

[17]. Starr, *k.d. lang*, 103–4.

[18]. CMHOF, "The Twenty-Second Annual Academy of Country Music Awards," NBC, April 6, 1987, 8–10PM, VHS 0895.

music. In the early 1980s her label released two of Cline's singles, and both appeared on country charts. Moreover, the Home Box Office (HBO) biopic, *Sweet Dreams: The Life and Times of Patsy Cline* (1985), added to her popularity. McEntire and lang's revival of her in the late 1980s led many to see her as part of a lost age, or as part of authentic country music. Even though country's audience generally perceived Cline as soft, women performers engaged in searches for past females to whom to link themselves, and the shortage of hard singers presented them with a problem. They needed a heroine and therefore reconstructed Cline as a hard country legend.[19]

Emmylou Harris's performances also included homages to the past. On *Nashville Now* in 1987 Harris performed during a tribute to the Louvin Brothers, iconic country gospel singers who first achieved popularity in the 1940s. They also popularized close harmony, a method used in many subsequent country songs. Harris sang "You're Running Wild" with Charlie Louvin and then participated in an interview in which she explained that she had always been influenced by "older" country.[20] In this instance Harris not only aligned herself to the past, but to established, male, hard country as well.

Women whom the industry previously labeled "country rebels" also linked themselves to tradition and authenticity by recording older songs. Tanya Tucker's 1989 *Greatest Hits* album included the single "Daddy and Home," a remake of a Jimmie Rogers song. The single reached number twenty-seven on the U.S. country chart and helped revive Tucker's failing career. Not only did the song link to a country legend, it also included traditional themes of family and

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[19]. Joli Jensen, "Patsy Cline's Crossovers: Celebrity, Reputation, and Feminine Identity," in *A Boy Named Sue: Gender and Country Music,* ed. Kristine M. McCusker and Diane Pecknold (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 107, 110–13, 121.

[20]. CMHOF, *Nashville Now,* June 18, 1987, VHS 0807.

home.[21] Country's "wild child" realized, as did other artists, that older themes and songs translated into success in the late 1980s.

Even older female artists who had "gone pop" returned to tradition. Tammy Wynette's 1987 *Higher Ground* was a neotraditional album that achieved critical and commercial success. The album included established neotraditionalists Emmylou Harris, Vince Gill, Ricky Van Shelton, and Rodney Crowell and the singles "You Love" and "Talkin' to Myself Again" each reached number twelve on the country chart. "Beneath a Painted Sky," which featured Emmylou Harris, was Wynette's last top-forty hit. The success of this album reestablished Wynette as a hit maker and earned her the label "spiritual mother" of neotraditionalism.[22]

The country music industry also bestowed honors on women who exemplified tradition and authenticity in country music. Loretta Lynn was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1988 and became one of six women with that status. Other inductees fell into the hard category: Kitty Wells (1976); Minnie Pearl (1975); Patsy Cline (1973); and the original Carter Family, AP, Maybelle, and Sara (1970).[23] It appeared as if pop country was not country enough for the Hall of Fame. The lesson was be hard and earn respect and recognition, or be soft and forgotten.

To accompany late 1980s hard country sounds, women's images became more traditional, with clothing that was more "country" than previous eras. There was no better example than the adoption of Nudie suits for women performers. Jewish ex-boxer Nudie Cohen

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[21]. Daniel Cooper, "Tanya Tucker: Almost Grown," *Journal of Country Music* 17, no. 1 (1994): 25.

[22]. Mary A. Bufwack and Robert K. Oermann, *Finding Her Voice: The Sage of Women in Country Music* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1993), 339-342.

[23]. Joel Whitburn, *Joel Whitburn's Top Country Singles, 1944–2001*, 5th ed. (Menomonee Falls, WI: Records Research, 2002), 566.

created Nudie suits in 1940. Cohen, who had a background making clothes for strippers, teamed up with western singer Tex Williams and started creating his costumes. The suits featured rhinestones, dramatic colors, fringe, and hats and boots. Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, and Rex Allen started wearing them, and within months Nudie suits became *haute couture.* In the 1950s they became flashier, with extensive rhinestones and embellishments. During the Nashville Sound Era of the late 1950s, performers chose toned-down country costumes; and throughout the 1960s Nudie suits declined in popularity. In the 1970s Outlaws like Willie Nelson wore jeans and T-shirts; Nudie suits looked out of fashion and old. Cohen died in 1984 and his protégé Manuel Cuevas took over. Many believed the suits would die with Cohen, but in the late 1980s the neotraditionalists revived them. Male performers like Dwight Yoakam and Randy Travis wore them as a way to demonstrate their links to tradition, and women began wearing them as well, a first in country music. Emmylou Harris and kd lang both donned Nudie suits throughout the late 1980s and in this way proved their places in the neotraditional movement.[24]

In addition to Nudie suits hats, boots, and western wear for female performers also returned. Rodeo scenes, cowgirls, bales of hay, churches, and country homes made regular appearances in videos and in concerts. In their 1987 *Tonight Show* appearance to perform songs from *Trio*, Dolly Parton, Emmylou Harris, and Linda Ronstadt all dressed traditionally. Parton and Ronstadt wore country-inspired dresses, with Parton in western fringe and Ronstadt in a mixture of Mexican and country. Harris had her own look with boots and a country jacket. To add to the effect, bales of hay and western props covered the set.[25] Even without hearing the music, viewers would know from these signifiers that they had witnessed a country performance.

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[24]. Country Music Foundation, *Country: The Music and the Musicians: From the Beginnings to the '90s*, 2nd ed. (New York: Abbeville Press, 1994), 340–41.

Newcomers Sweethearts of the Rodeo used a similar strategy. Their 1988 video for "Satisfy You" featured an interview with the duo about their loves of the rodeo and the "image of cowboy." The video also showed scenes from concerts that featured line dances and rodeo scenes projected onto backgrounds. The women dressed in country attire throughout to complement the western setting.[26]

Highway 101's front woman Paulette Carlson also dressed in traditional and presumably old-fashioned ways. In 1988, *Billboard's* "Nashville Scene" columnist Gerry Wood gave Carlson the Scene's Style Award for her attire at that year's CMA Awards. Carlson wore a long dress covered in ruffles with oversized sleeves that resembled styles worn by Loretta Lynn in the 1970s. In 1989 Carlson again wore this style at Highway 101's debut at Fan Fair, even though the event took place outside in the summer heat.[27] This dress not only resembled those of Loretta Lynn, but it also drew from the styles of country singers of the 1950s and even from earlier fashion images of the antebellum South. Carlson, through her attire, linked herself to traditional artists and also to conventional views of the South.

In previous time periods hard-core clothing was reserved for males since boots and hats symbolized tradition as well as masculinity. Of course women wore these as well, but they usually had feminine components. By the late 1980s women turned away from the feminine dresses of the early 1980s and the transitional clothing of the mid 1980s and instead wore Nudie suits and other attire formerly associated with men. The newer styles distanced them from the glamorous or intermediary attire of previous periods, and the behaviors that certain styles

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[25]. MTR, Los Angeles, *Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, NBC, March 13, 1987.

[26]. CMHOF, CBS Compilation Reel, VII, 1988, ¾ cassette.

[27]. CMHOF, Highway 101 Fan Club Folder, Fan Club Newsletter, vol. 1, no 1 (Winter 1988); CMHOF, Highway 101 Fan Club Folder, Fan Club Newsletter, vol. 2, no. 2 (Summer 1989).

insinuated, and instead linked women to newer ideas. Hard-core clothing gave women more access to the hard-core label, helped them claim places as neotraditionalists, and tied them to tradition.

Other successful women used different strategies. KT Oslin, for example, did not dress traditionally country, but she did dress conservatively, another link to older country music. The cover of her album *80's Ladies* featured a photograph of Oslin sitting at a table in front of a piano, wearing a high-neck shirt and long coat. She was completely covered, non-sexual, and non-flirtatious.[28] She projected the image of a serious older woman, an acceptable image. Tradition did not always mean "country"; conservatism was equally appropriate, as was anything that distinguished women from the glamour and sexuality of the early 1980s.

Women also became more traditional in terms of their roles and behaviors. Female performers began these trends in the mid-1980s and learned that fans responded positively to them; therefore, their attempts to focus on tradition became more pronounced by the end of the decade. In particular, women in country music became increasingly domestic, a trend that was not new, but one that intensified in the late 1980s. Many female singers emphasized their connections to food with fan club papers that included recipes. Emmylou Harris (who won ACM Album of the Year for *Trio* in 1987; the ACM for Vocal Collaboration of the Year; a 1988 CMA Vocal Event of the Year award; and a Grammy in 1987 for Best Country Vocal Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocals) included recipes for things like lemon poppy seed pound cake in her fan club newsletter. Harris was not a homemaker, yet she felt it necessary to emphasize her domestic skills. Even Dolly Parton, who rarely conformed to domestic stereotypes, used these tactics, for example, Parton's flyers for Dollywood included images of

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[28]. Paul Kingsbury and the Country Music Hall of Fame, *Vinyl Hayride: Country Music Album Covers, 1947–1989* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2003), 153.

her serving biscuits.[29] Parton was neither a mother nor a traditional wife; in fact, she consistently hinted that she had an open marriage and regularly defied other female stereotypes. But in the late 1980s she became a domestic goddess!

Domesticity took other forms as well as Fan Fair decorations in the late 1980s depicted kitchens and other domestic spaces. In 1987 Reba McEntire had the Reba McEntire Kitchen at Fan Fair, which placed the singer within the confines of a home.[30] This, like the associations with food, was not new but became more pronounced in this period. McEntire was neither a mother nor a domestic, and she was already an established artist. Her decision to display a kitchen to her fans showed she was conforming to ideas about women and their proper places.

Women also still continued to represent themselves as mothers which, like domesticity, was evident in earlier periods but intensified by the late 1980s. "I'll Always Come Back," the fourth single and the second number-one hit from Oslin's 1987 *80's Ladies* album, began with dialogue between Oslin and her female friend. Oslin confessed, "I miss him so much," leading viewers to believe she was speaking of a man. The lyrics, in fact, described her returning to a man; however, the video showed her returning to her son. She arrived at his home, played with him in the yard, and then sat down with him at a piano. It appeared as if the father had custody, and all of the activity took place in the father's space. He was there when Oslin appeared and informed her he was getting remarried. She then dramatically replied that she would always come back to her son.[31] The video showed her in a somewhat independent role: single, and away

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[29]. CMHOF, Emmylou Harris Fan Club Folder, "Emmylou Harris Fact Sheet"; CMHOF, Kathleen Betters Collection, Box 173, 2E 13.2.3, Fan Club Newsletters/Packets/Fans, Folder 97.25.421.

[30]. CMHOF, Reba McEntire, Fan Club Folder, Reba International Fan Club Newsletter vol. 5, no. 2 (September–October 1987).

[31]. CMHOF, Marlboro Music Videos, By Artists Involved in Our Tour, ¾ cassette.

from her ex-husband and child, but simultaneously maternal. Oslin, like other female performers, needed to link herself to children to subordinate her individualism since women could not go on the road without ties to a child or home. Moreover, since Oslin was an older woman, her audience potentially consisted of older, female baby boomers, or listeners who appreciated more maternal themes.

The Forester Sisters also emphasized motherhood. Their 1988 song "Letter Home," written by their producer Wendy Waldman, told the story of a woman who got married as a teenager and had children, after which her husband subsequently abandoned her, forcing her to support her children alone. She wrote a "letter home" to her mother that stated, "We work in a place with some other girls and we're doin' all right. We raise our kids, our jeans still fit, and sometimes we go out all night." According to country music writer and reviewer Mary Bufwack, "there is no finer song about single motherhood."[32] Not only did they sing of motherhood, they also sang about maintaining pre-baby bodies and lifestyles. You had to have it all: a career, good looks, and children.

The Judds also continued to emphasize their mother/daughter relationship. Their 1988 *Across the Heartland* television special showed the duo traveling through America. The show contained numerous references to family; they claimed they could not sing without each other and that they needed "roots." The special also included clips and photographs from Wynonna's childhood and interviews with other relatives. Ashley, as usual, was strangely absent. The show included only a few shots of Ashley, and the singing duo defended this by explaining that she filmed the video. In spite of the apparent division between the mother and youngest daughter, Ashley, both daughters expressed a very strong admiration towards Naomi; they both felt she

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[32]. Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 499.

kept their family together.[33] This focus on family served not only to link women to tradition, but it also reminded fans that they had not stepped too far out of their places.

Female country music's emphasis on motherhood mirrored larger societal themes and trends toward American women. With feminism under attack, society promoted both marriage and motherhood. In 1986 Harvard and Yale researchers published a marriage study that announced a "man shortage" and that "a college-educated, unwed woman at thirty had a twenty percent likelihood of marriage, at thirty-five a five percent chance, and at forty no more than a two percent chance." The media also consistently reported that women experienced over a 70 percent decrease in living standard after a divorce. None of these statistics represented the truth; in fact, most studies discovered that marriage was not the most important thing in a woman's life. Moreover, the more money a woman earned, the less hurry she felt to marry.[34] In spite of this, media reports focused on fear and the incorrect belief that all women wanted to marry quickly. Since the media and society encouraged women to marry, and perpetuated beliefs that women needed marriage in order to succeed, country music adopted these views as well. In this way female country music reflected its fan's and society's ideas about women's places.

In popular culture, marriage and motherhood also became ideal roles. In the late 1980s the media announced new trends for women, mainly nesting, leaving work, and being homemakers. The media also glamorized good, "subservient" housewives in films like *Fatal Attraction* (1987) and *The Untouchables* (1987) and then made motherhood look ideal. For example, in *Overboard* (1987), after the rich and temperamental main character suffered humiliation and returned to her place, she wanted to have a baby. Television encouraged

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[33]. *The Judds: Across the Heartland,* prod. Tall Pony Productions, 50 min. MPI Home Entertainment, 1988, Videocassette.

[34]. Faludi, *Backlash*, 3, 15–16.

motherhood as well, in fact, at the start of the 1988 fall season, *TV Guide* announced, "Nesting will be a crucial theme this year for returning shows." *Cheers*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Designing Women*, *Newhart*, *L.A. Law*, *Night Court*, and *thirtysomething* all had women who wanted or delivered babies. *The Cosby Show* even had an episode where men became pregnant. Allie got married on *Kate and Allie*, and *Moonlighting's* Maddie Hayes wed a character so boring that viewers criticized the show and eventually the writers annulled the marriage. Even in *Golden Girls* and *Designing Women*, the main female characters represented powerful women who simultaneously seemed confined to the home. In addition, a 1950s revival took place with *The New Leave it to Beaver*, *The New Newlywed Game*, and *The New Dating Game*.[35] Since women could not be politically, socially, or economically equal, they glamorized their traditional roles.

In addition to the focus on motherhood in female country music, women also exhibited childlike behavior. In 1987 Barbara Mandrell cohosted *Nashville Now* along with Minnie Pearl. During the show, Pearl claimed that Roy Acuff, the King of Country Music, admired Mandrell for her manners. He told Pearl that Mandrell always said "yes sir" and "no sir," as if she was an adolescent. Pearl also referred to Mandrell as "a girl" and treated her as a younger, inexperienced performer. In response, Mandrell acted like a child; she behaved very sweet, giggly, shy, and deferential.[36] This, like the attempts to appear domestic and maternal, served to diffuse women's power and success. If country's men depicted women as childlike and immature, then they could also view and describe them as nonthreatening girls, not powerful performers with serious careers.

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[35]. Ibid., 75–107, 116–17, 153.

[36]. CMHOF, *Nashville Now*, August 14, 1987, VHS 0805.

Just as Dolly Parton conformed to ideas of domesticity, she also became increasingly childlike. Parton's theme park Dollywood included an area called "Daydream Ridge," a $6 million expansion with separate sections fashioned after Parton's childhood dreams. Her publicity flyer for this area included photographs of Parton in a candy store, on children's rides, and surrounded by stuffed animals.[37] Parton represented herself as a child, not as an accomplished female performer. In spite of her attempts to fall in line with hard country, Parton had to simultaneously conform to country's standards for women. She had to diffuse her hardness with childlike displays.

Other singers demonstrated their childlike qualities through their songs. In 1987, newcomer Holly Dunn won the CMA award for New Female Vocalist for "Daddy's Hands," a song about the strength of her father and her admiration of him. His hands were "folded silently in prayer;" covered in calluses; were "soft and kind" when she was crying; and "hard as steel" when "she'd done wrong." In any event, there "was always love in daddy's hands."[38] The word "daddy" was itself childlike and asexual, even if it was also southern. Plus the song was about a child's love of her father, not about adult admiration. Dunn's song presented her as a child and her father as her protector, a traditional and accepted male/female relationship.

Women also depicted themselves as caregivers, a theme similar to motherhood. In 1988 Barbara Mandrell held the Barbara Mandrell Celebrity Softball Classic, a sports game that donated proceeds to Vanderbilt University's Transplant Programs. Participants represented a diverse crew; they included Roy Acuff, Sheena Easton, Gladys Knight, Minnie Pearl, Herschel

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[37]. CMHOF, Kathleen Betters Collection, Box 173, 2E 13.2.3, Fan Club Newsletters/Packets/Fans Folder 97.25.314, "Smoky Mountain Gateway Guide."

[38]. CMHOF, "The Twenty-Second Annual Academy of Country Music Awards," NBC, April 6, 1987, 8–10PM, VHS 0895.

Walker, Oprah Winfrey, Chuck Norris, and Betty White, among others. Almost 20,000 spectators attended; the event drew fifteen corporate sponsors and raised $500,000. Mandrell claimed, "Why put in the ground and turn back to dust what could help people live?" The game then concluded with Mandrell scoring the winning run. The cover of the game's program included Mandrell with Jonathan Jones, a two-year-old African American heart transplant patient.[39] Herself a mother, Mandrell by the late 1980s went beyond motherhood and helped other children as well.

Dolly Parton also depicted herself as a caregiver. In 1988 Parton started the Dollywood Foundation, an organization that created the Buddy Dropout Prevention Program. Students in seventh and eighth grades would pair up with a buddy, and the two would encourage each other to stay in school. The Dollywood Foundation would then provide funding for participating schools.[40] Parton, who had no children and therefore was not automatically seen as a caregiver, became a nurturer through this foundation.

In the late 1980s women in country music openly declared to sing for and about women, a new tactic for female performers that separated them from prior country stars. Previously songs described love or related themes, but singers themselves rarely claimed that they aimed lyrics exclusively at women. However, at decade's end, artists readily admitted they designed songs for and about their female fans. KT Oslin, whose album *80s Ladies* went platinum in May 1989 and who became the first country music female to hit the one million mark with a debut album, claimed "most of my songs are about women." She also linked herself to other women

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[39]. CMHOF, Kathleen Bethers Collection, Box 180A, 14.2.6, *Barbara Mandrell Celebrity Softball Classic*; Jane Sanderson, "An All-Star Lineup Makes Barbara Mandrell's Charity Softball Game a Big League Hit," *People Magazine* 29, no. 24 (20 June 1988): 76.

[40]. CMHOF, Folder- Dolly Parton Fan Club Information, *Foundation Gazette* (The official newsletter for the Dollywood Foundation Ambassadors), vol. 9, no. 3 (Winter 1996-1997).

by sympathizing with their hopes and dreams. Before her success she sang in television commercials, and of that profession she said, "One day I woke up and said 'do I wanna spend my life bein' the Fix-O-Dent lady on a roller coaster and having my head stuck in a john saying I-can-see-my-dishes-in-here …? I thought, 'Oh my God, I'm going to die and the only thing I'll be remembered for is a hemorrhoid commercial! Girl, you have got to give this singin' thing one more try!'"[41] She also claimed, "I think women always have had stronger careers and stronger records when they write their own songs" and added that society often forced women to "take on a passive image."[42] These comments and strategies both represented marketing tools and ways to defuse her power. Singing to women about female themes kept Oslin and others within a female sphere of influence. They did not challenge men and instead achieved success by being for and about women.

Others echoed the same sentiments. Jimmy Bowen of MCA, and later Capitol, said of Oslin, "All of her success that she's had has been when she said something. '80's Ladies,' do you know how many women in this country had to just get chills from the first time they heard that? Like: Whoa, that's me!" Tanya Tucker said, "I think women buy records, more so than men. That's why we're doing so well right now—because I'm really singing some women's songs. Used to, I'd sing men's songs. 'Down to my Last Teardrop,' 'Without You,' these are women's songs, what they would sing." Reba McEntire claimed, "The women in the audience, I figured out, are the ones who buy the tickets and who are the one who buy the music." Pam Tillis, who was accused of being too attractive, claimed, "I've heard people say, 'Don't be too

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[41]. CMHOF, KT Oslin, Fan Club Folder, "KT on KT" *KT Oslin Fan Club*; Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 523.

[42]. "Will the Circle Be Unbroken? Threads of an Ongoing Conversation," *Journal of Country Music* 15, no. 1 (1992): 28.

good-looking, you'll intimidate people.'" But according to Tillis, female fans said their husbands liked her and they did too; there was little jealousy, and instead Tillis appealed to female fans.[43] Even Dolly Parton in the 1987 debut episode for her television series *Dolly* claimed that she would wear stylish and exciting outfits for the women, and then, in typical Parton fashion, added that she would also do so for the men.[44] These comments and actions proved that performers and industry executives thought about audiences in gendered terms. Women marketed themselves to other women, not to men, and therefore used strategies that they believed would attract female fans.

KT Oslin's songs included lyrics that she directed exclusively towards women. Her hit "80's Ladies" began by describing Oslin as a child with her two childhood female friends. One was "smart," one a "fool," and Oslin sang of herself, "I cross the border every chance I get." The three were "girls in the 50s," "stoned rock and rollers in the 60s" and then "more than their names got changed." Finally they became "80's ladies": experienced, salty, "educated," and "liberated." Oslin sang, "we burned our bras and we burned some dinners and we burned candles at both ends. And we've had some children who look just like the way we did then."[45] These lyrics spoke to female, not male, country fans. She sang about women's pasts and women's lives, and even included a muted form of feminism. She discussed burning bras and the difficulties women faced trying to work and raise families, but she did not openly support the women's movement, nor did she attack patriarchy. Oslin sang to women, but kept her lyrics within the conservative bounds of country music.

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[43]. Ibid., 28–30.

[44]. CMHOF, *Dolly,* August 27, 1987, VHS-0233.

[45]. KT Oslin, "80's Ladies," *80's Ladies,* RCA, 1987.

Oslin's "80's Ladies" lyrics did speak to women and of feminism, but only to certain women and certain brands of feminism. Oslin created a version of feminism that presented token images, burning bras for example, but ignored the more mature elements of the women's movement. For example, Oslin sang in the chorus, "We were the girls of the 50s, stoned rock and rollers in the 60s. Honey, more than our names got changed as the 70s slipped on by. Now we're 80's ladies." In these lyrics she first mentioned that her and her friends started as "girls," a possible attempt to deemphasize any connection of her song with more adult themes. She then referred to frivolous activities like drug use and listening to rock and roll, not to the women's movement's struggles or goals. Instead of engaging radical 1970s feminism or the successes of moderate feminism, she claimed that the 1970s passed them by. Oslin did not speak of sexual violence, the Equal Rights Amendment, reproductive freedom, child care, or equal pay and instead focused on images that some used to discredit and ridicule feminism, like burning bras. Moreover, in some ways she also made her song accessible to men by belittling feminism and by not making it seems too serious. Additionally, Oslin presented her version of feminism as a youthful indulgence not only through her chorus but also in the song's ending. "80's Ladies" closed with three taunting verses that appeared to be from a children's song. Oslin sang:

A- my name is Alice.
I'm gonna marry Artie.
We're gonna sell apples
And live in Arkansas.

B- my name is Betty.
I'm gonna marry Bobby.
We're gonna sell beans
And live in Brazil.

C- my name is Connie.
I'm gonna marry Charlie.
We're gonna sell cars

And live in California.[46]

Judging from the song's ending, "80's Ladies" had not changed much from the 50's girls. They had childlike dreams and ambitions, strove to marry, and none wanted mature careers.

The video for "80's Ladies" also had scenes designed explicitly for women and, like the song, presented a somewhat immature version of feminism. The video began with well-dressed women leaving what appeared to be a successful party; they all seemed to be in great moods. Two female friends stayed behind after the party, happy to finally be alone. They watched videos of three female children and Oslin, one of the women, then left for the airport. On the way there, she stopped by a cemetery to visit the other child in the videos.[47] The party, scenes of the past, and bonding made this video about the strength of female friendships, even after death. Men did not have significant roles in the video, another factor that made it geared towards female fans. However, the video simultaneously seemed like a frivolous film, a "chick flick," designed explicitly for women. The female characters started at a party and then engaged in stereotypical women-focused activities like watching television, eating junk food, and giggling. Even their stylish outfits, which meant they knew about fashion and shopping, presented them in clichéd terms. In this way, even though the video seemed designed for female fans, it did not represent female empowerment or liberation.

Oslin also designed her performances to appeal to women. By the end of the 1980s Oslin had established herself as a hit-maker; her first album went platinum and her second gold. At the 1989 American Music Awards Show, Oslin performed "Hold Me," a single from her second album. She dressed in a purple suit complete with gloves and had an all-male band. The lyrics described a married couple who struggled with their relationship. The husband told his wife, "I

[46]. Ibid.

[47]. CMHOF, Cohn and Wolfe Marlboro Country Music Videos, VHS 1894.

was bound and determined I was never gonna come back" and that "he was running" from his job and also from her. His wife had similar thoughts; she was also "running" from her job, dealing with "wrinkles" that "no cream would stop," and still she returned to him. The chorus portrayed the wife telling her husband, "Don't kiss like we're married; kiss me like we're lovers."[48] Oslin's appearance, along with the song, pleased female fans. She dressed conservatively, not in a way that could be construed as oppressive or sexual, and stood confidently in front of a male band. In addition, Oslin sang about women's concerns.

Other women used similar strategies in their lyrics. In 1988 Charlie McLain performed "Men" at a concert in the Bahamas, a single that had been a hit from her 1980 album *Women Get Lonely*. McLain's career had declined during the mid-to-late 1980s since her music was pop country, a genre that had fallen out of favor. Her 1988 performance of this song, however, fit into the late 1980s trend of gearing songs towards women. Roy Clark introduced McLain by saying she was "new" and "all woman." In "Men," McLain sang that men could "treat you like a child" or "drive you wild." Some wanted to "take you straight to the altar" and some only wanted to take you "to bed." She admitted that "there's nothin' better than men" but also criticized them.[49] This, like Oslin's "80's Ladies," constituted a mild form of feminism. Like other artists, she did not challenge patriarchy but did offer a gentle criticism of women's treatment. She did not blame institutionalized sexism or the backlash but instead blamed individual men. She also softened the blow by stating that many men did have good qualities, only a few behaved in unacceptable fashions.

Rosanne Cash and Rodney Crowell's 1988 video for "Such a Small World" also spoke to

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[48]. CMHOF, American Music Awards Show, January 30, 1989, VHS 1283.

[49]. CMHOF, *Nashville Goes International*, produced and distributed by Cabin Fever Entertainment, 1988, VHS 0370.

a mild form of feminism. The footage was meant to look like scenes from a home video; for example, it included clips of Cash on the beach, the couple sleeping, them checking into a hotel, visiting friends, and looking at old photographs of themselves. It also contained sexual scenes, namely Cash and Crowell discreetly kissing in bed. In the sexual scenes Cash was obviously in control; Crowell was more exposed than she, and Cash was always in a dominant position. The video ended with Crowell leaving the morning after, but he quickly changed his mind and returned.[50] Cash was rewarded for being strong but not domineering, a stereotype that appealed to women and conformed to society's views about acceptable female behavior.

Cash's video for "Runaway Train" also showed her in a position of power. The 1988 video depicted a fight between Cash and her lover, Crowell. He pushed her against the wall, and she fought back by throwing a vase in his direction. Of course this domestic violence was not liberating; however, her refusal to be a passive victim was. She also left him afterwards, another freeing act.[51] Only when men threatened women could women truly take stands, and only then could audiences see their stances as legitimate.

Even Tammy Wynette of "Stand by Your Man" fame had a liberating video. In "Beneath the Painted Sky" (1988) Wynette sang of her father: he gave her "everything he could afford to buy" and protected her by painting a sky on the ceiling of her bedroom. The sky served as her shield from storms, sorrow, and heartbreak; and whenever she needed protection, she always thought of the painted sky. The video, however, did not show a daughter and father, but instead Wynette and her daughter. The video included scenes of the two playing and cuddling, with no

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[50]. CMHOF, CBS Compilation Reel VII, 1988, ¾ cassette.

[51]. CMHOF, CBS Compilation Reel VII, 1988, ¾ cassette.

father in sight.[52] The male figure was removed and replaced with a female, a strategy to demonstrate Wynette's maternalism and to win female fans.

Reba McEntire also tailored her music and videos to female audiences. Since 1986, McEntire had portrayed a suburban widow in "What Am I Gonna Do About You"; a glamorous singer in "Sunday Kind of Love"; a mother/wife/waitress who went back to school in "Is There Life Out There?" a cowgirl in "You Lie"; a prostitute in "Fancy"; and a murderess in "The Night the Lights Went Out in Georgia." These represented roles women wanted, not men. Moreover, record labels released most of these songs after 1987, when McEntire took control of her career. In 1987 she got a divorce, fired her manager, moved from Oklahoma to Nashville, started coproducing her albums, opened her own office, and incorporated a song publishing firm, booking agency, management company, fan club organization, and private jet-leasing business.[53] She took charge of her video images and deliberately catered to women.

Dolly Parton's role as Truvy in *Steel Magnolias* was also for women, as was the entire film.[54] Parton played a working-class hairdresser for women, which in itself presented her in a female-identified role. But the character's appeal did not end there. Parton's character also served as a legendary advice-disseminator, the mother of a wild child, the wife of an absent husband, and a Christian who acted neither prudish nor preachy. In addition, she had a happily tacky style, became maternal with Daryl Hannah's character, and in the end received redemption through her newly attentive husband and her son, who finally pleased her. These roles all spoke to female viewers and suggested that the "right" kind of woman got rewarded.

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[52]. Ibid.

[53]. Mary A. Bufwack and Robert K. Oermann, "Reba McEntire Walks On," *Journal of Country Music* 16, no. 1 (1993): 18.

[54]. *Steel Magnolias,* dir. Herbert Ross, 119 min., Sony Pictures, 1989 (DVD release in 2000), DVD.

Singing for women defused female performers' power and also relegated them to the women's sphere. They could not compete with male singers and simultaneously could not cater to a male audience; therefore, they dealt almost exclusively with women. This separation made women appear less threatening, less assertive, and more in line with traditional female roles in country music. They had become hard but simultaneously did not step too far out of bounds. Singing for women also worked as a marketing tool. Women bought more records than men, and they attended more concerts.[55] Female performers had to simultaneously win a female audience to avoid truly challenging male supremacy.

Women who did not adhere to the new late 1980s standards received reprimands from fans. Criticism towards nonconforming country music women was not new; however, in this period it intensified, especially in terms of sex. For example, Ralph Emery interrogated Patty Loveless, a neotraditionalist, on TNN's *Nashville Now*. Emery accompanied Loveless on his interview couch, an unusual move as he generally sat behind his desk. He asked if she was married, and when she answered "no," he followed with "why not?" He also asked if she had a boyfriend, lived alone, cooked, cleaned, or ironed. She denied having a boyfriend, but uncomfortably admitted to all the rest. He then asked about her clothing choices. How many times did she change in one day? During one performance? Did she wear pants? Did she ever wear a dress? He also claimed that he had never heard of a woman opening for another woman (she was on tour with Reba McEntire). At the end he briefly asked about her tour and her new album.[56] The interview focused almost entirely on her womanliness, not her music. Emery questioned her female qualities and ridiculed her choices, presumably because she was too

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55. Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 481-483.

[56]. CMHOF, *Nashville Now*, Patty Loveless, February 21, 1989, VHS 1133.

attractive and also for her refusal to adhere to norms, namely the anti-sexual focus for women in country music. Emery's actions also spoke to country's audience and its expectations of women. Emery, a seasoned interviewer, knew how to conduct a provocative interview that would appeal to his viewers. In fact, Emery received no criticism for his treatment of Loveless, in spite of her status as a country star. Women in the late 1980s, if they chose to appear too attractive, could be attacked for their sexuality.

Highway 101's Paulette Carlson also received criticism for being too attractive. Highway 101 won the ACM award in 1988 for Top Vocal Group and the CMA award for Vocal Group of the Year, and then received a Grammy nomination in 1989. In spite of this professional success, Carlson found herself consistently sexualized and reduced to nothing more than a body. Fans wrote in to Highway 101's newsletter and asked questions about her figure, specifically her measurements. In response Highway 101's fan club editor replied "this is not *Playboy*." The attention on Carlson's body eventually caused problems for her in terms in her image and her relationship with her band members. Fans' tendencies to sexualize Carlson reduced her to nothing more than another pretty face, not a powerful front-woman, and the media's focus on her led to resentment from her band.[57] Commercial success for women in country music did not equate with liberation. Carlson did not dress provocatively nor did she flirt, invite sexual comments, or compete with her musicians. The simple fact that she was attractive was enough to place the focus on her body, not her music.

The industry reprimanded Reba McEntire for being innovative and for speaking, something women apparently could not do. Her 1987 video for "Is There Life Out There?" included dialogue, a first for country music. CMT "warned" her and the "entire music industry

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[57]. CMHOF, Highway 101 Fan Club Folder, Fan Club Newsletter, vol. 2, no. 1 (Spring 1989); Bogdanov, Woodstra, and Erlewine, *All Music Guide to Country*, 344.

not to make any more videos that contained dialogue," as they felt their viewers "would rather not have any talking" in CMT videos. Record sales and awards did not support this claim; in 1987 McEntire won the CMA Award for Female Vocalist of the Year.[58] The issue with her video seemed to be about who was allowed to speak and what they could speak about. McEntire's video asked if women could search for more fulfilling lives, if "there was life out there?" McEntire's song began with the following verses:

She married when she was twenty.
She thought she was ready
Now she's not so sure.
She thought shed done some living
But now she's just wonderin'
What she's living for?
Now she's feeling that there's something more.

Is there life out there
So much she hasn't done
Is there life beyond
Her family and her home?
She's done what she should
Should she do what she dares?
She doesn't want to leave
She's just wonderin'
Is there life out there.[59]

Judging from CMT's response, women could not speak, especially if they questioned their domestic choices and asked about the possibility of better lives.

KT Oslin also received criticism for voicing her opinions. In 1988 Oslin performed on *Hee Haw* and the show received a "flood of phone calls from women all over the country thanking" it for having her on. In response the show asked her to perform again, an invitation

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58. CMHOF, Reba McEntire Fan Club Folder, Reba International Fan Club Newsletter, vol. 5, no. 2 (September–October 1987).

59. Reba McEntire, "Is There Life Out There, *For My Broken Heart*, 1987, MCA.

Oslin declined. When asked why, she claimed that she "did not like the way the Hee Haw Honeys and some of the other female performers were dressed on the show." She did not think that *Hee Haw* was being "respectful to them as women." In response, *Hee Haw*'s Sam Luvullo stated, "maybe I had done something wrong by surrounding her with our Honeys in some of our comedy skits. After all, KT isn't exactly Honey material."[60] He responded to her criticism by attacking her physical appearance and did not acknowledge her comments but instead resorted to calling her, for all intents and purposes, "ugly." Moreover, Luvullo's claims insinuated that he knew he could publicly attack her and that fans would accept his criticisms, in spite of Oslin's obvious popularity. This also sent a message to other would-be critics: if you challenge *Hee Haw*'s sexism, prepare for a personal attack, since only unattractive women protested the objectification of other women.

kd lang, who by the late 1980s began to experience commercial success, also received reprimands from fans and the industry. In 1987 she recorded "Crying" with Roy Orbison, which became a successful single on Billboard's top country singles chart and earned her a 1988 Grammy for Best Vocal Collaboration. Her 1988 album *Absolute Torch and Twang* sold over 200,000 copies in three weeks, remained on the country chart for over 100 weeks, landed on the top pop albums chart, and won a Grammy in 1990.[61] lang's problem, therefore, concerned not her music but her image, specifically her physical appearance and behavior. Appearing on *Hee Haw* in 1988, lang refused to wear makeup or to have a dressing room separate from the men in her band. But she sang so well that she caused a commotion, a "near riot," which helped her

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[60]. Sam Lovullo and Marc Eliot, *Life in the Kornfield: My 25 Years at* Hee Haw (New York: Boulevard Books, 1996), 181–82.

[61]. Starr, *k.d. lang*, 90–91, 113–14, 126.

maintain her popularity.[62] lang continued her unusual behavior in 1989 when she performed "Crying" (after Orbison's death in 1988) in a dress with no shoes. She looked more feminine than usual, and the performance was solemn, but the lack of footwear made it seem quirky.[63] In 1989 she also started wearing Nudie suits, which enhanced her gender ambiguity and simultaneously linked her to tradition. She claimed she did this so the press would not focus on her body; but in reality it made her body and sexuality the talk of Nashville.[64] In each case lang behaved bizarrely but performed so well that it diffused some criticism. Eventually, however, her talent would not be enough to save her from the harsh criticisms directed towards nonconformist women in country music.

lang also continued to wear her trademark outfit, an ensemble that inspired many reviews and comments. On *Austin City Limits* in 1988, lang sang "Three Cigarettes in an Ashtray," a performance that featured her sitting at a table alone with an ashtray. She wore an electric-blue shirt with white fringe, electric-blue tights, a flower-print skirt with charms attached to the bottom, and no makeup. She sang so well that she received a standing ovation, again minimizing her quirkiness with talent. She then ran to the camera, put her face into it, and blew a kiss.[65] The playfulness of her closing also prevented criticism.

lang generally chose clothing that concealed her body as she had issues with her weight and never felt comfortable with the constant criticisms of her appearance and attractiveness. She wanted to appear androgynous, hence the Nudie suits, and also made jokes about herself and her

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[62]. Lovullo and Eliot, *Life in the Kornfield*, 182–83.

[63]. *kd lang, Harvest of Seven Years.*

[64]. Starr, *k.d. lang*, 133.

[65]. UNC, Music Library, *The Best of Austin City Limits: Country Music's Finest Hour*, compilation producer Terry Lickona, executive producer Bill Arhos, director Gary Menotti, 60 min., Sony Music Entertainment, 1996. VC-470.

appearance as a way to diffuse her outfits and lack of femininity. But the problem was not specifically lang's body; it was the message her appearance conveyed. She defied tradition and therefore was not in her place. As in previous periods, she represented neither the virgin nor the whore in an industry that required women to conform to one or the other.[66]

As the 1980s progressed, lang's behavior became increasingly questionable. In 1989 she took part in Amnesty International's Human Rights Now Tour with Sting, Bruce Springsteen, Peter Gabriel, and Tracy Chapman. She also performed a sold-out concert in Vancouver's Orpheum Theater that was designed to raise money and awareness against free trade.[67] Country music did not tolerate this type of activism, especially since it was for liberal causes. Women in country music could openly support causes that related to families, children, and in some cases conservatism, but never liberalism.

lang also used her body aggressively, another act forbidden in female country music. During the Winter Olympics in Calgary, Alberta, lang sang "Turn Me Round" and danced with hundreds of ice skaters. The show also included dancers on stage, and neither she nor the dancers had choreographed moves. lang ran across the stage, flung her body around, and seemed totally sure of herself and her performance.[68] Country music shunned this level of confidence, especially when performers combined it with aggressive movements. Fans and the industry expected women to be passive, non-aggressive performers in control of their bodies.

Finally, there was lang's lesbianism, which violated every rule of female country music. lang never admitted she was a lesbian (she did not publicly "come out" until 1992); however, her

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[66]. Starr, *k.d. lang*, 111–12, 115–16.

[67]. CMHOF, kd lang Fan Club Folder, *k.d. lang Roundup,* vol. 2, no. 1 (Spring 1989).

[68]. *kd lang, Harvest of Seven Years*.

androgyny and refusal to discuss men led many to assume she preferred women. Her 1989 "Trail of Broken Hearts" video seemed to confirm their suspicions. The video showed a huge Alberta sky, wheat fields, wind mills, wooden fences, and barns, all traditional country signifiers. lang stood in the middle of the field and appeared depressed, another traditionally country theme. The video then showed a woman with blond flowing hair running towards lang in slow motion. It seemed as if lang was singing the love song to this woman. They did not touch, but the scene implied a relationship. This muted lesbianism would prove devastating for lang's country music career. Country music tolerated her only as long as she did not overtly admit her sexuality.[69]

Fans criticized Tanya Tucker as well, but her crime was her "hardness," a label usually reserved for men. Males in country music could drink and party, but women could not, even if they occupied roles as country music legends. Tucker's 1987 album *Love Me Like You Used To,* 1988's S*trong Enough to Bend,* and 1989's *Greatest Hits* album all went gold and also produced hit singles. *Love Me Like You Used To's* "Love Me Like You Used To" went to number two and "I Won't Take Less Than Your Love" and "If It Don't Come Easy" went to number one. *Strong Enough to Bend*'s title track also went to number one, "Highway Robbery" to number two, and "Call on Me" to number four. "Daddy and Home" went to number twenty-seven and "My Arms Stay Open All Night" to number two, both from *Greatest Hits.* In spite of this, personal problems plagued Tucker. In 1988 her family staged a surprise intervention, and as a result Tucker entered the Betty Ford Clinic for drug and alcohol abuse. She claimed treatment did not help, and she immediately went back to partying and performing. In fact, she performed at the ACM Awards show within days of her release. She then got pregnant, toured with Hank

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[69]. Ibid.; Starr, *k.d. lang*, 177.

Williams, Jr., had her daughter Presley in 1989, refused to name the father, and then went on tour with her child. Based on her record and concert sales, Tucker did well; however, her label, Capitol, threatened to drop her. Her manager then demanded that Tucker create a classier image to avoid controversy. According to Tucker, he instructed her to "forget the wild country party girl, and forget the sexpot." She was now a mother and should behave as such.[70]

Dolly Parton consistently avoided criticism, as she had in previous time periods; however, in the late 1980s it seemed as if she had finally crossed country's threshold. In 1989 her Sandollar film company produced the Oscar-winning *Common Threads: Stories from the Quilt*, a documentary about AIDS activism. The film told the history of the first ten years of the AIDS epidemic by following the stories of five men and women connected by their involvement with the NAMES Project/AIDS Memorial Quilt. Parton claimed she became involved in the project because of her personal connections to the gay/lesbian community. Sandy Gallin, her manager, co-owner of Sandollar, and a gay activist, introduced Parton to AIDS activism. Parton claimed she was trying to bring awareness to the Common Threads Quilt Program that traveled across the country. She went on to state that "gay isn't something you do. It is who you are," a comment that defied many conservative views of homosexuality. Moreover, Parton criticized other country musicians for not involving themselves in the movements to end AIDS and AIDS-related discrimination. But in typical Parton fashion, she added humor and deflection to her comments to lessen their impact. Parton claimed that many country performers came from rural areas, places that AIDS did not touch, statements that represented a semi-humorous attempt to

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[70]. Tanya Tucker with Patsi Bale Cox, *Nickel Dreams: My Life* (New York: Hyperion, 1997), 209–13, 216–26, 240–47, 252.

discuss AIDS and that also affirmed the views of would-be critics. If country fans saw AIDS as urban, then they could ignore it with claims that they were "too country" for activism.[71]

In 1986 Parton was also one of *Ms.* magazine's Women of the Year, a title that linked her to feminism and the women's movement. Gloria Steinem personally chose all of the women and based her selections on women's positive contributions during the year. She claimed *Time* generally chose a villain, and so she had attempted to make *Ms.* honorees more positive (only three of her selections had ever been on the cover of *Time*). She chose Parton because she celebrated "ordinary working people," wrote 3,000 songs, supported her family, owned businesses, and opened Dollywood. Steinem also said that Parton "took symbols of femininity that have been developed—fingernails, big hair—and used them as humor and for power." Again, this served as an explicit link to feminism, even if Parton herself did not decide to appear on the list. Parton accepted and promoted her award, and her fan club newspaper proudly announced the honor.[72]

To diffuse her actions, Parton significantly increased her self-depreciating humor, especially on television. In 1989 she was the host and singer on *Saturday Night Live*, and in the opening monologue an extremely thin and hair-sprayed Parton appeared in a sequined cat suit. She then criticized herself by stating that she bought the outfit from Dollywood to look like the NBC peacock. The camera zoomed in on her breasts while she talked, a technique that made her more laughable. Later in the show Parton participated in a skit where she told stories to cast members about her childhood. She sat on a couch and reminisced about tales her mother told her

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[71]. B. Andrew Plant, "Songbird with a Mission," *A&U: America's AIDS Magazine* vol. 12, no. 7 (July 2003): 16–17; Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 539.

[72]. MTR, Los Angeles, *Made in New York*, Fox, January 9, 1987; CMHOF, Kathleen Betters Collection, Box 173, 2E 13.2.3, Fan Club Newsletters/Packets/Fans, Folder 97.25.421, Dolly Newsletter, August 1987.

as a child, stories that in reality came from television show plots. She then appeared in a skit titled "Planet of Enormous Hooters," where Parton played a "deformed" woman with tiny breasts in comparison to the other members; she was so misshapen that she was banished and sent to Earth. She also acted in a skit where cast members made fun of her films. She called her own television show "ill fated" and an "enormous failure," and claimed that *Rhinestone* almost "killed" Sylvester Stallone's career.[73] Her self-depreciating humor softened her sexuality and her professional success.

Parton continued this strategy on her own television series. On the debut episode of *Dolly*, Parton started the show by devaluing herself and her talent. From her bubble bath, she claimed she would never be as funny as Carol Burnette or as pretty as Cher. She exclaimed, "I'm not trying to compete with these great people." She also told the audience the bathtub was only a distraction and that later she would wear gorgeous dresses to attract both men and women. Here again, she used humor and self-criticism to downplay her sexuality and to minimize her physical appearance. This continued in a skit with Dudley Moore, where Parton stated, "you know I'll never be a serious actor." The entire skit focused on their flirting and his teaching her how to act and contained much sexual innuendo. Of course the show also contained many jokes about her breasts; almost every skit included at least a comment about her trademark silhouette.[74]

kd lang also occasionally avoided criticism with humor. lang regularly engaged in comical behavior and joked about her appearance, and for a while both strategies worked. She appeared on *Crook and Chase*, a country music magazine/variety show, twice in 1987, and both times had unusual entrances. Once she walked in backwards and insinuated she did not belong,

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[73]. CMHOF, *Saturday Night Live with Dolly Parton*, April 15, 1989, VHS 0232.

[74]. CMHOF, *Dolly*, August 27, 1987, VHS 0233.

and on the second appearance stuck her head through the studio's curtain. The playfulness continued into the interviews. Lorianne Crook commented that she was skeptical that lang had ever driven a grain truck (a talent of which lang spoke) and lang replied, "Wait—you're looking at me and saying you're shocked I drove a grain truck? I don't buy it." Crook was rendered speechless. lang went on to say, "Oh, you just didn't think I could actually hold a job, is that it?" She then offered a joking explanation of why she wore cutoff boots. lang stated she loved to wear tight boots and eventually they became too restrictive, so she cut them off.[75] In these instances her humor made her appearance and behavior less threatening.

Women in country music reflected larger developments, in particular that women still experienced inequality; in fact, in many cases they lost ground. In politics, women attempted to fight back but the two main political parties ignored their efforts. In 1988 Molly Yard, then president of the National Organization for Women (NOW), gave testimony before the Democratic National Committee that "women would not go to the polls if the Democratic party did not speak to women's concerns." Representative Bill Richardson of New Mexico asked why she was so concerned and claimed, "We have done our battle on behalf of women." He also stated that the Republican Party ignored women and therefore the only option was for women to vote Democratic, in spite of the Democrat's silence towards women. This was particularly true of the right to choose; since 1984 the Democratic Party had changed its pledges on abortion and reproductive rights. In 1984 it vowed to support a Supreme Court decision and oppose any constitutional amendment to restrict or overturn that decision; to oppose government interference that denied poor Americans their right to privacy; to work to end violence and harassment against health providers and women seeking abortions; and to support federal interest in local

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[75]. *kd lang, Harvest of Seven Years*; Starr, *k.d. lang*, 88–89, 113–14.

family planning programs. In 1988 the party pledged only to support abortion rights, regardless of ability to pay. The Republican Party's pledges stayed the same in 1984 and 1988: to support a human life amendment to the Constitution and legislation extending Fourteenth Amendment protections to unborn, to oppose federal funding for abortion and organizations that advocated abortion; and to appoint pro-life judges.[76]

These examples represented a shift towards more conservatism in the late 1980s, developments that negatively impacted women. As the Democratic Party moved away from certain women's issues it left women with fewer options. Politically, women could challenge the Democratic Party's stance or accept its new direction. Women in country music did not protest the move towards more conservatism and instead incorporated it into their performances. Neotraditionalists presented women as passive and as traditional mothers and wives, not as liberated or political actors in the public sphere. Moreover, if they did challenge traditional ideas they did so through humor, not through more aggressive tactics.

Increasing political conservatism became evident in presidential campaigns as well. In 1988 Democratic presidential candidate Michael Dukakis did not discuss abortion even though his opponent Republican George Bush did. Bush stated, "Is it right to believe in the sanctity of life and protect the lives of innocent children? My opponent says no—but I say yes." He then argued that adoption should replace abortion. Reagan added to this in 1988 by devoting a significant portion of his State of the Union address to abortion. He claimed the unborn was a living child, not a women's rights issue, and that he wanted an antiabortion amendment with no exceptions other than when a mother's life was in danger. He went on to link the crusade against

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76. Kira Sanbonmatsu, *Democrats, Republicans, and the Politics of Women's Place* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 34–35.

abortion to Christianity and encouraged a solution that ignored women's interest in the issue, adoption.[77]

The abortion debate continued after the 1988 election. The 1989 *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* decision gave states greater power to limit women's reproductive choices. To add to this, in 1989 Pat Robertson formed the Christian Coalition, and under the leadership of Ralph Reed, it became a significant player in the Republican Party. In the late 1980s, Republicans courted women voters with child care, and Bush appointed more women than Reagan or Carter. The Democrats shortened their platform and supported the child care bill; but for many women, this was too little, too late.[78] The continued debate on abortion, and Democrats virtual silence on the issue, helped show that conservatism increased in this period. Moreover, Supreme Court decisions and the growing ties between Republican politics and religion contributed to the backlash against the women's movement and feminism. Women in country music operated within this environment and their retreats into domesticity, passivity, and tradition reflected not only political conservatism but also the values of country music's fans and the industry. Fans responded positively to increasing conservatism in female country music and the country music industry claimed that conservative trend represented real, or true, country.

As a result of the 1989 *Webster* decision, NOW met in Cincinnati to discuss forming a third party, one that would work for women's equality. In response, the press ridiculed the attendees and made them out to be reactionaries. NOW activists felt discouraged and like they had little room to maneuver. Antiabortion violence increased along with the new political restrictions, and many activists felt under attack on all fronts. Bombings, arsons, harassments,

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[77]. Ibid., 40, 102.

[78]. Sanbonmatsu, *Democrats, Republicans, and the Politics of Women's Place*, 34–35, 40, 102, 119, 123, 131, 175.

kidnappings, and murders related to abortion increased and the two main parties virtually ignored women.[79] Their options, it appeared, were to enter a heated and uphill political battle or retreat into traditional, more socially acceptable roles.

Women's inequality became apparent in other political and economic ways. On Election Day in 1988, two women ran for the Senate (both Republican), a figure down from ten in 1984. The number of women running for the House decreased as well, a trend that held true for governors, lieutenant governors, and secretaries of state. Both women running for the Senate lost, leaving the Senate with only two female members. The numbers of women in the Senate had remained stagnant since mid-century; the first time it had more than two female senators was in 1953 when there were three. Economically, women also experienced inequality. In 1988 white women earned 59 percent of men's salaries, a decrease from previous years. Black women continued to earn even less and economically had not seen the benefits of Reaganomics. Moreover, older women made 58 percent of what men made (in 1968 it was 61 percent) and Hispanic women made 54 percent.[80] In spite of gains, women still were far from equal in terms of political representation or economics.

Despite the fact that women's power decreased, popular culture blamed feminism, not patriarchy, for women's problems. For example, *thirtysomething*, an ABC series that was marketed as a show for educated viewers, included a mother, Hope Steadman (Mel Harris), who played the hero and the show's focus. The most unsympathetic character was Susannah, a self-proclaimed feminist. Susannah was a social activist who worked with battered women and homeless men yet she was portrayed as cold and unfeeling. She had few friends, and the other

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[79]. Faludi, *Backlash*, 277, 412.

[80]. Ibid., 270, 272-73, 364.

characters made fun of her. Susannah finally gave in to traditionalism; she became pregnant, tried to obtain an abortion, and became swayed by Gary, her love interest.[81] As in country music, even feminists could be "tamed" by love and maternity.

In popular culture, independent women, or women who behaved like men, became portrayed as "bad." In the movie *Three Men and a Baby*, a woman gave up her child; in the television series *Blossom*, the mother was not with her daughter; and in *Who's the Boss?* the mother needed a man's help to raise her child. This was evident in drama as well, for example, Alex in *Fatal Attraction* was a psychotic, murderous, barren, and single career woman. James Dearden, the director and screenwriter who created *Fatal Attraction*, said he wanted it to be about how a person could be responsible for a "stranger's suffering" and how you have to be held accountable. When Paramount decided to make it into a film, the story changed. The husband and his family became loveable, and Alex more lethal.[82] These examples mirrored events taking place in country music. The industry and fans chided Tanya Tucker for being too hard, criticized Reba McEntire for speaking, and berated Patty Loveless for her lack of domesticity.

Popular culture also blamed working mothers for society's problems. Films showed unhappy career women; for example, in *Working Girl* (1988) Tess, played by Melanie Griffith, had to connive in order to compete with other women. *Baby Boom* (1987), which starred Diane Keaton, focused on a working single woman who inherited a child. In the end she quit her job and started a business that allowed her to work from home in a rural, domestic setting. The

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[81]. Ibid., 137.

[82]. Women and feminism were blamed even though crimes against women increased. For example, battering, which usually occurred in the home, was the leading cause of injury for women in the late 1980s. In spite of this the home was depicted as a safe and appropriate space for women. Faludi, *Backlash*, 117–19, 155, 159.

media claimed this film served as proof that motherhood and career did not mix. Neither film depicted men as guilty and instead blamed women for having careers.[83] This fell in line with the focus in country music on motherhood and domesticity. Women in country music learned that society viewed their appropriate roles as wives and mothers and they conformed.

Women in popular culture also needed to be rescued. In *Someone to Watch over Me* (1989), *Sea of Love* (1989), and *Look Who's Talking* (1989), the male characters represented overbearing, masculine guardians for powerless women and families threatened by predators. In 1988 all but one of the women nominated for the Academy Award's Best Actress played a victim (*Working Girl* was the exception). Jodie Foster won for *The Accused*, a film produced by Sherry Lansing, who also produced *Fatal Attraction*. "Lansing said *The Accused* should be hailed as a breakthrough movie because it tells America a woman has the 'right' not to be raped." In reality, it showed how far the backlash had gone. By the late 1980s a film that simply criticized rape was labeled a feminist statement.[84] Similar views existed in country music. Feminism was mild, not directly challenging. Women could be hard and successful, but only if they managed to conform to traditional, domestic stereotypes.

Race

Women in the late 1980s also changed in their uses of race. In previous time periods, women in country music generally did not mention race; they avoided or ignored the subject. But in the late 1980s country music once again became strongly linked to tradition, a concept that included ties to conservatism and to whiteness. Country music had always associated itself with whiteness, historically it presented itself as the music of the white working classes, but in

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[83]. Faludi, *Backlash*, 128–29.

[84]. Ibid., 59–60, 70, 138–39.

this time period the association became more intense and explicit. Whereas in previous periods country music disguised the use of race, it now became overt. At the same time black Americans became more visible, especially in terms of popular culture, and conservatives increasingly used race and racial fears in their political campaigns. Female performers, therefore, had choices: continue to ignore race; address it through comedy; move it to the background; or openly discuss race in attempts to eliminate all black influence.

By and large, most women in country music did not speak of race, a strategy similar to those used in earlier time periods. In most cases performers did not discuss whiteness or blackness; race was simply ignored. As in previous eras, women surrounded themselves with whiteness and its signifiers. They continued to use stillness and they contrasted encircled themselves with other white performers, concepts of rural whiteness, and "countryness" and white traditions. However, by the end of the 1980s African Americans had succeeded in almost every aspect of popular culture, with country music being one of the few exceptions. The new visibility of black artists, especially in music, made race more difficult for women to ignore. It also in some ways called into question all-white music- it stood out more than before. For these reasons some women in country music started including African Americans in their videos, their performances, and their rhetoric.

Many performers who chose to discuss race did so through comedy, a new strategy for women in country music. For example, the debut episode of the television series *Dolly* featured Oprah Winfrey in a skit where she and Parton discussed their bodies. Parton had recently lost a great deal of weight, yet both agreed that girdles were always necessary, even for thin women. Parton then made jokes about her previous size and Winfrey made jokes about herself. The dialogue was meant to be comic; however, the underlying theme focused on a thin white woman

and a large black female, both racial stereotypes. They then performed a skit where Parton, who was wearing all white, auditioned for Winfrey for a role in *Porgy and Bess*. Winfrey told Parton she could not have the role because she was the wrong color, a reference to race, and in response Parton changed her clothes.[85] The skit was both an attempt to diffuse racial tensions and to make light of racism. It also provided a nonthreatening way to incorporate blackness into country music. Humor helped create an interracial environment that did not challenge the status quo.

In the second episode of *Dolly* (October 4, 1987) Whoopi Goldberg played a fourteen-year-old valley girl, another play on whiteness. Parton attempted to talk Goldberg out of getting into a van with an older man but only succeeded in talking her out of a bad haircut.[86] In this skit Goldberg played a naive, sexualized child threatened by a stalking male and Parton, her older caretaker. Even though Goldberg played a white role, her character's age and innocence made her subordinate. Additionally, comedy diffused the seriousness of the situation, an older man preying on a young girl. It is doubtful, however, that any amount of comedy could have lessened the impact if the van's driver had been black, and the young valley girl white.

These examples represent a shift, since previously women in country music did not interact with black celebrities. Moreover, in earlier periods country music women rarely discussed whiteness or blackness. But by 1987 Winfrey was a guest on Parton's first episode, and they actually joked about race. The same occurred with Goldberg, yet neither celebrity actually mentioned race in the skit. This newer openness about race did not necessarily represent an acceptance of racial equality. Instead it reflected larger changes in popular culture.

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[85]. CMHOF, *Dolly,* August 27, 1987, VHS 0233.

[86]. CMHOF, *Dolly,* October 4, 1987, VHS 0234.

By the late 1980s black entertainers and black life had moved to the forefront of American culture and therefore became harder to ignore. Afrocentricity and "black consciousness" made comebacks, and slogans like "black by popular demand" and "it's a black thing, you wouldn't understand" appeared on T-shirts and hats, and on film and television. Rap music, an increasingly popular genre, helped spread these changes with more political and aggressive performers and lyrics. In 1987 Public Enemy, a rap group that called themselves the "Black Panthers of Rap," met the press through a series of radio and television interviews. Public Enemy's raps contained overtly political lyrics; they criticized American politics, race relations, and problems within the black community, namely crack. In 1988 Public Enemy released *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*, and Public Enemy's Chuck D said he wanted the album to be like "political propaganda," like "black CNN," and that he hoped the album would create 5,000 black political leaders. Then in 1988 NWA (Niggas With Attitude), consisting of Ice Cube, Eazy E, and Dr. Dre, entered the mainstream with their West Coast version of "gangsta" rap. Their lyrics expressed the realities of inner city life, a style they called "social realism." NWA's Ice Cube explained, "We call ourselves underground street reporters. We just tell it how we see it, nothing less, nothing more." NWA rapped about youth protest and declining inner city economies and societies; for example, their 1988 album *Straight Outta Compton* included the single "Fuck tha Police," a protest anthem against police brutality. Overt feminism accompanied this new militancy in rap, and all-female groups rivaled male stars. Salt-N-Pepa's "Push It," a song about sexual freedom, went gold in 1988, and Queen Latifah's single "Ladies First" (1988) became the first true feminist MC anthem. These artists enjoyed a new vehicle for exposure when "Yo MTV Raps!" debuted in 1988. These examples of more overt expressions of black power implied that racial problems increased in the late 1980s; however, for

many Americans, it appeared as if they had improved. African Americans became more prevalent in popular culture, which seemed to imply progress, but there was less understanding of the problems that impacted the black community. In essence, the appearance of racial progress, a "language of fairness," disguised increasing discrimination.[87] Women in country music reacted to this new exposure by including African Americans in their performances but simultaneously did not discuss racism or inequality. In addition, they included only certain types of black artists and continued to ignore others. A distinct difference existed between performing with Winfrey and Goldberg and including Chuck D or Ice Cube. Stars like Goldberg and Winfrey seemed natural choices since they were female celebrities famous in part for female films, which ultimately had conservative messages.

Country singers also continued to place African Americans in secondary roles, which implied racial inferiority. In videos and on television, black performers appeared as backup singers or in supporting gospel choirs. The television series *Dolly*, for example, included clips of members of a black, and presumably southern, gospel choir sitting on the church's porch fanning themselves and proclaiming their love of Parton. Parton also sang a gospel song with Oprah Winfrey in a church setting with an all-black choir. "Something Inside So Strong," a 1989 television special that featured Kenny Rogers, Willie Nelson, and Dolly Parton performing at the NASA Space Center in Houston, Texas, also included two African American choirs, one adult and one child.[88] The insertion of black performers in previous periods was not necessary;

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[87]. Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 188–202; Nelson George, *Post-Soul Nation: The Explosive, Contradictory, Triumphant, and Tragic 1980s as Expressed by African Americans (Previously Known as Blacks and Before that Negroes)* (New York: Viking, 2004), 153, 171, 178, 187–89, 210–11.

[88]. CMHOF, *Dolly,* August 27, 1987, VHS 0233; CMHOF, Kenny, Dolly, Willie "Something Inside So Strong," NBC, May 20, 1989, VHS 0234.

however, by the late 1980s women in country music did include them, but also placed them where they "belonged," in the background or in traditional spaces, the church, for example. In this way, they included African American performers in stereotypical and token ways that did not challenge white supremacy.

Rosanne Cash's video for "Way We Make a Broken Heart," a number-one single from her album *King's Record Shop,* was more explicit in its placement of African Americans in the background. The video contained black women, but again they appeared as backup singers. Cash appeared in the middle of the screen with two African American women on either side in profile who appeared and disappeared throughout the video. In one brief scene of her with the two backup singers, one of them, who was overweight, wore a head wrap similar to a maid's.[89] In the video Cash stood at the center, like white America, with black women on the periphery. In addition, it included only a certain type of black woman, a nonthreatening sort who existed only in relation to whites.

The late 1980s also witnessed the first African American female winner of a national country music talent competition, the 1987 Nashville Network's televised "You Can Be a Star." The competition included 176 singers who performed in eight rounds. Nisha Jackson, a social worker from Texas, won after her phenomenal performances of two country female classics, "Stand by Your Man" and "You Ain't Woman Enough." Jackson did receive her rewards: $10,000 cash, a piano and drum set, appearances on TNN's *Nashville Now* and on the Grand Ole Opry, and the release of her single "Alive and Well" by Capitol Nashville. She subsequently quit her job, moved to Nashville, and watched her single as it moved up the country charts; she believed she would be the next Charley Pride. However, her initial success did not translate into

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[89]. CMHOF, CBS Records, Compilation Reel VI, 1987, ¾ Cassette.

a career in country music. Capitol signed her, then for two years refused to release any of her songs. She was dropped in 1990, a month after Jimmy Bowen took over the label, based on his belief that she "wasn't country enough." She then stayed in Nashville and tried to book other jobs until an executive told her she was "too black" to be a country music star.[90]

Country music did have black performers who were successful prior to Jackson, but they were not female, nor did they attempt to simply rely on their talent. Charley Pride, for example, had a career that was controlled and crafted to be less of a challenge. Pride's label, RCA, chose his songs carefully and deliberately downplayed the racial issue. Since he was a black man singing to southern white women, his love songs focused on mothers and families, not male/female relationships. He also did not sing about drinking or sexual conquest, popular themes in white male country music. In essence, he emasculated himself in order to receive acceptance. In addition, Pride consistently referred to his country roots, attempts to prove his legitimacy, and also used self-effacing humor, for example, he repeatedly mentioned his "permanent tan."[91] By the late 1980s this type of humor became required in country music but Jackson violated the "rules" by ignoring that fact that she was black and for refusing to diffuse her race or adopt a race-appropriate role. She therefore was seen as a threat to white women and subsequently shunned.

Nisha Jackson serves as only one example of the new, more racially hostile environment in country music. Racism especially appeared in male country as males could be more open about all issues, race included. In 1988 Hank Williams, Jr., sang his single "If the South Woulda

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[90]. Other black women had similar experiences in country music. Linda Martel, the first black woman to sing at the Grand Ole Opry, found critical acclaim but little commercial acceptance. Jeff Woods, "Color Me Country: Tales from the Frontlines," *Journal of Country Music* 14, no. 2 (1992): 9–10.

[91]. Woods, "Color Me Country," 10.

Won" on the Opry stage during the CMA Awards show. His song included lyrics like, "if the South woulda won we woulda had it made," insinuating that whites would have been better off. Williams went on to sing, "we wouldn't have no killer getting off free if they were proven guilty then they would swing quickly" and "we'd put Florida on the right track, 'cause we'd take Miami back." After his performance he won Entertainer of the Year, an award he had also received in 1987. In addition, he won the same award from the Academy of Country Music in 1987, 1988, and 1989. Only one person protested awarding such overt sectionalism and muted racism: Edward Morris of *Billboard* magazine resigned his CMA membership.[92] Williams's success served as but one example of the more racially hostile mood in country music. Women included African Americans in secondary or humorous roles as ways to handle increasing racial integration, while males and the industry generally responded with aggression.

The environment in country music mirrored the increasing backlash against the civil rights movement. The late 1980s were a time of social, economic, and legal discrimination where even previous gains were threatened. In terms of hiring, President Reagan attempted to reform affirmative action by eliminating the federal mandate requiring employers to adopt minority and white female hiring goals, and he vetoed the Civil Rights Restoration Act, which reaffirmed the antidiscrimination protections for minorities, women, the disabled, and the elderly. Financially, trickle-down economics had failed, especially for black Americans. By the end of the decade, one in three blacks found themselves below the poverty line and Reagan's attempts to improve inner city economies had little impact. For example, Reagan's concept of enterprise zones, inner city areas where he hoped to create jobs (instead of training the residents), brought in too few businesses. Legally, William Rehnquist's 1986 nomination as

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[92]. Ibid., 10; Hank Williams, Jr., "If the South Woulda Won," *Wild Streak,* Warner Brothers, 1988.

chief justice of the Supreme Court represented a fundamental turning point in civil rights history. The Court now had no liberal-to-moderate majority, a fact reflected in civil rights rulings. The 1989 *Patterson v. McLean Credit Union* decision stated that the 1966 Civil Rights Act did not cover on-the-job harassment. Furthermore, *Antonio v. Wards Cove Packing Company* ruled that alleged victims of racism had to prove not only that a specific practice was discriminatory, but also that the policy had no "legitimate business goals." In response, Associate Justice Thurgood Marshall claimed in 1989, "It is difficult to characterize last term's decisions as the product of anything other than a deliberate retrenching of the civil rights agenda."[93]

Increases in drug use/sales accompanied the declining social, political, and legal environments for African Americans. Drugs, in particular crack cocaine, posed especially difficult problems for black communities in cities such as New York and Detroit. Detroit recorded 450 cocaine-related emergency room visits in 1983, but 3,811 such visits in 1987. In response, depictions of African Americans as drug dealers or junkies increased, which affected the entire black community. Drug use became a means to justify more overt discrimination, a trend seen in popular culture as well.[94] For this and other reasons, overt racism again became acceptable in country music and in other genres. If the public associated African Americans with crime and drugs, then country's discriminatory policies could continue without criticism.

To combat rising drug use and sales, incarceration rates increased as did the emphasis on punishment. By 1989 approximately 609,690 African American males between the ages of 20 and 29 were either behind prison bars or on legal parole or probation. This constituted 23

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[93]. Nicholas Laham, *The Reagan Presidency and the Politics of Race: In Pursuit of Colorblind Justice and Limited Government* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 54–59; George, *Post-Soul Nation*, 144–45; Manning Marable, *Race, Reform and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945–2006*, 3rd ed. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 195–96.

[94]. George, *Post-Soul Nation*, 145–47.

percent of black males in this age group, or one in four. Only one in 10 Latinos, and only one in 16 whites, had the same status. In terms of punishment, courts showed greater willingness to impose harsh sentences and also to use the death penalty. In May 1986 the Supreme Court ruled that prosecutors could eliminate jurors who disagreed with the death penalty, and in the 1987 *Warren v. McCleskey* case the Court ruled that even though in Georgia the death sentence correlated with race, discrepancies were "inevitable." After this decision the Supreme Court became more punitive and restrictive; for example, in 1989 it ruled that states could execute the mentally ill and juveniles as young as sixteen. This led to a society more interested in punishment, which in turn created larger prison populations. By 1989 African Americans were incarcerated at a rate of over 700 per 100,000, nearly seven times the rate for whites.[95]

Since society increasingly saw African Americans as criminals, and since popular culture reflected this trend, it also became more acceptable for overt discrimination to appear in politics. The Willie Horton commercial represented one significant example of negative racial images in the political media. Horton, a prisoner who stabbed and raped a woman while out on furlough in Massachusetts, became the focus of a 1988 presidential campaign advertisement for George H. W. Bush. The advertisement used the Horton case to depict Michael Dukakis as soft on crime, even though the furlough system existed before Dukakis became governor of Massachusetts. The Republican Party's muted racist appeals, which started in the 1968 presidential campaign, suddenly appeared more overt. Horton became a symbol of black crime: a powerful and, by the late 1980s, credible and effective tool for conservative politics.[96]

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[95]. Marable, *Race, Reform and Rebellion*, 190–93.

[96]. Haynes Johnson, *Sleepwalking through History: America in the Reagan Years* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2003), 394–402; Dan T. Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race and the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963–1994* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 79–82.

Women in country music reflected the increasing depictions of African Americans as criminals. Since popular culture and political campaigns showed blacks as criminals, and since black men and women became so prominent in popular culture, county's women had to respond. However, they could not deal with African Americans as equals therefore they included them in performances but not with total acceptance. If country performers had added African Americans in videos and performances in ways that insinuated equality, they could have alienated their audience. The token inclusion of African Americans in female country music reflected women's desires to respond to societal changes and also to the desires of their fans.

In spite of the negative developments, positive changes existed as well. Politically, in 1987 Colin Powell became Reagan's national security advisor, Al Sharpton became one of the most prominent African American leaders in New York, and Jesse Jackson ran for the Democratic nomination in 1988 and won the Michigan Democratic caucus. In 1989 Clarence Thomas was nominated for a seat on the U.S. Federal Appeals Court, becoming the first black nominee to that court in over ten years. Socially, the term "African American" became the most acceptable moniker for blacks, a development that reflected increasing pride and also a deeper association with Africa. The link between African Americans and Africa became more explicit as anti-Apartheid activism increased. After 1984 African Americans organized to end apartheid, an effort led by Randall Robinson, Mary Frances Berry, and Walter Fauntroy. The NAACP protested outside of the South African embassy, Jesse Jackson demanded that the Democratic Party fight to free Nelson Mandela, and student demonstrations took place on college campuses. In 1986 Congress required strict economic sanctions against South Africa, an act that passed over Reagan's severe opposition. In 1988 President Bush caucused with more black leaders, praised South African leader Nelson Mandela, endorsed sanctions of South Africa, increased the

Equal Opportunity Commission's budget, and supported black colleges.[97] These gains; however, gave the appearance of racial improvements in spite of continued, and in some cases declining, racial situations. As in country music, African Americans became more visible but still marginalized.

Racism was not only a top-down phenomenon; it occurred as a grassroots movement as well. As southern whites moved to the suburbs, conservatism transformed from an ideology that endorsed segregation and blatant racism into one that championed individualism, personal rights, and freedom. White flight created segregated areas populated with white residents who convinced themselves, and others, that their choices had little to do with race. They also isolated themselves in all-white, middle-class neighborhoods where inner city crime became a black problem, not an issues that impacted them or their families. In this way everyday people helped create a tie between late 1980s conservatism and massive resistance.[98] Many individuals in these suburbs made up country's fan base and their musical choices reflected their values. They wanted "white" music that associated itself with "tradition" and endorsed down-home family values.

Female country music reflected the new developments for African Americans. The visibility of black performers led to their inclusion, albeit secondary and token, in country videos and television shows. Simultaneously, female country music also mirrored the negative images of African Americans. Nisha Jackson's blackness prevented her from achieving fame in the country industry; in fact, no black performer received recognition from country's audience.

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[97]. George, *Post-Soul Nation*, 169–70, 175–76, 179, 200, 207; Marable, *Race, Reform and Rebellion*, 201, 210–12.

[98]. Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 6–7, 9–10.

African Americans' successes, in essence, equaled some inclusion in female country performances, a development that separated the late-1980s from prior periods; but singers still did not present black individuals as equals.

Class

From 1987 to 1989 in female country music, socioeconomic class received expression through the uses of musical genres. The more rural, "country," and "harder" performers appeared and sounded, the more fans linked them to the working classes. In this period, unlike the early 1980s, hardness, and thereby working classness, meant authenticity. In order to be perceived as authentic, or legitimate, women in country music had to explicitly tie their music to the working class. They did this by presenting country music as by and for the working class, by addressing certain working-class concerns, and by connecting working-class values to patriotism.

By 1987 women performers marketed themselves and their music as for and by the working class. This also occurred in previous time periods; however, in earlier eras women also tried to attract middle-class listeners by making their music more class-neutral. In the early 1980s, for example, singers used southern and working-class signifiers but combined them with region-free accents and music that appealed to the middle class. But in the late 1980s any attempt to court a middle-class audience became seen as unauthentic and soft. The most acceptable road to success for women was to glorify their own, and their audience's, working classness. The Judds' "Across the Heartland" tour and their 1988 Greatest Hits tour both exemplified this shift. Each tour highlighted working-class cities, and the accompanying videos and television specials connected the duo to working-class themes. Wynonna and Naomi both stated that "this is real," meaning their tours were for "real," or working-class, people. They also

claimed they themselves had experienced "the American dream."[99] In doing this the Judds glorified the working class, linked themselves to this group, and also highlighted their own rags-to-riches, escape-from-poverty story.

Dolly Parton also presented herself as for the working classes. Parton's persona had always focused on her family's poverty, but in previous periods she downplayed her upbringing in an attempt to appeal to middle-class fans. By the late 1980s, however, she became totally rural. On her television series Parton consistently paid homage to her working-class roots and often spoke of growing up poor in the Great Smoky Mountains. She played guitar on her television show in blue jeans and a denim shirt, decorated her sets like rural homes, explained her song "Coat of Many Colors" and its links to working classness, and dedicated songs to her "mama and daddy," whom she described as working-class heroes.[100] The crossover star of the early 1980s succumbed to ruralness.

Kathy Mattea's hit single "Eighteen Wheels and a Dozen Roses" also focused on the working class and its concerns. The song described a male truck driver on his last "four-day run" before his retirement, a period where he hoped to "spend the rest of his life with the one that he loved." Rarely did women mention work in songs; few examples existed, making Mattea's single atypical. Her decision to discuss work in itself was exceptional, as was her choice to highlight a working-class profession. The video took her theme further by glorifying working-class life and also by associating Mattea with truck driving. The video opened with an older man asking Mattea for an autograph. Viewers soon learned that they both had been on the road; he was returning to his home and Mattea was on tour. The video then showed alternating clips of

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[99]. *The Judds: Across the Heartland,* prod. Tall Pony Productions, 50 min. MPI Home Entertainment, 1988, Videocassette.

[100]. CMHOF, *Dolly*, August 27, 1987, VHS 0233.

the trucker and Mattea's tour bus, linking both to the working class. In the end the driver returned to his working-class abode while Mattea continued to ramble. This song spent two weeks at number one on the country charts in 1988, was in the top ten for six weeks, in the top forty for fourteen weeks, and won a CMA in 1988.[101] Country fans and the industry apparently approved of Mattea's working-class theme

Even though performers like the Judds, Parton, and Mattea focused on, and presented themselves as tied to, the working class, they did not discuss their own individual desires for success. They did speak of their past poverty but rarely did they mention dreams of riches or fame. Working class men and women also strove for success, therefore, it seems as if women could have reflected this, however, in country music individual class-based aspirations, and individualism in general, existed for men only. Women could not express their individual aspirations, especially if they involved wealth or fame, since fans associated those traits with masculinity. For this reason, women could focus on the working class but could not communicate about their own financial status or their hopes for continued success.

In spite of women's new focus on the working class, their music addressed only *certain* working-class concerns and excluded others. Women could only discuss those class-based issues that were traditionally female and that did not challenge the new status quo. Specifically, women could not truly address poverty, its causes, or its impact on women. They could only celebrate the working classes, the noble poor, and offer mild, female assistance. For example, Parton's Dollywood "Buddy" Dropout Prevention Program, which paired seventh and eighth graders with a "buddy" and each child encouraged the other to stay in school, seemed to have a class-conscious agenda. But this program had a traditional quality due to its focus on children,

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[101]. CMHOF, Cohn and Wolfe Marlboro Country Music Videos, VHS 1894; Whitburn, *Joel Whitburn's Top Country Singles, 1944–2001*, 562, 566.

who were confined to the female sphere of influence; therefore, it was acceptable. It did not challenge the causes of poverty nor did it attempt to economically assist the working poor.[102]

Women in country music also associated working classness with "Americaness," a new development in the late 1980s. In 1988 the Judds performed at the White House during a private luncheon for Ronald and Nancy Reagan and their 300 guests. Their fan club newsletter published a photograph of the Judds with the Reagans and the accompanying article claimed that all exemplified working-class values. Moreover, the photograph's caption pointed out Reagan's clothing, namely his string tie and belt buckle, and claimed he was honoring country culture and the working class. The Judds also appropriately closed the show by singing "America," a way to demonstrate their own patriotism.[103]

In 1987 the Judds also sang at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, during a Thanksgiving United Service Organization (USO) tour. The duo, and daughter Ashley, toured the base, visited marines, ate in the "chow hall," and attempted to spread holiday cheer. Naomi wrote of her experience, "I paused for a moment and stared across the low rusty barbed-wire border to the other side. I bent down and reached across it to touch the earth on the communist side. It was just like the soil I was standing on. I could see Castro's bunker and felt unseen eyes watching me." After their tour the Judds taped a performance for a TNN special during which Naomi mentioned their "Heartland" tour, which was overtly working class, and linked it to the troops who were defending the heartland and working-class America. They then closed the show by singing "America the Beautiful." Naomi later wrote, "Patriotic to our core, countless reviewers had long noted that Judd music celebrated American values of God, family, and class through

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[102]. CMHOF, Dolly Parton Fan Club Folder, *Foundation Gazette: The Official Newsletter for the Dollywood Foundation Ambassadors*, vol. 9, no. 3 (Winter 1996–97).

[103]. CMHOF, The Judds, Fan Club Folder, The Judds International Fan Club, October 1988.

country music."[104] In essence, the Judds brought a country music version of class consciousness to a communist country. But instead of discussing economic hardship, the increasing gap between the rich and poor, or their own histories as women struggling with financial adversity in a capitalist system, they linked working classness to America, making poverty patriotic.

President George H.W. Bush also believed there existed a relationship between country music, the working class, and Americanism. During the 1988 presidential campaign Bush proclaimed his love for country music, a statement that critics described as a "political ploy" used to develop a "populist image." Bush retaliated by declaring his genuine love of country music. He claimed that country music was American, that a good country song was "like a Norman Rockwell painting," that it was "devoid of cynicism," and about the working classes. All components, for Bush, linked country music to the working class and to America.[105]

Bush not only loved country music, he also participated in it. In 1988 he took a bus trip with Crystal Gayle, Loretta Lynn, and their sister Peggy Sue. These women accompanied him to rallies, they all spoke on his behalf, they all sang at his appearances, and he claimed the sisters helped him to win in the Midwest. After Bush's victory, Crystal Gayle and her husband Bill Gatzimos spent the night at the White House, Loretta Lynn became friends with Barbara Bush and worked with the first lady in her literacy campaign, and Barbara Mandrell visited Camp David with her family.[106] Bush certainly accepted female country music and its new working-class associations.

Female performers' silence about class conflict, unemployment, or women's work came

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[104]. Naomi Judd, *Love Can Build a Bridge*, (New York: Villard Books, 1993), 379–80.

[105]. George Bush, "My Country and Western 'Tis of Thee," *Forbes* 153, no. 10 (May 9, 1994): 80.

[106]. Ibid., 86.

during a period of increasing poverty, especially for women. At the end of the decade women represented over one-half of all poor adults, and nearly 75 percent of full-time working women made less than $20,000 a year, double the percentage of men. In 1988 women who did work earned only 59 percent of what men made. Women were also more likely to have no health insurance and no retirement, and most worked in "female jobs" with lower salaries. In addition, higher degrees did not translate into financial equality. Women with bachelor's degrees made approximately the same as men with high school diplomas, and women with master's degrees earned salaries similar to those of males with four-year degrees. Moreover, few women held elected positions, government still had no family-leave and child-care programs, and more than 99 percent of American private employers did not offer child care.[107] Women in country music did not address these concerns. Instead they focused on philanthropy or on glorifying poverty, not on continued economic discrimination.

Despite this feminization of poverty, popular culture discouraged women from working but encouraged them to consume. Female country music performers ignored the attempts to link shopping and consumerism to economic independence, and they continued to glamorize poverty and domesticity. Even *Ms.* magazine endorsed fashion and beauty and rarely discussed work. The magazine continued to analyze women's issues but added a large fashion section and more and more information about celebrities. It also started catering to upper-class women by displaying advertisements for high-end products and services. Other media outlets followed suit, creating an environment in which women had declining salaries and statuses but increasing pressure to purchase more items and services.[108] Women in country music presented themselves

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[107]. Faludi, *Backlash*, xiii.

as working-class heroes, as domestic and traditional women in touch with the needs and values of those at the lower ends of the economic spectrum. However, they did not attack the causes of poverty or the continued attacks against working women, nor did they protest against increasing consumerism. Instead they accepted the new trends in advertising and incorporated them into their performances and personas.

Region

Since women in country music celebrated rural poverty, the images of the South changed to reflect this. The South in female country music became a place of working-class life and down-home values, in fact, songs depicted the South as exclusively working class, an image linked to tradition and authenticity. *Trio*'s "Wildflowers" mentioned a "wild mountain rose" who needed "freedom to grow," meaning a woman who had different values from those around her. The wildflower's companions were "common," an allusion to the working class. Parton, the song's lead, is critical of the other "flowers" but respects them as well. She needed to leave but honored their places. The Judds' single "Young Love" also spoke of the southern working class. "Young Love" contained many working-class and southern signifiers such as Fords, hardware stores, baseball caps, and girls who sat "cross-legged" on the hoods of cars while they filed their nails, all concepts that helped tie the South to the working class. Kathy Mattea's "18 Wheels and a Dozen Roses" did this as well. The South was a place of marital vows, hard work, and devotion. The main character, a truck driver, worked for thirty years, wanted to buy a Winnebago, and "light the old flame" with "pieces of the old dream."[109] These examples made

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[108]. Sanbonmatsu, *Democrats, Republicans, and the Politics of Women's Place*, 131; Faludi, *Backlash*, 107–10.

[109]. Parton, Harris, and Ronstadt, *Trio*; The Judds, *River of Time,* RCA, 1989; Mattea, "Eighteen Wheels and a Dozen Roses."

no mention of the middle or upper classes, nor did they reference areas outside of the South. The South, for women performers, was working class.

The 1989 film *Steel Magnolias* also depicted the South as a place of working-class values. Not all characters in *Steel Magnolias* were working class; some were extraordinarily wealthy, but their behaviors and ideas fit in with the working class and with the traditional South. For example, Quiser Boudreaux, played by Shirley MacLaine, and Clairee Belcher, played by Olympia Dukakis, were wealthy widows, but each adhered to working-class standards. They patronized a small hair salon owned by Truvy, Dolly Parton's character, who ran her business in her home, acted unpretentiously, and also lived in an isolated area of town. The two wealthy women obviously could afford more expensive treatments; however, they chose to associate themselves with Truvy and her other clientele. The two also shopped and cooked for a friend's husband; in fact, they bought cans of pork and beans, an overtly working-class dish. Other *Steel Magnolias* characters linked themselves to the working class as well. Shelby Eatenton Latcherie (Julia Roberts) married a man who had a working-class, almost "white trash" family, and she also made regular appearances at working-class festivals. Truvy herself worked as a working-class hairdresser with a modest income and an out-of-work husband who occasionally worked on offshore oil rigs. Daryl Hannah's character, Annelle Dupuy Desoto, was first married to a convict, then became an evangelical, fundamentalist, hairdressing assistant, and finally married a waiter and became pregnant. The film itself was set in a small Louisiana parish, linking all of the women to the South. The characters spoke with exaggerated accents and, on more than one occasion, mentioned that they were "good southern women."[110]

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[110]. Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 538; *Steel Magnolias,* dir. Ross.

In female country music the South also shed its Sunbelt image. In the early 1980s country music portrayed the South as a region of progress, both economically and socially. Women in country music did not overtly identify with the South or with southern values, and instead focused on how the South was becoming more like the rest of the nation. In the mid 1980s the South in female country music was in transition. It became Appalachia and the West, but in either case was moving more towards ruralism. By the late 1980s country music continued to portray the South as Appalachia, but only a poor yet dignified Appalachia. It was also still the West, but the West became more "country," with extreme accents and exaggerated western themes. In addition, female country music also absorbed the Midwest into its concept of the South. The Judds did this with their Across the Heartland tour as they represented Midwesterners as southern, rural, and country. Even kd lang, the misfit of female country music, demonstrated this with the cover for her 1989 album *Absolute Torch and Twang*, which showed lang holding a huge cowboy hat and wearing a long brown suede coat (western style) worn over a jean jacket and masculine shirt. Her attire linked her to both the West and the South, yet she stood in a wheat field with a wood shack in the background, as if she were a Midwestern farmer in big sky country.[111] Women in country music insinuated that their traditional values, which they expressed in their music and personas, extended outside of the old Confederacy. Any nonurban region, the North excluded, became southern.

Ruralness, as opposed to urbanization, characterized female country music at the end of the decade in more pronounced ways than in other 1980s eras. The South's association with Appalachia and the West made this period similar to the mid-1980s, and its uses of the lower

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[111]. Kingsbury and Country Music Hall of Fame, *Vinyl Hayride*, 153; CMHOF, The Judds, Fan Club Folder, The Judds International Fan Club, October 1989; CMHOF, The Judds, Fan Club Folder, The Judds International Fan Club, January 1989.

South linked it to the 1980-1983 period, but the exaggerated focus on ruralism manifested itself more than before and made the late 1980s distinct. In essence, female performers depicted the South as non-urban, which tied it to more traditional, pre-1980s, constructions of region in country music. Moreover, the representations of the South as rural contained elements of race. In country music, rural translated into white while urban usually implied black. The rural South was the white South and singers ignored southern African Americans, who apparently only lived in southern inner cities. This inclination mirrored larger developments, in particular, the pre-1980s creation of large, southern cities like Atlanta and Charlotte that exemplified white flight, new styles of segregation, and the simultaneous perception of racial harmony.[112] While this occurred prior to the late-1980s, in the early 1980s country music women latched onto the modernity of the Sunbelt, not necessarily its urbanness. By the late 1980s, however, female singers rejected cities and embraced the country.

The South also became known as a place of tradition, a trend that was not new, but one that intensified. At the end of the decade women singers directly linked themselves to tradition; however, tradition had come to mean something different. In the early 1980s traditionally female country music was the Nashville Sound, a period in the 1950s when women strove for crossover success. This association was relatively region-free; it did include southern signifiers, but since the music had to appeal to audiences across the country, explicit southernness was muted. In the mid-1980s the concept of tradition fluctuated; in some cases it remained the Nashville Sound, but increasingly it became "hard" country, music of the 1970s or pre-1950. By the 1980s, tradition in female country music associated itself only with ruralism, hard country, and southernness. The South was working class, which was seen as traditional, and it was a

[112]. Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Sururban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 10-12.

place of long-established family values. Even though the South had expanded, female country music still represented it as a region of time-honored customs and standards.

Rosanne Cash's single "Tennessee Flat Top Box" from her *King's Record Shop* album illustrated this trend. The video showed traditional southern themes and scenes, such as trailers, rural people, musicians playing banjoes, southern food, and a county fair. The song, which went to number one on the country charts, was a revival of her father Johnny Cash's 1962 hit.[113] Both the song and the video linked her to the past, which gave her legitimacy, and each also showed the South as a place of tradition. If the South was traditional, then Cash must be as well, another tactic that gave her and her music authenticity.

Other women did this as well. As previously mentioned, *Trio* was a hard-country album that described the South and southernness as traditional and authentic and *Trio*'s songs tied traditionally country themes, including rambling, heartbreak, and death, to the South. Southern hobos rode the rails, Harris and Rondstadt's accented voices sang of lost loves, and Parton revised a southern traditional ballad with "Rosewood Casket."[114] It appeared that only the South had a time-honored past; other regions either had no history or had earlier periods that were unworthy of celebration.

Lacy J. Dalton also tied the South to tradition. In 1988 at the Annual Neewollah Country Music Celebration in Independence, Kansas she sang "Are There Any More Real Cowboys?" a cover of a Neil Young song that he sang with Willie Nelson on Young's 1985 album *Old Ways.* The song asked if there were any more cowboys who drove "dusty pick-ups" or lived "where the

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[113]. CMHOF, CBS Records, Compilation Reel VI, 1987, ¾ cassette; Vladimir Bogdanov, Chris Woodstra, and Stephen Thomas Erlewine, eds. *All Music Guide to Country: The Definitive Guide to Country Music* (Berkley: Backbeat Books, 2003), 138.

[114]. Parton, Harris, and Ronstadt, *Trio*.

cattle graze and an old gray barn still stands?" The song also distinguished between "real" cowboys and others. "Real" cowboys were not the ones "snortin' cocaine when the honky-tonk's all closed" or the ones who wore "diamond sequins shining on TV." Real cowboys worked "hand in hand" with their families to earn their keep, and they made a "stand while the rows and rows of houses" came "creepin' up on the land."[115] These lyrics spoke to traditional southern values, not to values associated with other regions. In fact, they criticized modernity and glorified ruralness. Urban sprawl and drug use conspired to corrupt the traditional lifestyles of American cowboys and presumably of other southern icons.

Since the South in country music assumed a more traditional role, it also became more religious. Women in country music increasingly sang songs with religious themes, and the focus on evangelical Christianity intensified. Emmylou Harris's *Angel Band* was a gospel album, *Trio* had religious ballads, and the Judds consistently referenced God and the *Bible* in their songs. In earlier 1980s periods women mentioned religion, but their comments were generally more muted- they thanked God for success but rarely devoted entire albums to their faith. But by the late 1980s overt identification with Christianity became not only acceptable, but expected, and presented as a thoroughly southern trait. Artists covered southern gospel songs, religious themes in country music accompanied southern motifs, and the South represented the region of religious values.

The increasing use of religion in female country music corresponded to evangelical fundamentalism in the South; however, southerners had been long associated with Christianity. Yet, in earlier periods, women's music did not reflect this fact. The new use of explicit Christianity could have been associated with the scandals in the late 1980s that involved popular

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[115]. CMHOF, *Nashville Goes International*, produced and distributed by Cabin Fever Entertainment, Greenwich, CT, 1988, VHS 0370.

televangelists. As religious leaders increased in popularity and influence, they increasingly used the television to raise revenue and to expand their audience. By the late 1980s these leaders, who experienced enormous popularity in earlier periods, became enmeshed in scandals. In 1987 Jim Bakker of the PTL Club confessed that he had an affair with Jessica Hahn, a church volunteer, and then paid her to keep the story secret. Hahn's story did much more damage; she claimed that Bakker drugged and then raped her. Bakker eventually made a public, tearful confession that devastated his wife Tammy Faye and ultimately resigned and turned PTL over to Jerry Falwell. Other televangelists experienced disgrace as well. Oral Roberts told his viewers that he would die unless they sent $4.5 million he needed to save his ministry. In 1988 Jimmy Swaggart, who had exposed the Bakker fiasco, was found with a prostitute, and he subsequently, publicly confessed to his congregation that he had "sinned" and asked for forgiveness. Finally, in 1988 Falwell, the patriarch of religious conservatism, resigned as head of the Moral Majority and also of PTL. His resignation had nothing to do with any scandal, but the evangelical community suffered a loss nevertheless.[116] Since Christianity's image, and thereby the image of the South, suffered in the late 1980s, women in country music could have been attempting to revive it. Female singers presented an untarnished evangelical South, a traditional South where religious values remained intact. In essence they deflected from the scandals and depicted a region, and a religion, as time-honored and undamaged.

The North, however, did appear as damaged. Women in country music had long depicted the North as corrupt, but the trend intensified at the end of the century. Rosanne Cash's video for "Runaway Train," for example, showed Cash in the big city running away from presumably from a man and also from urbanization. The women characters in *Steel Magnolias,* Parton

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[116]. Johnson, *Sleepwalking through History*, 213.

included, criticized the North, and new artists like the Judds spoke of their time in the North as if it constituted a punishment. As previously mentioned, even male artists discussed a corrupt North, most notably Hank Williams, Jr., in "If the South Woulda Won."[117] In the early 1980s women singers started to move the country music South away from racial violence and negative stereotypes. By the late 1980s the country music South became completely exonerated, and depicted the North as a problematic, if not entirely distasteful, region.

Since the North was corrupt, women in country music loudly proclaimed that they were from the South and proud of their birthplaces. Parton frequently mentioned her past and even took ownership of Dollywood as a tribute to her childhood home. Patty Loveless and the Judds spoke of her birthplaces in Kentucky, and Reba McEntire emphasized her western upbringing. Rarely had women so frequently mentioned where they were born, but by the late 1980s being born and raised in the South equaled authenticity. Country music once again had explicit ties to the South; therefore, singers had to connect themselves to the South in order to appear legitimate.[118]

To demonstrate southernness, women singers exaggerated their southern accents. In the early 1980s women singers deemphasized their accents, but by the late 1980s they had become sources of pride. McEntire in particular often discussed her own accent and fiercely defended it. In 1988 she appeared on *The Tonight Show Staring Johnny Carson* and Carson started his interview with a joke about her drawl. McEntire defended herself and her speech and then

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[117]. Eric Stein, "Living Right and Being Free: Country Music and Modern American Conservatism" (master's thesis, McGill University, Montreal, 1998), 77; CMHOF, "The Twenty-Second Annual Academy of Country Music Awards," NBC, April 6, 1987, 8–10PM, VHS 0895.

[118]. CMHOF, Heart to Heart, 1988, CMT, Patty Loveless, VHS 1356; CMHOF, The Judds, Fan Club Folder, The Judds International Fan Club, October 1989.

convinced Carson that it was charming. By the end of the interview, he admitted that he did in fact appreciate and like her southern accent.[119]

The new images of the South in country music became associated with the increasing southernness of America and the South's political clout. By the late 1980s the South had evolved into a hugely significant region in terms of national politics, and southern culture and southerners themselves spread across the country. It would have been difficult for women to defend the South if it were still seen as a region of racial segregation and abject poverty, but since the South had moved away from these images, it could be celebrated. In reality; however, the South was losing its influence. Economically, the region declined, unemployment increased, and minorities and the working classes experienced significant losses. Large southern cities like Atlanta, Charlotte, and Nashville created new jobs, and southern resort cities like Myrtle Beach boomed, but overall the economy declined.[120] In spite of this, the South became redeemed and glorified in country music because country music did not focus on the realities of southern life; it was the image that mattered. For women country singers, the South held the image of a traditional place, filled with morals, pride, families, and working-class values.

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[119]. MTR, *Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, NBC, September 15, 1988.

[120]. Johnson, *Sleepwalking through History*, 419–23; Egerton, *Americanization of Dixie*; Peter Applebome, *Dixie Rising: How the South Is Shaping American Values, Politics, and Culture* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1996), 8–9.

CONCLUSION

"COWBOY TAKE ME AWAY"

Beginning in 1990, country music entered into yet another new phase. This era, like the ones that preceded it, included women performers; however, men dominated country's charts and stages. But a few trends did remain unchanged. Both men and women still used gender, race, class, and region in their personas and performances, and they also reflected larger societal trends. In particular, women and men in country music continued to mirror conservatism, although like the political environment, in some ways their conservatism became less pronounced. They also tended to work within the bounds of patriarchy rather than challenge it. What follows is a brief discussion of country music during the 1990s and early 2000s to show how it continued to change but simultaneously conformed to earlier themes. It does not thoroughly examine the uses of class, region, race, or politics; instead it offers a surface interpretation of gender in country music and how both men and women worked within the confines of patriarchy and conservatism.

In 1990 kd lang starred in a People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) commercial, an act that resulted in a swift and far-reaching backlash from the meat industry and also from country music. A member of PETA and a vegetarian, lang refused to conform to "acceptable" codes of behavior, all acts that distanced her from country music's audience and its expectations of women. In response to the PETA commercial, the North American Cattleman's Association called for a boycott of lang's music, and country radio stations across the United States and Canada stopped playing her songs. It seemed as if country music had finally found a

way to rid itself of its problematic performer without directly attacking her music or persona. As a result of the bans and backlash, in 1990 lang left country music.[1]

lang continued to perform after her departure from country music, in fact, she expanded into film and other media outlets. In 1991 she appeared in *Salmonberries*, a film that depicted an emotional relationship between two women. That same year Sire released the DVD *kd lang: Harvest of Seven Years (Cropped and Chronicled)*, a retrospective of lang's videos and public appearances. The DVD included lang's new video for her song "So in Love," which she recorded specifically for Red, Hot, and Blue, an AIDS benefit organization. The video showed lang alone in a home filled with IV bags, hospital machines, and other medical items. lang washed hospital clothes, hung a woman's nightgown on a clothes line, and in the end caressed the gown, an act that insinuated she missed the woman who once wore it. lang returned to her music career in 1992 with a non-country CD, *Ingénue*. To accompany the CD's release, she also publicly announced her lesbianism in the *Advocate*, a popular gay magazine. lang's proclamation made her the first openly lesbian pop entertainer, and others like Melissa Etheridge, who described lang as an inspiration, soon followed suit. It seemed as if pop fans saw lang's lesbianism as a nonissue, especially in light of the media's willingness to promote her. In 1993 lang appeared on the cover of *Vanity Fair* in an overtly masculine pose; she sat in a barber chair, dressed in a suit and tie, with shaving cream on her face. To add to the gender confusion, a scantily dressed Cindy Crawford, an American supermodel, shaved her. That same year lang won a Grammy for Best Female Vocalist.[2]

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[1]. Victoria Starr, *k.d. lang: All You Get Is Me* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1994), xii, xiii, 135, 142–44.

[2]. Ibid., xiv, 182, 186, 211; *kd lang, Harvest of Seven Years (Cropped and Chronicled*), prod. Carl Scott, dir. Jim Gable, 60 min., Warner Reprise Video, DVD.

lang's 1990 move to pop occurred at the beginning of a new era in country music. In 1991 *Billboard* magazine started using Soundscan to obtain CD sales data, a development that revealed new information about country music's popularity and audience. Before Soundscan, *Billboard* called a preselected group of distributors and asked store managers about top sellers; it did not collect precise figures. Soundscan scanned bar codes and therefore gave more accurate numbers on record sales. As a result, the industry discovered country music sold more than previously believed. The introduction of Soundscan also accompanied the phenomenal growth of Wal-Mart and other mass merchandisers. By 1995, mass merchandisers like Wal-Mart sold 75 percent of country music albums. In addition, Wal-Mart prominently displayed country CDs and merchandise, sales strategies that attracted new consumers and created higher sales. Mass merchandisers not only made country affordable and available, but they made it somewhat hip as well. Teenagers became one of the largest consumer groups for country.[3] Soundscan, mass merchandizing, and country's new "coolness" all became factors in the music's success.

New technological developments emerged simultaneously with the male takeover in country music. Beginning in 1990, country music entered into a phase labeled "new country," a style that blended neotraditional sensibilities and the pop-savvy crossover potential of countrypolitan. New country, a genre inspired by country, 1970s rock, and pop, not only appealed to fans of hard-core, bluegrass-derived traditional country, but also to teenagers, baby boomers, and urban pop fans. In essence, it combined a variety of genres and, for that reason, had a tremendous amount of crossover appeal. This style became far more successful than any of the 1980s trends, and by the mid-1990s, new country artists dominated the airwaves. But new

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[3]. Don Cusic, "Country Green: The Money in Country Music," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 94, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 231–38; Chet Flippo, "Numerous National and International Outlets Give Country Videos Exposure," *Billboard* 111, no. 36 (January 1999): 36–37.

country did not refer just to a new musical style, it also described a new look for performers. New country's face was male, masculine, clean, urban yet somewhat rural, groomed, and attractive; nonthreatening, and ideal for crossover success.[4]

Male "hat acts," a term coined by Travis Tritt to describe singers who wore large hats, became the images for new country music. Performers like Tritt, Billy Ray Cyrus, Clint Black, Alan Jackson, Brooks and Dunn, and Tim McGraw all took center stage and pushed older performers aside. The industry and fans labeled these men "hard core," a badge that meant they were "real" country.[5] And since "real" country included overt masculinity and manly swagger, women found it difficult to compete. In the early 1990s country's ladies lost most of their 1980s status and trailed far behind new male stars.

Garth Brooks epitomized new country and helped define the hat act style. His 1990 album *No Fences* made him an instant music phenomenon. Brooks became the first country performer to claim the number-one spots on pop and country charts at the same time, a feat he accomplished within one week of his album's release. *No Fences* went platinum thirteen times, and his next album, *Ropin' the Wind* (1991), stayed on the tops of charts for eighteen weeks and sold more than 11 million copies. Then in 1992 Brooks's *Beyond the Season* became one of the most successful Christmas albums of all time. Brooks's success not only symbolized the male takeover of country music, but it also indicated that country had become mainstream. Men like Brooks appealed to a variety of Americans, and he, and country music, spread further than before. His specific formula of claiming country, pop, and rock influences and then using

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[4]. Vladimir Bogdanov, Chris Woodstra, and Stephen Thomas Erlewine, eds. *All Music Guide to Country: The Definitive Guide to Country Music* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), 921.

[5]. Richard A. Peterson, "The Dialectic of Hard-Core and Soft-Shell Country Music," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 94 (Winter 1995): 297.

fiddles, steel guitars, ballads, and theatrical concerts set the standard in new country. Brooks was also college-educated, well spoken, and staunchly Middle American, other factors that added to his success. By 1994 he had sold more than 33 million albums, which made him the most successful performer of that time.[6]

Brooks courted mainstream America by not challenging conventional values, a significant facet of his success. Instead of defying America's norms and values like 1970s Outlaws, Brooks wanted to become America's biggest commodity. This tactic made him similar to others in the mainstream music industry and also to American politicians. In fact, Brooks has been described as "the consummate country music star for the Age of Bill Clinton."[7] Like President Clinton, Brooks appeared to be sincere and concerned, but some fans nevertheless perceived this as merely an act. He left audiences wondering how much of his showmanship symbolized the "real" Brooks and how much represented a performance. Moreover, Brooks, like Clinton, dealt with race but in a mainstream, nonthreatening fashion. His single "The Dance" (1990), from his 1989 album *Garth Brooks*, made allusions to Martin Luther King, and the video showed images of the civil rights movement, but it neither criticized whites nor discussed modern racism. His hit song "We Shall Be Free" from *The Chase* (1992) included a gospel choir and addressed racial issues with lyrics like "When the last thing we notice is the color of skin … we shall be free," another tame attempt at discussing racism.[8] Like women in the 1980s, Brooks and the other hat acts mirrored the political environment. Males in country music appealed to a

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[6]. Country Music Foundation, *Country: The Music and the Musicians: From the Beginnings to the '90s*, 2nd ed. (New York: Abbeville Press, 1994), 387–88, 392; Bogdanov, Woodstra, and Erlewine, *All Music Guide to Country*, 921.

[7]. Country Music Foundation, *Country: The Music and the Musicians*, 395.

[8]. Bogdanov, Woodstra, and Erlewine, *All Music Guide to Country*, 87; Garth Brooks, "The Dance," *Garth Brooks*, Capitol, 1989; Garth Brooks, "We Shall Be Free," *The Chase*, Liberty, 1992.

variety of audiences and, like America's new president, conformed to contemporary norms and behaviors, a formula that proved successful.

Brooks and other men in country music also reflected developments in the women's movement. As Third Wave feminism exposed violence towards women and promoted women's sexual power, men in country music did the same. Brooks's single "Face to Face" (1992), for example, discussed a date-rape victim and how she strongly identified her attacker in the courtroom; and "That Summer" (1993), a song of sexual exploration, described a love affair between and older woman and a young boy.[9] In this way Brooks showed that even though he and others wore large hats and had macho bravado, they remained concerned about women and in touch with women's issues. These examples, like country's use of race, also represented noncontroversial feminist topics; most fans did not believe that opposing rape or depicting older women's sexuality represented a revolution. Brooks attracted female fans by adopting women's issues but also appealed to mainstream men by not directly attacking patriarchy.

Brooks's single "Thunder Rolls" (1990) represented the most dramatic and controversial example of male support of feminism and, for that reason, the song initially proved divisive. The album-version of the song, which contained only two verses, described the tumultuous relationship between a wife and her adulterous husband. The third omitted verse, however, included a violent ending. In this version the wife shot her husband, thereby making that night "the last time she'll wonder where he's been." Brooks did not include the third verse on his CD, but he did sing it in concerts and the live version made its way to radio. Eventually some fans

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[9]. Billy Altman, "Women in Music: Country Just Ain't What It Used to Be," in *Facing Difference: Face, Gender and Mass Media,* ed. Shirley Biagi and Marilyn Kern-Foxworth (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forest Press, 1997), 255–57; Garth Brooks, "Face to Face," *The Chase*; Garth Brooks, "That Summer," *The Chase*; Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, *ManifestA: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000), 58–59, 78–80.

and radio stations claimed the song went too far, which led to a partial ban. The song's video also became problematic as it adopted an even more controversial stance. The video depicted a battered wife who presumably killed her husband as a storm raged in the background.[10] The video's implied violence led to a Country Music Television (CMT) ban, which backfired and added to the song's popularity. Then, a newer video station, Great American Country (GMT), showed "Thunder Rolls" as its first video, and eventually CMT reluctantly agreed to include it in its rotation. In fact, in 1991 "Thunder Rolls" became so popular that it won CMT's Best Video of the Year Award.[11] Even though this song adopted an atypical topic, Brooks stayed within the limits of mainstream American beliefs and only slightly challenged the boundaries. The battered woman retaliated, a controversial act but one that fans did not see as entirely objectionable. He managed to be provocative and relatively conservative at the same time, again staying within the bounds of acceptable behavior.

Antifeminist sentiment also existed along with the presumably pro-woman turn in male country music. Even though male performers in some instances used violence to liberate women, many songs also used it to keep women in their places. However, they generally did not use violence in overtly discriminatory or threatening ways and instead presented it as humorous. Brooks's "Papa Loved Mama" (1992), for example, described a truck-driving husband who killed his cheating wife. This scenario depicted an act of passion, not necessarily a cold-blooded crime, and the murder weapon was not a realistic knife, a common tactic in bluegrass, but instead a more improbable eighteen-wheeler. Other singers used similar tactics. Johnny Cash's "Delia's Gone" (1994), which described a man who killed his lover twice with a machine gun in order to

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[10]. Altman, "Women in Music," 257; Garth Brooks, "Thunder Rolls," *No Fences*, Capitol, 1990.

[11]. Theresa Goddu, "Bloody Daggers and Lonesome Graveyards: The Gothic and Country Music," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 94 (Winter 1995): 75–76.

avoid marrying her, used excessive violence as a way to diffuse the song's presentation of murder.[12] These songs, and others like them, offered lighthearted yet violent reminders of women's proper places, both within society and in country music.

In spite of this environment, some women did move into positions of power. By 1992 women occupied leadership roles within the industry, a first in country music. Frances Preston rose through the ranks in Nashville to become chief executive officer of Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI), a music licensing agency; Donna Hilley became the operating officer of Sony/Tree Publishing, the world's largest country publisher; and Connie Bradley headed the Nashville office of the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP).[13] But women's new roles did not result in more record sales. Women performers still struggled to compete with country's men. Mirroring women's positions in early 1990s society, women made progress but still experienced restrictions.

As men took on women's issues, and as women moved into leadership positions, women became the most important consumers of country music. In the 1990s women bought more concert tickets than men, and they also purchased more CDs than men.[14] Country performers had to cater to their female audience and reflect its values while still winning over men. They did this by presenting themselves as all things to all people- feminist but patriarchal, conservative but daring, urban yet rural, and white but non-racist.

Women performers, like country's men, had to find ways to court female as well as male fans. In 1990 women represented 12 percent of the year-end sales charts, a significant decrease

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[12]. Ibid., 74–75; Garth Brooks, "Papa Loved Mama," *Ropin' the Wind*, Liberty, 1991; Johnny Cash, "Delia's Gone," *American Recordings*, American Recordings, 1994.

[13]. Paul Kingsbury, "Women, Walk the Line," *Journal of Country Music* 15, no. 1 (1992): 22.

[14]. Country Music Foundation, *Country: The Music and the Musicians*, 405.

from previous eras. In 1981, for example, women claimed 38 percent of the year's hit records, one of the highest percentages in country's history. To win back fans in the 1990s, women singers had to compete with hat acts, a feat that presented numerous problems. However, Brooks's success led the industry to manufacture an entire series of male performers who lacked staying power, and most of them quickly faded. This situation allowed some women to emerge, such as Trisha Yearwood, Martina McBride, Pam Tillis, and Suzy Bogguss; but at first, they did not get far. They still had to compete with more established new country performers, and in most cases, the men won. But in the mid-1990s country's women made a semi-comeback. Stars like Shania Twain, Faith Hill, Le Ann Rimes, Lee Ann Womack, Jo Dee Messina, Teri Clark, and SheDaisy achieved huge amounts of popularity.[15] But in each period of the 1990s, women not only had to fight with males for country's top spots, but they also had to work within the bounds of American society.

The boundaries for country's women represented the same boundaries that existed for American women in general.[16] Country celebrated new country and masculinity, which fans perceived as hard and true, and women could not compete. For this reason they adopted pop techniques, a style many believed to be more feminine and appropriate for women performers. In essence, most women in country music retreated and let males adopt some elements of hard core, a strategy that led audiences to see men as authentic and women as not.[17] This passivity corresponded to society's views of women and their proper places. Some women in country music did use feminism but most used mild, nonthreatening versions. In the early 1990s, society

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[15]. Alanna Nash, "The Gender Gap," *Country Music* 227 (August–September 2003): 28–35.

[16]. Mary A. Bufwack and Robert K. Oermann, "Reba McEntire Walks On," *Journal of Country Music* 16, no. 1 (1993): 16.

[17]. Peterson, "Dialectic of Hard-Core and Soft-Shell Country Music," 273–74.

accepted certain types of feminism but if women took their feminism too far, they risked ridicule and commercial failure. So while country witnessed a mild revolution brought on by the emergent feminism of Nashville's female stars in the 1990s, it also imposed limitations on acceptable images for women in the country field.[18] This environment, and women's lack of access to hard-core music, led to many contradictions for women in country music. Performers like Reba McEntire, Wynonna Judd, Trisha Yearwood, Shania Twain, Martina McBride, and Mary Chapin Carpenter used sex and wholesomeness; criticized conservatism and promoted conservative values; and accepted feminism and retreated from it. Like women in the 1980s, they mirrored the conflicting environment for American women. Even if they incorporated feminism, they stayed within the bounds of acceptable femininity.

In some cases women combined cheerfulness with feminism, a strategy designed to diffuse song's semi-aggressive stances. For example, Lorrie Morgan's "Watch Me" (1992) taunted an unfaithful man who seemed to think his female partner would never leave. Morgan's song confronted the cheating man with lyrics like "if you think I won't go, just watch me."[19] However, the song had an upbeat tempo and used a playful voice, as opposed to an angry one. In this way she toyed with female empowerment but did not directly attack men or patriarchy.

Suzy Bogguss used a similar tactic in "Hey Cinderella" (1993). Bogguss's song spoke of fairy-tale narratives that misled and confined women; in general, it exposed unrealistic expectations and romantic myths. However, like Morgan, Bogguss presented these ideas in a humorous way. She had a powerful message in that romantic myths were unhealthy and

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[18]. Beverly Keel, "Between Riot Grrrl and Quiet Girl: The New Women's Movement in Country Music," in *A Boy Named Sue: Gender and Country* Music, ed. Kristine M. McCusker and Diane Pecknold (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2004), 155–77; Baumgardner and Richards, *ManifestA*, 79–85.

[19]. Altman, "Women in Music," 258; Lorrie Morgan, "Watch Me," *Watch Me*, BNA, 1992.

dangerous, but the song was simultaneously funny. Bogguss sang, "Hey hey, Cinderella, what's the story all about? I got a funny feeling we missed a page or two somehow … Does the shoe fit you now?"[20] Her humor undercut the song's feminist message.

Pam Tillis's "Cleopatra, Queen of Denial" (1993) also used humor to present a powerful but nonthreatening feminist message. Tillis sang of a "misunderstood" man who "had a lot of potential" and who treated her badly on accident. He "didn't have any money" and for that reason could not buy her a wedding ring but some how managed to afford a new truck! For these reasons Tillis asked her audience to call her "Cleopatra, queen of denial." The video depicted Tillis as a pampered Egyptian pharaoh and her cowboy lover (who wore a huge hat) as a cheating, humorous, rube.[21] Both the song and video contained aggressive humor, and both adopted somewhat superior stances, but the humor made Tillis's message more appealing. Instead of overtly criticizing women's roles, Tillis caused her audience to laugh at gender stereotypes, a more acceptable strategy.

Some women left duos or bands and entered into careers as solo artists, moves that could be construed as independent and empowered. Wynonna Judd, for example, embarked upon a solo career in 1991 after her mother and singing partner, Naomi, was diagnosed with hepatitis.[22] Wynonna's solo career became symbolic of her entrance into adulthood; the industry portrayed her move as if she had left home. Her first solo album, *Wynonna* (1991) with MCA, did exhibit confidence, but did not stray far from the traditional themes that she, and her mother, had used in

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[20]. Robin Roberts, "Independence Day: Feminist Country Music Videos," *Popular Music and Society* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 140, 145; Suzy Bogguss, "Hey Cinderella," *Something Up My Sleeve*, Liberty, 1993.

[21]. Roberts, "Independence Day," 140; Pam Tillis, "Cleopatra, Queen of Denial," *Homeward Looking Angel,* Arista, 1992.

[22]. Country Music Foundation, *Country: The Music and the Musicians*, 412.

the past. She still celebrated domesticity and strong family ties and did not openly endorse feminism or criticize patriarchy. "She Is His Only Need" (1992), her first single as a solo performer and also her first solo number-one hit, described a love affair between a kept woman and her working-class husband. "I Saw the Light" (1992) and "No One Else on Earth" (1992), songs about love and heartbreak, also went to number one. In all of these singles Wynonna spoke of established and conservative themes, including rural roots, family bonds, spiritual fortitude, and the power of love.[23] She depicted independence but still remained within the bounds of femininity and tradition.

Some women in country music did express overt feminism; however, even these displays contained elements of restraint. Martina McBride's "Independence Day" (1994) became one of the most prominent, and controversial, examples of this type of feminism in country music. The song's lyrics described a child's views of her battered mother, her alcoholic father, and their tragic relationship. The child stated that the entire town knew of her mother's abuse but did not intervene; in fact, they all "looked the other way." As a result of the abuse and her apparent lack of options, the mother killed the father by setting the house on fire. The song depicted judgment, not reconciliation or rehabilitation, and this stance led many to criticize its message. Moreover, the song's video included more direct and confrontational elements. The video opened with an overhead shot of the mother and daughter as they both sang "Amazing Grace," a scene that evoked religious devotion and innocence. It then moved into scenes of the mother crying, the mother battered, and an Independence Day celebration (including American flags). The video also depicted the town's complicity in condoning domestic violence by showing two clowns, one

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[23]. Paulette Carlson also left Highway 101 in 1991 and entered a solo career. She, however, was less successful than Wynonna Judd, although she did receive a Academy of Country Music nomination for Best New Female Vocalist. Michael McCall, "Leaving the Nest," *Journal of Country Music* 14, no. 3 (1992): 47–48; Wynonna Judd, *Wynonna*, MCA, 1991.

male and one female, sparing with each other to the delight of a crowd. In the end the mother burned down the house, presumably with the father in it, a visual representation of the song's lyrics. The lyrics then justified the action: "Now I ain't saying if it's right or wrong, but maybe it's the only way. Talk about your revolution, it's independence day."[24] Although McBride's song unequivocally displayed feminism and also overtly criticized patriarchy, it did so through a relatively safe theme. Like "Thunder Rolls," "Independence Day" described domestic violence, a crime that most Americans condemned. The controversial aspect, the wife's decision to kill her husband, became the focus of criticism; however, ultimately country music accepted this act. McBride presented a situation where a woman had no options, and in that case it seemed as if she justified murder. The entire town ignored her pleas and her husband, according to the video, would never have allowed a divorce. In this way, she attacked a system that allowed women to be abused but justified retaliation only in certain circumstances. Even though her song mentioned revolution, she did not ask women to rise up in female solidarity to attack institutionalized sexism.

By the mid-1990s women discovered a new solution for their quests to compete with men: sex appeal. Women in country music previously used sex and sexuality; however, they usually remained somewhat inhibited. Moreover, in the past sexy women represented exceptions, not the mainstream. In contrast, in the mid-1990s most women in country music adopted overt sexuality and it became an acceptable persona for women in country music. Since female country sexuality existed for the male gaze, meaning women became passive objects for male pleasure, fans saw it as nonthreatening, and in many ways sexuality lessened women's

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[24]. Roberts, "Independence Day," 141, 145–47; Martina McBride, "Independence Day, *The Way That I Am*, RCA, 1993.

power. If fans saw women as sexual objects and men as established performers, then the male dominance of country could continue.

Shania Twain, who led the way in terms of sexuality, became the biggest country star of the 1990s. Her album *The Women in Me* (1995) sold eight million copies and became the highest-selling female country album of all time. Her next album, *Come on Over* (1997), then became the best-selling album ever released by a female in *any* category. Twain's success made her one of country's most visible stars; she appeared on the covers of all types of magazines (even *Rolling Stone*), her videos stayed on the charts for months, and other media outlets reported on her rags-to-riches success story.[25] But Twain's music alone did not result in her unprecedented success and exposure. Twain used sex in her videos, performances, and public appearances, and the audience responded. Twain's bare midriffs, backless dresses, seductive glances at cameras, model-like poses, and sensual moves made her a country and pop superstar. Moreover, her songs, which contained upbeat tempos and pop lyrics, discussed sex in untraditionally aggressive, but still feminine, ways. Her single "Whose Bed Have Your Boots Been Under," which reached number eleven on the country charts, asked a man where he spent his nights; and "Any Man of Mine," her first number one hit, taunted men and forcefully, but playfully, described her relationship requirements. By the mid-1990s MTV, and its sexual depictions of rock and rap stars, had influenced many younger listeners; for this reason many became more willing to accept Twain. Her overt sexuality started a new era for female country music, one characterized by sex and crossover appeal.[26]

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[25]. Ralph Emery with Patsi Bale Cox, *50 Years down a Country Road* (New York: Harper Collins, 2000), 329, 336.

[26]. Bogdanov, Woodstra, and Erlewine, *All Music Guide to Country*, 767–68.

Even though Twain, and others in country music, used sex to sell records, their actions did not necessarily represent antifeminism. It can be argued, for example, that women's expressive sexuality, a version of sexual empowerment, represented a type of feminism. Twain expressed her sexuality aggressively, as did Faith Hill, and seemed confident and secure with her decisions. Moreover, Twain and others did achieve financial success.[27] However, industry journals and reviews rarely described Twain and others who followed her lead as powerful women; in fact, most writings of them focused entirely on their bodies. Country reviews also described their music and personalities as "soft," meaning that they did not represent "real" country. Fans saw men as "real" and women as sexy. In addition, some women's sexual behavior did lead to criticism, and these women increasingly became associated with the more accepted sexy stars. For example, in 1997 a tipsy Tanya Tucker, after barhopping with visiting Dateline NBC coanchor Stone Philips, lifted her sweater and flashed her attributes to a roomful of music-industry elites in Nashville. This act resulted in swift criticism, and some country publications associated Tucker, and other inappropriate actions, with Twain, Hill, and country's other sexy stars.[28]

Women in country music did have options other than sexuality. Women could conform to society's expectations in other ways; in particular, they could use family or child-like themes. In 1996 a fourteen-year-old LeAnn Rimes became the first country performer to win a Grammy for Best New Artist in almost thirty years.[29] Rimes's childishness combined with her magnificent voice seemed to place her above criticism. In terms of domesticity, in 1996 Faith

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[27]. Mary A. Bufwack and Robert K. Oermann, *Finding Her Voice: The Sage of Women in Country Music* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1993), 548.

[28]. Steven Dougherty and Joanne Fowler, "Untamed Heart," *People* 47, no. 13 (April 7, 1997): 95.

[29]. Nash, "The Gender Gap," 34.

Hill married Tim McGraw and the couple became the new Mr. and Mrs. of country music. Hill could, and did, use her marriage and later her status as a mother to diffuse criticism of her sexuality.[30] Audiences saw both childishness and domesticity as acceptable roles for women in country music. As in the 1980s, fans condoned any connection to childhood or marriage.

Women also used conservatism as a way to conform. In the 1990s women linked themselves to conservative politics more than ever before in country's history, even if they themselves had experienced the negative impacts of conservatism. In 1988 Vice President Dan Quayle attacked Murphy Brown, the television character portrayed by Candice Bergen, for her decision to raise a child alone. Tanya Tucker, a single mother herself, then criticized Quayle in the *New York Daily News*. Tucker stated, "What in the world does he know of what it's like to go through pregnancy and have a child with no father for the baby? Who is he to call single mothers tramps?… What about the men?… The real trouble with these situations isn't the women having children out of wedlock; it's men with no backbones—like Dan Quayle—who don't understand their plight."[31] However, in spite of her views about Quayle, Tucker demonstrated support for conservative politics and the Republican Party. In 1991, on the day she gave birth to her second out-of-wedlock child, the CMA awarded Tucker its Female Vocalist of the Year award, an honor that proved she had reclaimed some of her popularity. The next year, in the midst of her comeback, she recorded a performance for the Republican national convention. She did this even though she was an unwed mother of two children and had previously been in drug rehab, actions that separated her from conservative ideology.[32]

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[30]. Emery, *50 Years down a Country Road*, 345–49.

[31]. Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 536.

[32]. Daniel Cooper, "Tanya Tucker: Almost Grown" *Journal of Country Music* 17, no. 1 (1994): 11, 24.

Both Wynonna and Naomi Judd also participated in conservative politics. In 1992 they joined together to once again work with George Bush on his presidential campaign. Of this, Bush said, "Naomi campaigned with me and dished out some real zingers against my opponents."[33] In spite of Wynonna's solo career and her independence, she still tied herself to conservatism and in many ways, to its antifeminist stance.

Dolly Parton continued to defy country's rules in the 1990s. She used all of her standard techniques, including her self-depreciating humor and girlish jokes; but she also used her status as a legend to push boundaries. She conformed in some ways, in others did not, and the combination worked. Parton supported the gay community, had become a successful businesswoman, had a rumored open marriage, and openly admitted to her many plastic surgeries, but still continued to have hit records. Her 1991 album *Eagle when She Flies* went to number one on the country charts and reached platinum status. She also had a number one hit that same year with Ricky Van Shelton, "Rockin' Years." Then in 1992 she starred in a feature film, *Straight Talk*, where she played a working-class woman posing as a radio relationship/sex therapist. Her album *Honky Tonk Angels* (1994), with Loretta Lynn and Tammy Wynette, became gold, and *Trio II* (1999) with Linda Ronstadt and Emmylou Harris went to number four on the country chart and also won a Grammy. She then won a Grammy for *The Grass is Blue* (1999), and "Shine" from *Little Sparrow* (2001) won a Grammy as well.[34]

Unlike Parton, some artists did not conform, meaning they were neither sexy nor pop, childlike nor domestic, and as a result were less successful. For example, in spite of *Trio II*'s success, Emmylou Harris declined in popularity. Her neotraditional style became reserved for

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[33]. George Bush, "My Country Western 'Tis of Thee," *Forbes* 153, no. 10 (May 9, 1994): 80.

[34]. Alanna Nash, *Dolly: The Biography* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2002), 305.

men; therefore, she fell off of country's charts. In the late 1990s Harris started touring Europe, where she believed fans appreciated her music more than U.S. audiences. She became one of the first country music singers to perform extensively in Europe and over time became very popular in Ireland. She did not have a great fortune, and since her American sales declined, she had to work as a touring performer.[35]

Some women gained control of their finances in other ways. For example, Reba McEntire, who actually took charge of her career in the mid-1980s, went even further in the 1990s. In 1990 a chartered jet with seven of McEntire's band members and her road manager crashed into a mountain and the accident killed all on board, including the pilot and copilot. Afterwards she told the story to *People* magazine (she also appeared on the cover), went back on tour two weeks later, and once again became one of country's most visible stars. The plane crash, along with the birth of her son Shelby in 1990, gave McEntire visibility and a certain type of credibility that she used to promote other female singers. Specifically, she experienced public trauma, and that exposure allowed her to come out as a strong advocate for other women. She used her new clout to help female singers, acts that previously could have led to criticism. McEntire went out of her way to find songs by female songwriters and then assisted them in breaking into the male-dominated music world.[36] For example, she helped jump-start the career of singer Linda Davis, a McEntire soundalike managed by Starstruck Entertainment (McEntire's multimillion-dollar management publishing firm). McEntire cut a duet with Davis, included it on her *Greatest Hits Volume Two* (1993) CD, released it as a single, and then unveiled Davis during the CMA's awards show, country music's biggest showcase of the year. Her tactic

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[35]. Laurence Leamer, *Three Chords and the Truth: Hope, Heartbreak, and Changing Fortunes in Nashville* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 93–94, 106.

[36]. Bufwack and Oerman, "Reba McEntire Walks On," 18–19.

worked, and Davis became successful.[37] McEntire's maternalism made her appear nurturing, an acceptable role, and fans also saw her as a victim, which in some ways put her above criticism. She did not attack the male establishment; she simply wanted to help other women.

But even McEntire could go too far. In 1994 McEntire wore a low-cut dress to a CMA awards show, a decision that brought her lots of attention. She made a joke during the show about her designer, Sandi Spika, "I wish Sandi would have told me I had that on backwards."[38] In this way, even McEntire, an established star with a family and a tragic past, could cross the limits and receive criticism.

While McEntire's clothing choices did offend some, her actions did not overtly challenge patriarchy. On the other hand, some artists did offer mild criticisms. For example, Mary Chapin Carpenter's song "He Thinks He'll Keep Her" (1994) described a woman who left her husband due to dissatisfaction and boredom. This made her song similar to McEntire's earlier "Is There Life Out There?" (1987) which also resulted in criticism for McEntire. McEntire's song described a woman who simply asked, "is there life out there," or if she could obtain a better life. Carpenter's single took this further. The female subject of her song left her husband simply because she was not satisfied. Carpenter received swift reprimands for "He Thinks He'll Keep Her"; for example, in an interview, *Pulse* magazine asked Carpenter if she had any "Thelma and

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[37]. In 1992 at the Academy of Country Music Awards Show, Trisha Yearwood also received criticism for her dress, a tight, white, Marilyn Monroe–inspired mini. At this point Yearwood was an established star, but her fame did not mean she could push the sexual boundaries. Fans accepted some sex, but too much was too much. Paul Kingsbury, "Together Again," *Journal of Country Music* 16, no. 1 (1993): 50.

[38]. Mary A. Bufwack, "Girls with Guitars—and Fringe and Sequins and Rhinestones, Silk, Lace, and Leather," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 94, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 208.

Louise motivations," even though the song made no mention of violence or lawlessness.[39] Even minor suggestions of independence could lead to associations with radicalism.

In any event, whatever strategy women used, they had to have videos. By the 1990s videos had changed country music and became required for success. Like songs, some did include mild forms of indirect feminism. Also like songs and personas, most stayed within the bounds of conservatism. This remained true even in 1997, a year the industry labeled "The Year of the Woman." The year received this title due to the success of a handful of female stars, most notably Twain, Judd, Carpenter, and Rimes. But female videos did not necessarily contain pro-woman themes. Seventy-five percent of female videos in 1997 depicted women as someone's lover, compared to 42 percent for males. Twenty-two percent of men in videos worked, compared to only 6 percent of women. Males' average age was thirty-three and females twenty-seven, with the oldest male in the sample at sixty and the oldest female in her early forties. Females usually wore neutral clothing (57 percent), but one-third wore alluring attire. The overwhelming majority of men in videos, 94 percent, wore neutral clothing. In addition, males directed 94 percent of all videos, and male videos appeared at a three-to-one ratio to female. Only 6 percent of female videos presented topics that could be construed as emancipating. So, even though the industry labeled 1997 as the year of the woman, it hardly represented a revolution.[40]

Even though women did not experience a feminist revolution, a few transformations in country music took place in the 1990s, especially in terms of homosexuality. In the 1990s a few

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[39]. Mary Chapin Carpenter, "He Thinks He'll Keep Her, *Come On Come On*, Columbia, 1992; Goddu, "Bloody Daggers and Lonesome Graveyards," 77. For more information on McEntire's "Is There Life Out There?" see Chapter Three.

[40]. Julie L. Andsager and Kimberly Roe, "Country Music Video in Country's Year of the Woman," *Journal of Communication* 49, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 69–82.

male country personalities openly declared their homosexuality, acts that previously could have resulted in career disaster. In 1995 two high-profile country radio figures, WSIX Nashville personality Hoss Burns and consultant Jaye Albright, announced they led alternative lifestyles. Burns admitted to his bisexuality and HIV-positive status, and Albright revealed that he had previously had a sex change. Both received a relatively warm reception from the industry following their disclosures, and they did not appear to suffer professional criticisms. Their decisions to reveal their sexual preferences signified more than personal choices; they also represented responses to market research. In the past, gay fans and performers silenced themselves due to country's conservatism, but by the mid-1990s things started to change. The industry realized that country had many gay fans (1 in 10) and a 1995 report from Simmons Market Research Bureau revealed that the gay community listened to country, perhaps a discovery that led to more openness. Of course, many fans and labels still discriminated, but the environment began to change.[41] However, country still did not accept female bisexuality or lesbianism. Women still had to exist within the confines of patriarchy, meaning they had to exist for male pleasure. They could not openly admit they did not need, or desire, men. For this reason men would become country's gay trailblazers, not women.

At the end of the 1990s the Dixie Chicks broke all of the rules of country music. Their album *Wide Open Spaces* (1998) sold over four million copies in one year, six million copies total, and became the biggest-selling album ever by a country music group or duet. Their second album *Fly* sold 350,000 in one week. The Dixie Chicks, unlike other 1990s ladies, represented a different trend. They, like women in the late 1980s, used neotraditional techniques; namely, they wrote their own music and played traditional instruments. The Dixie Chicks used fiddles and

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[41]. Phyllis Stark, "Gays See Gains in Country Radio," *Billboard* 109, no. 6 (February 8, 1997): 68–69; Wes Orshoski, "Calling All (Gay) Cowboys!" *Billboard* 115, no. 36 (September 6, 2003): 38.

steel guitars in contemporary ways, a style that made them unique. Sisters Martie and Emily Erwin, the two original members, had played instruments since their childhoods, and both took pride in their musical abilities. Martie played the fiddle and viola, and Emily played banjo, dobro, lap steel, and acoustic guitar. Natalie Maines, the singer, used a strongly accented voice to deliver love songs and feminist anthems. Together, the trio exhibited fearlessness; their songs discussed sex, murder, mayhem, and rowdiness in general while their music represented tradition.[42]

In the early 2000s the Dixie Chicks became the only hugely successful female group in country music. A few industry writers attributed their success to a lack of competition. Stars like Faith Hill and Shania Twain became too pop and alienated their country audience; while men went a more traditional route, which made them more popular.[43] Other industry writers focused on the Dixie Chicks' provocativeness, which country fans sometimes supported, sometimes criticized, but always paid attention to. In essence, they broke all of the rules and managed to remain successful. For example, in 2003 the Dixie Chicks criticized President George W. Bush and taunted one of country's leading males, Toby Keith. During a concert in London, Maines said the trio felt "ashamed" that they and Bush both claimed Texas as their homes and that the Dixie Chicks did not support the war in Iraq. This led to criticism, bans, boycotts, and eventually death threats. Then, during a concert, Keith showed forged images of the Dixie Chicks with Saddam Hussein. In response, Maines began wearing a T-shirt with "FUTK" on the front, an acronym that many believed stood for "fuck you, Toby Keith," although Maines claimed, with a wink, that it meant "freedom, understanding, tolerance, and

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[42]. Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, 473.

[43]. Phyllis Stark, "Country Women Lose Hit Magic," *Billboard* 115, no. 27 (July 2003): 1; Emery, *50 Years down a Country Road*, 351.

knowledge." The trio also appeared nude on the cover of the May 2, 2003, issue of *Entertainment Weekly* with the words "boycott," "Dixie Sluts," "traitors," and "peace" written on their bodies. Then, later that year, the Dixie Chicks had the largest one-day concert sales (867,000 ticket sales) in music history, a feat that meant they surpassed Madonna, U2, the Rolling Stones, and Paul McCartney.[44]

As this discussion suggests, the 1990s and early 2000s represented a hodgepodge of styles and strategies. The information presented here is only a first glance at a period that others will have to interpret. But a few features are clear, even in this brief discussion. Women and men continued to use certain concepts to link themselves to tradition and to give themselves legitimacy. And, like women performers in the 1980s, some conformed, some experienced punishment, and others went against the grain. Some pushed boundaries, and some accepted the status quo. All of these trends continue into the present, with older stars like Loretta Lynn publicly confronting domestic violence and others like Faith Hill being criticized for competitiveness.[45] The Dixie Chicks remain political and provocative, and others like Gretchen Wilson, the "Redneck Woman," celebrate working-class female conservatism. Regardless of women's personas, they all do say something about our society.

While a few country music historians have begun to interpret the 1990s, the 1980s still remains a relatively undiscovered era for female country music. However, as this dissertation shows, women's music did say something about its fans, society, and the political environment.

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[44]. Duncan Campbell, "Dixie Sluts Fight on with Naked Defiance," *Guardian* (April 25, 2003): 13; Chris Willman, *Rednecks and Bluenecks: The Politics of Country Music* (New York: New Press, 2005), 21–23; Calvin Gilbert, "CMT News Special Explores Maines-Keith Controversy," June 20, 2003, CMT.com (accessed February 15, 2009).

[45]. Michael Streissguth, "Still Woman Enough," *Country Music* 219 (June–July 2002): 64–68; Nancy Henderson, "Skirting Danger," *Country Music* 226 (July 2003): 67.

It represented a social text that revealed the values, norms, and expectations of the American public. In the early 1980s, women performers reflected changes for American women, notably the move away from feminism and towards more traditional constructions of femininity. They used their bodies and bodily control to identify with whiteness, depicted the South as the progressive Sunbelt, and presented themselves as middle-class ladies searching for a new audience. By the mid 1980s CMT and TNN contributed to more exposure for country's women artists, but fans reacted negatively towards performer's newer looks. As a result women in country music searched for new personas and gradually realized that constructions of passive femininity led to success. They continued to use whiteness but added subtle racism, especially in terms of their depictions of urban African Americans. In their uses of region, they moved away from the more middle-class representation of the Sunbelt and towards working-class images of Appalachia and the West. They also started presenting themselves as working-class, a change from the more middle class performances on the early 1980s. These transformations mirrored developments in American society, namely increasing political conservatism, growing backlash against feminism and the civil rights movement, the South's continued rise in national prominence, and celebrations of working class life. By the late 1980s women in country music had completed their moves towards tradition, mainly with their gendered displays of domesticity, maternalism, and passivity. They began to use African Americans in their performances and did mention race but generally did so only through comedy. The also celebrated the white working-classes and poverty but distinguished both from the urban poor or "white trash." Moreover, by 1987 women in country music overtly defended the South and presented it as a rural region filled with defiant pride, time-honored values, and down-home charm. These changes, like the others in previous periods, reflected American society, namely more overt backlash, continued and, in

many ways, increasing political conservatism, new cultural exposure for African Americans coupled with depictions of black criminality, the South's place as a solidly conservative and prominent region, and the stronger, more overt, celebration of working-class life and family values.

The uses of gender, race, class, and region in female country music do tell us about the 1980s and about country's audience. The men and women who appreciated female country music identified with conservative shifts in the American political and social landscape. They appeared to want music that reflected conservatism, whiteness, and tradition. Moreover, as the audience and American values changed, so did country music. Women's country performances reflected class-based ideas, changes in how fans saw the South, trends towards feminism and women's roles, and views towards minorities. Country's women artists mirrored fan's desires and expectations, and in doing so reflected how these individuals changed throughout the 1980s. Moreover, since country music had a national audience, the popularity of women's country music speaks to American, not local or regional, trends.

In general, examining female country music during the 1980s helps us understand how society viewed American women and their roles. It also reveals racial beliefs, conceptions of class, and how fans saw and experienced the South. Using music as a social text allows us to investigate these themes through the eyes of fans, an approach that places the men and women who listened to this music at the center of the analysis. These fans economically and personally supported artists who appeared to endorse their norms and values, even as these ideas changed. This approach also gives the performers themselves agency and shows that they responded to fan's wishes. As the transitional mid 1980s show, performers experimented with a variety of styles and behaviors and generally selected the ones that fans responded to.

This dissertation has also shown that the 1980s did represent a significant decade for women in country music. Women achieved unprecedented success, rivaled their male counterparts, used new media formats successfully, and established themselves as both crossover and country stars. Some women took control of their careers, a new development in country music, and many used their power successfully. Moreover, many achieved national notoriety and critical acclaim, other factors that suggest they had moved into American mainstream consciousness. In addition, women's success in videos alone, not to mention film and television, sets this decade apart and makes it more than a transitional period between the much-discussed 1970s and 1990s. *Barbara Mandrell and the Mandrell Sisters*, *Dolly*, *9 to 5*, *Coal Miner's Daughter*, *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*, and others all serve as illustrations that women in country music could succeed outside of their genre. These examples, along with the use of women's country as a reflection of societal norms, makes the 1980s a significant period, not a bridge between two more important decades.

It is "only fittin'" to end this dissertation with Dolly Parton, since she appears throughout. She is the alpha and omega; she personifies all of this dissertation's points and exemplifies the characteristics of each period. Luckily for current audiences, Parton is not just a past performer. In 2008 Parton wrote the lyrics to more than twenty songs for the Broadway version of *9 to 5*. The play opened first in Los Angeles and will open in New York in 2009. Producer Robert Greenblatt enlisted the writer of the movie's screenplay, Patricia Resnick, to work on the show. Together, the two of them flew to Nashville to ask Parton if she would like to write the score. In her typical self-deprecating fashion, Parton claimed, "I've never done a musical ... I will not be offended though, if it don't turn out, because it's new to me ... But I will

give it a whirl."[46] Based on this dissertation's findings, the rediscovery of *9 to 5*, and in some ways of Parton, reflects not only her fabulousness, but also larger themes. Future historians will have the pleasure of deconstructing the 2009 version of Parton and explaining what her uses of gender, race, class, and region mean for modern society.

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[46]. Jeff Lunden, National Public Radio's *Morning Edition*, "Dolly Parton: Working '9 to 5' to Get to Broadway," September 20, 2008.

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