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Outlaw Country Chronicles: Rebels, Roots, and Cultural Change

A Dissertation Submitted

by

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Abstract

Music provides lyrics and symbols to express art within the society. The goal of this research project is to examine the outlaw movement in the country music genre to study the connection of the working-class American culture to the music. Additionally, the purpose of this project is to establish the strong relationship of folk genre and country music as an endeavor to provide authentic lyrics that reach into the past to reflect the experiences of the changes in the present. The outlaw movement in the country music genre provided a unique capture through the lyrics and reflection to the culture in this period of history. The research exams the culture's impact on the music through research of the relationship of the artist, songwriters, and listeners. This movement evolved out of the artist's fight for freedom to express the reflection of the cultural adaptation echoed in the lyrics. The outlaw musicians helped raise the popularity the country music genre. While enduring the transformation of society, working-class Americans found an escape in the lyrics that provided consolation with echoes of the past. The data for this project was collected through archives, newspapers, and magazine articles. As the country music industry evolved to expand marketing success in the genre, it moved away from traditional sounds. Because of the impact of societal changes to tradition, the songwriters and the working class used the lyrics to reminisce of easier times and to reflect on the struggles faced. The analysis indicated the outlaw movement's influence on the country music genre tied the culture of the listeners to the music, providing an exchange of sentiments between the artist and songwriters with the listeners. This channel of communication is unique to the country music genre as a result of the continued debate of tradition and authenticity while evolving with the changing society.

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Introduction

In an interview with *The Baltimore Sun* in 1975, Willie Nelson stated, “They talk about progressive country, but it’s really progressive listeners.”¹ This comment presented awareness of a music artist, the lingering question of the lyrics used, and the popularity of the music. The shift in the lyrics presented a perception into the progression of the culture as it evolved with the music. The rise in the silent majority included listeners of country music trying to comprehend the changing society by gravitating to music to understand the cultural shift.² The music produced by the outlaw musicians used lyrics to illustrate the climate of the culture. In reference to the record executives labeling the music as progressive, Nelson attributed the musical change to the listener’s interpretation. The music that came forth from the outlaw movement presented the cultural connection to the listener. In the 1970s, the response to the erosion of the traditional roles in society and the country music genre created a drive in the outlaw musicians to connect with listeners through music with similar ideology or belief in traditions. The outlaw movement was not alone. The conservative movement was not just a paranoid defense of the status quo. They truly wanted a return to what they felt defined America. However, to avoid getting labeled as racist or sexist, the conservatives turned into a silent majority rather than a loud and powerful movement. The timeframe of the 1970s followed a quickly progressive movement in the United States. However, the country music genre responded a bit slower in the progression. This

¹ Ed Ward, “Willie Nelson: Country’s Favorite Outlaw,” *The Baltimore Sun*, December 28, 1975, sec. D.

² Scott Laderman, *The “Silent Majority” Speech: Richard Nixon, the Vietnam War, and the Origins of the New Right*. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020). Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015). Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). Jeffrey J. Lange, *Smile When You Call Me A Hillbilly: Country Music’s Struggle for Respectability 1939 - 1954* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2004). Nixon coined the term “silent majority” in a speech expressing the connection. These historians examine the rise of the right-wing conservatism and the demographic of the group that emerged during the 1960s and 1970s in response to the counterculture movement during the period.

presented the idea that specific demographics and even regions also had a culture shift to express an opinion that aligned with the lyrics. This dissertation examines the lyrical impact and cultural aspects of the outlaw country music of the 1970s and how it evolved. The use of music to communicate was a means to provide a message acceptable in the American culture through the music's lyrics. The success of the country music message with the conservative movement came from these rebellious lyrics that evolved into the image of this cowboy rebel. The irony was tradition during this period grasped a rebellious attitude in response to the movements that opposed or challenged traditions. This was evident in the cultural transference from the American society reflected in the outlaw movement through the lyrics that connected with the culture of the listeners. There were some genres that reflected these societal changes in their lyrics much earlier than the country music genre.³ However, the outlaw artists who were connected to the outlaw music presented lyrics with a much more in-depth dialogue of the struggles of the common people. This image of an outsider of the law who pushed the envelope became the predominant image of country music during this period and gradually embodied the American spirit of a traditional American with the freedom of a cowboy.⁴ Key topics examined included the record label industry of the time period for country music, the producers, and the culture of the fan base. In his book *Real Country: Music and Language in the Working-Class Culture*, Aaron Fox stated, "Country music, as working-class culture, is a music of protest, accommodation, self-realization, and mythological fantasy."⁵ The influence of using music to speak to the listeners emerged in the protest movement of the 1960s. This influence continued in

³ Mary Barbier, Glenn Robins, and Andrew A. Wiest. *New Perspectives on the Vietnam War*. (New York, N.Y: Routledge, 2010), 259.

⁴ Travis D. Stimeling, "'Phases and Stages, Circles and Cycles': Willie Nelson and the Concept Album." *Popular Music* 30, no. 3 (2011), 389.

⁵ Aaron A. Fox, *Real Country: Music and Language in Working-Class Culture*, (Duke University Press, 2004), 318.

the outlaw movement. The conversation in the lyrics evolved to reflect the cultural and social climate in the working class. The turbulent changes in society provided a basis for a soundtrack of the cultural and social climate of the period as expressed in the lyrics of the outlaw country music that progressed as the social climate shifted. It was the working-class Americans who were drawn to the message emanating from the outlaw artists. The backgrounds of the outlaw artists were analogous to working class Americans. The artists' own aspirations for artistic freedom led to of the outlaw movement that evolved to a patriotic tone. The outlaw movement aligned with the culture of the listeners who faced their own challenges with evolving laws and societal changes. The result was a lyrical communication that connected with the country music fan base by presenting a collective voice that echoed the cultural and social climate of the period. The outlaw movement forever stamped the country music genre as a reflection of the fan base, projecting through lyrics with honesty, authentic sounds, and traditional storytelling.

Until the outlaw movement, the Nashville record executives provided the music that they expected to be successful and profitable. In an effort to find commercial success, this group produced the Nashville sound in the 1960s. The importance of the outlaw movement was also to connect the country music listeners to the genre. Fortunately, the conservative movement of the 1970s latched onto the country music genre to provide the message of tradition and opposition when needed. The commercial success of country music in the post-World War II era resulted from separating itself from the southern rural background that transformed the genre. However, even with the expansion of country music, the musicians and listeners themselves had been part of the migration to different parts of the country. The 1970s provided the rise of balancing the blending the rural past with the modern societal struggles. The conservative movement faced struggles as scandals plagued leadership, and the economical struggles hit the working class hard

during this period.⁶ This gave birth to the outlaw movement that was navigating this balance while obtaining and achieving their own artistic freedom. The outlaw movement created a rippling effect in the country music genre that presented a dialogue with the message in the lyrics to the listeners.⁷

The original musicians in the outlaw music movement were Merle Haggard, Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Jessi Colter, and Kris Kristofferson. Their style of music and lyrics that strayed from the Nashville sound attached them to the outlaw movement of the period. Other artists, including female artists, such as Dolly Parton, paved their own way to gain artistic freedom by providing the lyrical narrative not only of the outlaw movement but also of the shift towards the listener demographic of the conservative movement that was closely tied to the country music genre. This desire for traditions echoed in the lyrics was evident in the sales of the album *Wanted: The Outlaws*, which became the first certified platinum country album by the Record Industry Association, which tracks albums for certification of gold and platinum status. The *Wanted: The Outlaws* album reached a second platinum certification in 1985.⁸ These singing cowboys had made music with artistic freedom that also connected with the listeners.⁹ The significance of the success of the outlaw movement showed the desire for this traditional sound versus the polished Nashville sound introduced by record executives to promote sales. Outlaw music created a sound by blending elements of country, rock, and folk to create a unique sound that included lyrics that resonated with audiences. The outlaw movement challenged mainstream

⁶ "A-0024," Southern Oral History Program Interview Database, accessed April 16, 2023, <https://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/sohp/id/8506>.

⁷ In reference to this research, the outlaw movement refers to the time period in the 1970s when specific country music artists successfully achieved their own artistic freedom and the anti-establishment rhetoric spilled into the lyrics that connected to the listeners of this time.

⁸ "Gold & Platinum," RIAA, April 4, 2023, https://www.riaa.com/gold-platinum/?tab_active=default-award&se=outlaw#search section.

⁹ Deborah Evans Price, "RCA Believes 'Outlaws' are Still Wanted 20 Years Later." *Billboard* 108, no. 20 (May 18, 1996): 12.

country music this sound and did it by expressing themselves freely. This freedom allowed the lyrics to connect directly to the listeners, providing a unique relationship that defined the culture of the working-class American. This response showed not only how to evolve with the changing society but also how to hold to tradition and create a rebellious image that attached onto the cowboy image and lifestyle. This movement embraced the cultural atmosphere with lyrics presenting the transformation of American society faced during the 1970s.

The demographics of the listeners of country music had strong opinions on the country music genre trying to find its balance. The *Country Music* magazine provided a publication for country music fans to write and express their opinion on music and award show conduct. The controversy that occurred at 1975 Country Music Awards created a reaction from the fans which caused them to write to the magazine in response to Charlie Rich's rebellious act when he took the envelope with John Denver's selection of Entertainer of the Year and lit it on fire.¹⁰ A year after the controversial reaction to John Denver's award, the outlaw movement was making inroads in the genre. Waylon Jennings had finally earned the male artist award. In a letter to the editor, Mr. and Mrs. Bill Hannah wrote their thoughts from Pine Bluff, Arkansas, to the magazine by stating:

However, it is Waylon we're really concerned with. Just because he chooses to keep some privacy in his life, be a nonconformist, and have a rough looking appearance, plus a rough looking band, it seems that Nashville has a tendency to turn its back on him. We were really irritated with Tanya's remark about Waylon's "song from the underground." We think Waylon is great and is long past due an award. Hurray for last night— he deserves it. We'd like to know who told him to " be nice," and why?¹¹

¹⁰ "John Denver Got No Respect, but His Music Was Popular with the Public," *Clarion-Ledger*, October 15, 1997, 7.

¹¹ "Letters," *Country Music*, (February 1976): 4.

The letters to the magazine provided a voice for the country music fans as the 1970s presented the identity-defining moments as the artists and the fans reflected on the selections of winners. Steve Kavajecz from Madison, Wisconsin, also had a strong opinion on John Denver's selection as the Country Music Association's Entertainer of the Year stating, "If they can't put on a country show, with country artists, then cancel the show. Perhaps they could learn from the Music City News Awards, which are chosen by the fans. Remember them, they are the people who have been forgotten."¹² These reactions from the fans showed the struggle of the country music genre in redefining and diversifying itself in the face of the changing cultural landscape in the United States. The fans of country music looked to the genre as a mirror to reflect their own experiences, values, and identity. The individual listener who was struggling to find the simplicity of life without the modern challenges wanted to find an escape within the lyrics of country music genre. The outlaw music expressed this sentiment by highlighting the ability to overcome past mistakes. This ability to overcome the struggles and mistakes found parallels to the days of the cowboys.¹³ The musicologists have argued that these lyrical aspects were a form of resistant philosophy, which was exhibited in the fight for artistic freedom to lessen the controls of record executives in Nashville. The musicologists connected this marginalized identity of the common man to the theme used in the lyrics.¹⁴ The blue-collar working-class family struggled as society shifted, resulting in their moving away from the rural lifestyle by migrating to different areas in search of work. The southern origins of the country music genre expanded due to migration, creating a diverse progression in the country music genre that the

¹² "Letters," *Country Music*, (February 1976): 4.

¹³ Shelbi Nahwilet Meissner and Bryce Huebner. "Outlaw Epistemologies: Resisting the Viciousness of Country Music's Settler Ignorance." *Philosophical Issues* 32, no. 1 (2022), 214.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 219-220.

outlaw movement seized.¹⁵ The outlaw artists empathized since many of them came from working-class backgrounds. The outlaw movement further deepened the relationship with the audience as they bonded over the lyrics discussing the struggles and experiences. The culture shift of the 1960s and the change in societal norms provided the songwriters similar experiences. This desire to adhere to some of the traditions while adapting to the modern changes became the anthem of the outlaw movement.

The conservative movement became intertwined with the outlaw movement, an outlet with music to respond to the changing society. The demographics of the listeners, which were statistically the working class of American society, presented a clear cultural connection with the music. Although the societal changes occurred at a fast pace, the outlaw and conservative movements used the message in the music to reflect on their own struggles and desire to adhere to traditions or customs of the United States history. The cowboy image connected with the outlaw image due to the blurring of these lines with some western stories, such as lawmen Wyatt Earp and John “Doc” Holliday, who ultimately became outlaws. These lawmen went beyond the law to retaliate to the injustice they faced, creating a dilemma that the inherent outlaws are all bad.¹⁶ This created a predicament in the outlaw image. The questioning of authority was in the origins of the United States, and the amendable nature of the laws in the United States allowed for people to challenge them. The questioning of the laws and representation and the ideology of the natural rights influenced these calls to challenge authority.¹⁷ This theory or patriotic aspect of the outlaw who ultimately stood for what was right even when challenging the established norm

¹⁵ James Gregory, “The Southern Diaspora and the Urban Dispossessed: Demonstrating the Census Public Use Microdata Samples,” *Journal of American History* 82 (June 1995), 111-134.

¹⁶ Christopher Tookey, "How Doc Holliday rode off with Wyatt Earp's epic new movie." *Daily Mail*, September 9, 1994, 44-45. *Daily Mail Historical Archive*.

¹⁷ Richard Scott, “Making the Myth.” *Times*, October 22, 1994, 9[S1]. *The Times Digital Archive*.

heavily influenced the outlaw movement and the lyrics of the music. The outlaw musicians created lyrical dialogue addressing the current struggles or remembrance of the past. This was their own way to stand against the injustices faced from the record executives. Although some defined the music as progressive, it aligned with the demographic of listeners who in their effort tried to understand the quickly changing society while holding onto tradition. Ironically, the musicians struggled with the same fate as they embraced the artistic freedom to provide commercially successful music while remaining true to the tradition of the country music that grew out of folk and hillbilly. This unique balance was evident in the origins of the outlaw music movement in the 1970s that imprinted a delicate balance between the listeners and the music that created a cultural phenomenon, deepening the relationship of the culture of the listeners to the country music genre.

The use of the term outlaw grasped this concept of change, which gave the music a marketable characteristic that resonated with the working class. The musicians attached to the outlaw image did not set out to create a connection of the music to the lyrics. The country music genre always had a relationship with the southern and rural identity. However, the lyrical connection in the country music genre had always closely tied to the culture of the listeners. The time period of the outlaw aligned with the expansion of the country music genre and cultural climate that divided the United States. The lyrical connection in the country music genre had always closely tied to the culture of the listeners. The change emerged with the outlaw artists and their achieving artistic freedom with their music. This provided a personal element that allowed a deeper connection to the listeners and provided comprehension into the culture and special relationship with the country music genre. The collective sentiment expressed in the lyrics

defined itself as an instrument for a social movement.¹⁸ Even so, the controversial songs and their impact on the culture in the United States continued to be a debated topic. The music of the outlaw movement of the 1970s from the rising political divide the changing societal norms. The outlaw movement arose from the artists' stand against the establishment not necessarily because they broke the law. The visual image of the movement was tied to the cowboy as the artist sought individual freedom in the selection of the music and used the cowboy lifestyle in their lyrics and image.

Consequently, this authentic and romanticized image of the cowboy resonated with the listeners and continued to be a strong influence for working-class America as the cowboy persona expanded beyond the country music genre in the 1980s and embodied a patriotic theme.¹⁹ The musical artists in the outlaw movement and country music genre became fascinated with the cowboy image because of their own background and location. These artists' music evolved into a patriotic theme in the 1980s due to the aspect of the outlaw movement providing the genre the lyrical dialogue in the face of many changes occurring in society. The irony of the outlaw movement was that the ideals and cowboy image popularity moved into the mainstream. These ideas and grasp of the cowboy image came as an answer to the counterculture movement and the desire to establish or define masculinity. This was the image and authenticity used by the artists in their lyrics and even in their own images to share their message as it evolved. In a 1973 article discussing Waylon Jennings' rugged image compared to what the Nashville establishment had presented. Jennings was quoted in the article describes how he felt the establishment and defended the ability of the country music fans to understand and relate to the lyrics. He stated:

¹⁸ Country Music Hall of Fame, Willie Nelson Interview by Martha Hume - "Honeysuckle Rose" - Tape One, Side Two - 1979-11

¹⁹ Braden Leap, "A New Type of (White) Provider: Shifting Masculinities in Mainstream Country Music from the 1980s to the 2010s." *Rural Sociology* 85, no. 1 (2020): 173.

That's one of the big problems of country music. They don't want the country folks to know very much and they don't give 'em credit for knowin' very much. Country fans are as smart as anybody and it's an insult to 'em when a program director says, well, that song's too deep for our audience. Bullshit.²⁰

Willie Nelson's *Red Headed Stranger* album provided a continued connection to the storyline with the cowboy image. Paul Nelson, a reporter for *Rolling Stone*, noted in an article in 1975 on how this album contributes to the American ideas of the cowboy lifestyle. Nelson even pointed out Theodore Roosevelt's opinion on the loneliness aspect as being a national character of America. This individual hero echoed in the cowboy image that is trapped in this lifestyle. Nelson applauds Willie's ability to take the listener of this album on a story through the West with love and loss and trying to find purpose.²¹ Another *Rolling Stone* reporter, Peter Guralnick in his article on Willie Nelson's album *The Sound In Your Mind*, noted his ability to bring the past to life.²² Although ultimately Guralnick critiques this album as not standing up to his previous albums. The ability to resonate with the past provided authenticity not only to the genre but also to American traditions that connected the working-class listeners to the music that reflected simpler times. Although Guralnick's article criticized the album, the fans pushed this album to the number one spot in 1976.²³ The listeners related to the image and lyrics that projected memories that stirred emotions.

The spread of the image into other mediums, such as film and fashion, supported the relationship of the image of a cowboy with the culture of society in the United States during this period. The outlaw movement bolstered this connection by adding an edgy message. Hollywood

²⁰ Chet Flippo, "Waylon Jennings Gets Off the Grind-'Em-Out Circuit." *Rolling Stone*, Dec 06, 1973. 28.

²¹ Paul Nelson, "Red Headed Stranger," *Rolling Stone*, August 28, 1975, 68, 70.

²² Peter Guralnick, "The Sound In Your Mind," *Rolling Stone*, June, 3, 1976, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-country/the-sound-in-your-mind-247929/>

²³ "Billboard Country Music Chart", *Billboard*, Vol. 88 No. 52, December 25, 1976, 66

had also created a contradiction of the outlaw image by sometimes manifesting the outlaw as the villain and at other times emphasizing the outlaw as a misunderstood hero.²⁴ The film and fashion industry realized the value of the outlaw cowboy image. The fashion industry became influenced by the popularity of the cowboy image, which encapsulated a modern twist. Additionally, the film industry supplied the movies to show their version of the authentic cowboy. The image in western movies prior to the 1960s and 1970s embodied the westward expansion following the Civil War. The film industry provided a visual medium of the cowboy image and the western ideology. This image closely related to the country music genre began to connect to demographics nationwide.²⁵ The outlaw movement embraced the outsider status through the lyrics which created a dialogue to give voice to both the artists and listeners, who felt marginalized or overlooked by the mainstream culture of the period. The popularity of the outlaw movement showed the connection to the working class and conservative movement that adhered to traditional values.

The geographical origins of the folk music and country music genre provided traditions and influences on the artists' backgrounds and the audience of the music. The religious movements in the 20th century played a significant role in creating specific demographics for musical genres. The religious movement in the 1950s had an impact on the music of the time. The rock and roll of the time also had influences, especially from Elvis Presley. His performances had debates from the gospel followers concerning the gyrations used in his shows.²⁶ The connection between gospel music and country music ran deep with both genres'

²⁴ George N. Fenin and William K. Everson, *The Western: From Silents to Cinerama* (New York City: Bonanza Books, 1962) Internet Archive, 10.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Randall J. Stephens, "'Where Else Did They Copy Their Styles but from Church Groups?': Rock 'n' Roll and Pentecostalism in the 1950s South." *Church History* 85, no. 1 (2016), 97.

influence in the music. This influence on sounds and lyrics was one aspect of the connection. Another aspect was understanding the background of the listeners with this connection.²⁷ America's religious diversity, and how that religious diversity influenced the artists, resulted in debates among the Christian community.²⁸ The emergence of the rock and roll genre that combined new electric sounds with more liberal lyrics caused backlash from some listeners. The country music genre with its listeners' backgrounds also had strong foundations of influence from gospel. Even so, it began to grow in popularity during this period. There were some outlaw artists, such as Johnny Cash, who had a strong relationship with gospel genre. In 1972 the National Quartet Convention at the Municipal Auditorium in Nashville included Johnny Cash as one of the guest singers for the event. This event attracted over thirty thousand participants. The location and the inclusion of Cash highlighted the close relationship of the gospel music and country music during this time period.²⁹ This is important to understanding not only the artists' influences but also the country music fans' culture. Rosanne Cash discussed the blend of styles in her father's music, including gospel as one of the elements. She attributed his style to a blend of sounds, such as folk, bluegrass, including gospel.³⁰ Cash's daughter understood the unique blend of her father's sound and the importance of these influences that contributed to the uniqueness for him as an artist. This blend of backgrounds provided the foundation for the outlaw musicians, who mingled traditions and styles embodied in the movement. This music resonated with the listeners who experienced their own blend of trying to integrate with the changing society while holding onto traditions.

²⁷ Jim Melanson, "BILLBOARDS 13th ANNUAL World of Country Music: Gospel: Country Roots Spreading To Every Widening Market." *Billboard*. 87, no. 42 (1975), 40.

²⁸ America is known for religious diversity from Anglicans, Baptists, Catholics, Jews, Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Puritans, and Quakers.

²⁹ "Gospel Music: Johnny Cash Slated Oct. 6 Dove Award." *Billboard*. 84, no. 27 (1972), 27.

³⁰ Duncan, Dayton, and Burns, Ken. *Country Music: An Illustrated History*. (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2019), 240.

Unlike Cash, whose path to trouble came after his success in music, Merle Haggard's career provided an example of the transformation of themes throughout his career. Haggard made political stands in his music and opposed change. However, his ties to religion became more important later in his life. It also showed the rebellious nature on the path to self-discovery.³¹ Haggard presented the conflicted soul and provided the path to redemption.³² A memory of an inmate who had been on death row, Caryl Chessman, which included witnessing his last walk to his execution, left an impression on Haggard that he detailed:

They bring him though the yard there's a guard in front and a guard behind-that's how to know a death prisoner. They brought Rabbit out (his nickname was rabbit) and a bunch of guys who knew him were sitting around as he came through the yard with a guard in front and a guard behind. They were taking him to see the father.³³

This vivid memory signified Haggard's beliefs, noting his path to the Father. The experience of his time in jail not only impacted him for his lyrical style but also insured that he remained out of trouble besides some driver license's offenses after he was released from San Quentin.³⁴ The experiences of a songwriter's life can help direct the path and stories to use in the lyrics. The shared or similar experiences of the audience helped create a connection to the culture as well as to the outlaw artists. The listeners, facing turbulent time while trying to gain balance in a changing world, found solace in the outlaw movement. The influence of gospel music with its imbedded religious belief provided a common cultural element for the audience and artists.

Country music, even sometimes called hillbilly music, emerged from a blend of backgrounds of gospel and bluegrass. This diverse background created these different elements

³¹ Richard P. Wheeler, "A Place to Fall Apart: Merle Haggard's Music." *American Imago* 75, no. 3 (Fall, 2018), 430.

³² This is expressed throughout the Bible in multiple verses. A reference and example is in Ephesians 1:7 that records this belief stating, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace."

³³ "Merle Speaks His Mind." *Billboard*. 99, no. 7 (1977), H-5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

of sound in the genre. In 1949, *Billboard* established the standard of the country music genre after earlier changing the name of hillbilly music to folk songs.³⁵ After this time the country music under the control of the record producers set out to establish a marketable sound. This eventually led to the adaptation of the Nashville sound, providing a much more pop sound than the traditional blends of previous years. This caused the artists, particularly the outlaw artists, to strive for artistic freedom. The outlaw movement encapsulated its own movement within society. The genre, after its official labeling in 1949 by *Billboard* to the country western theme, had to find its identity, giving the opportunity for the artists to contribute their own blend of styles. The outlaw movement not only impacted the artists but also created stronger ties with the fans by providing understanding on the culture. The dynamic time period connected like-minded people with honest lyrics.

The background of the country music genre connected the relationship with the outlaw movement to the conservative movement. Although the outlaw movement had progressive elements challenging authority in the core, the inclusion of faith, patriotism, and redemption played a key role. The impact the movement made to expand the audience and diversity of the listeners helped to be the circular give-and-take to provide a dialogue to reflect the culture of the period. Its use established tradition and continued to bring a unique dialogue to the genre.

The foundations and beliefs of the demographic of listeners and artists of country music presented the outlaw movement with an element that was a reaction to the liberal movement of the 1960s. The cultural shift of the 1960s spurred a conservative religious movement and transformation that actually started prior to the 1960s. Early in the 20th century an earlier religious movement, known as the fundamentalist movement, influenced the later evangelical

³⁵ Norm Cohen and David Cohen, *Long Steel Rail: The Railroad in American Folksong*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 31.

movement of the 1950s. The background of the evangelistic approach started in the 19th century with preachers, such as Dwight L. Moody. Moody was led to embrace the evangelistic method and left an imprint on the evangelistic approach that lasted well into the future. Moody came from humble beginnings and faced life's struggles, such as losing his father at a young age. The convictions he held once he found his faith were evident in the choices he made throughout his life.³⁶ He championed spreading the Kingdom of God through showing love to others. The impact Moody made was evident in the 1936 article in the *Washington Post* celebrating his dedicated life to evangelistic preaching and his continued impact even well after his death in 1899.³⁷ The fundamentalist-modernist controversy provided origins to the discussion being debated throughout the 20th century. Pearl S. Buck also recognized the struggles in the world. Her views of religious missions transitioning from conversion missions to more humanitarian missions varied from previous evangelistic approach, which caused change in the Presbyterian church.³⁸ The artists and the listeners also faced these struggles. The global element of the society and the debate on the application of the Christian belief in the face of struggles and societal changes eventually became a piece of the fabric of the outlaw movement.

Religious movements embraced the evangelistic method of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ and left an imprint on the evangelistic approach that lasted well into the future. The topic of religion and its place in the public sphere experienced a challenge in the 1960s, including in education, which saw the removal of prayer and religion from public schools.³⁹ This debate on the role of religion in the American society spun off other reactions to the changes. The working

³⁶ Andrew R. Holmes and Stuart Mathieson. "Dwight L. Moody in Ulster: Evangelical Unity, Denominational Identity and the Fundamentalist Impulse." *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* (2021): 1-22.

³⁷ William Lyon Phelps. "Greatest Evangelist: D.L. Moody." *The Washington Post* (1923-1954), Sep 12, 1936, 1.

³⁸ *Evening star*. [volume] (Washington, D.C.), 21 April 1933. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1933-04-21/ed-1/seq-24/>.

³⁹ William Vance Trollinger, Jr. "Guaranteed Pure: The Moody Bible Institute, Business, and the Making of American Evangelicalism." *Fides Et Historia* 48, no. 1 (Winter, 2016): 197-9.

class demographic aligned closely to the changes and challenges within the faith.⁴⁰ Outlaw artist Johnny Cash struggled to align political injustices faced by some and stay true to his faith. This struggle to understand the changes and challenges birthed the outlaw movement. However, he stayed true to his faith through his struggles, including singing a gospel song in the White House in 1970.⁴¹ The outlaw movement and artists struggled to address how to adhere to traditions as the definitions of society changed. There is no denying that external effects involving race, gender and economics of a broad period created the political shift in the United States and to ignore some of the events outside classic eras limited complete understanding. The outlaw movement within the country music was a reaction to the changes faced in America.

The gospel music background not only brought elements of style to the artists but also tied the beliefs to the music. The foundation of Christian beliefs in America spread to different levels of the culture and influenced movements that emerged. The conservative movement, which is closely related to the Christian movement, became more of a force during the latter half of the century and was a response to what proponents of the movement believed as the moral decay of the country. The culture wars of the 1970s resulted because the conservatives viewed them as an assault on traditional values and the idea of the traditional family.⁴² Society's reaction to the changes were present in the women's struggle to define womanhood in this period and the support or opposition of the Equal Rights Amendment. Evangelical Christian women debated the Equal Rights Amendment and used scripture to support or oppose the amendment. Even more

⁴⁰ Markku Ruotsila, "Carl McIntire and the Fundamentalist Origins of the Christian Right." *Church History* 81, no. 2 (06, 2012): 378-407.

⁴¹ Marie Smith. "Cash Sings a White House Sermon: Cash in the East Room." *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, Apr 18, 1970. 2.

⁴² "The Conservative Evolution of Country Music," NPR, February 18, 2007, <https://www.npr.org/2007/02/18/7484160/the-conservative-evolution-of-country-music>.

interesting was the debate on the definitions of womanhood.⁴³ The outlaw artists were trying to find their own traditions within the music and lyrics while finding middle road on modern issues. This mindset helped give rise to the New Right Movement and of course, the ascendancy of Ronald Reagan.⁴⁴

The country music genre origins have a strong connection to the working class. The 1970s presented a rise in a group that challenged the cultural rebellions of the era. Richard Moss, associate professor of history at Harrisburg Area Community College, pointed out in his book on the New Right Movement that even though the 1972 beckoning to recover a nostalgic identity persisted, it nevertheless seemed a “relic of a previous era...drowned out by the angry denunciations of college professors, feminists, vocal minorities, and homosexuals.”⁴⁵ Moss determined that the narrative developed by the progressive activists, reactionary leaders, working-class Americans, and conservative Republicans all managed to solidify the New Ethnicity as a conservative movement that undermined the efforts of progressive activists and ensured that the ‘hardhat’ stereotype would become the prominent image of white ethnicity in postwar America. The economical struggles and the rise of new social issues and the resurgence of evangelical Christianity created the perfect elements that allowed for the conservative right to continue to grow, resulting in the 1980 election of Ronald Reagan. The 1970s served as a period of time for this ideology to grow and spread.⁴⁶ In the 1980s new leadership under Ronald Reagan

⁴³ Chelsea Griffis, “In the Beginning Was the Word’: Evangelical Christian Women, the Equal Rights Amendment, and Competing Definitions of Womanhood.” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 38, no. 2 (2017), 155.

⁴⁴ The rise of modern conservatism American Right has been at war with itself between the factions of elitism and populism or mainstream. The outlaw music was an early outlet of establishing the balance of traditions and movement into the modern society.

⁴⁵ Richard Moss, *Creating the New Right Ethnic in 1970s America: The Intersection of Anger and Nostalgia*. (Cranbury: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2017), 204.

⁴⁶ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 5.

continued the national shift to a conservative mindset, and America returned to a strong role globally. Reagan signed the proclamation to endorse world trade for a week beginning March 17, 1981. Reagan saw trade as a tool to enhance America's international relationships and improve American lives. He noted trade advantages as a competition that encouraged improvement and creativity on an individual level. While Reagan's proclamation seemed like another plain speech concerning a benign subject, there was a deeper level. Reagan had an unwavering faith in America, its capabilities, and capitalism. Therefore, he wanted to spread American ideology and the free market system to the rest of the world. Reagan used the speech to highlight American values, such as a strive for betterment, creativity, initiative, hard work ethic, advanced technology, and a strong economy.⁴⁷ Reagan, even in his political travels, saw the influence of country music intertwined with the conservative movement that the American culture had embraced. At a concert in Poland, attended by Reagan, the influence of country music and its connection to freedom was on display. An artist by the name of Korneliusz Pacuda praised the influence of country music at this festival. Regarding country music popularity in Poland, Pacuda stated, "...first of all because it is American, and people like America. It really is the music of the road and freedom, made by common people for common people."⁴⁸ This reflection showed the connection to the working-class even as a global perception.

The focus of this research was to reveal the importance of music's impact on culture in history and what caused it to evolve and spread for major changes as witnessed during this period. The methodology for this dissertation subject examined closely the political and cultural implications in the music created during this era. An analysis of the lyrics and society of the

⁴⁷ Ronald Reagan, "Proclamation 4823-World Trade Week, 1981." The American Presidency Project. Accessed August 4, 2022. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/proclamation-4823-world-trade-week-1981>.

⁴⁸ "Country-Western May Be 'Ronald Reagan Music,' but the Good Ole' Poles like It," *Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 1987, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1987-09-13-mn-7401-story.html>.

period provided an examination of the cultural connection and the lyrics of the music created during this era. Biographical analysis revealed the thought process behind the music. Exhaustive research of the newspapers and media of the time period in regard to journalist representation of the artists and their music revealed much on the impact of the music. The chapters include an analysis of the artists' intended and unintended lyrical message that resonated with specific demographics of the United States and evolved with the changing sentiments of the listeners.

This dissertation analyzed the evolution of the artist's fight for expression in the popularity of the uniquely themed music and the evolution of this music into the spread of a patriotic theme and its rise of popularity in the country music genre. The analysis revealed the importance of music's impact on culture in history and the culture's impact on the music through research of the relationship. Society began to retrieve the memory of what was once the lifestyle of a cowboy, and it longed for this lifestyle. It was through the emergence of the country music that society began to identify these ideals. The working-class Americans had wide-open dreams as they worked their industrial or blue-collar jobs. The weight of the continued growth of the government, including the expansion of income taxes, made the rural lifestyle and the cowboy dreams a distant memory, only remembered through the lyrics of music. However, this did not discourage the loyalty and patriotism that resonated with the working-class group as a long-ago lifestyle echoed in the country music that eventually evolved into the patriotic themes in the following decades.⁴⁹ How does this music express the culture of the period? Did the artists within the county music genre evolve with the working-class mentality? The significance of this research was to understand the music and its role in reflecting society during the period. The music provided awareness into how the culture was changing and what the fan base empathized

⁴⁹ Aaron A. Fox, *Real Country: Music and Language in Working-Class Culture*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 20.

with in the lyrics. The songwriters challenged the status quo of country music for the period and not only became successful in their endeavor but also created marketable music that became timeless in the country music genre.⁵⁰

The lyrics detailing the experiences of working-class society resonated with audiences who identified with the outlaw movement theme of defiance and independence. This evolved as society changed but the dialogue and acceptance of the themes were evident in the reaction to the music.⁵¹ Country music artists embraced the cultural diversity, incorporating elements of rock, pop, and traditional sounds. However, the outlaw movement grasped the nostalgia for rural life and longing for simpler times through the lyrics and also addressed social and political issues. This movement drove home the desire of authenticity in a rapidly changing world while creating an identity that aligned with the demographic belief system of the country music genre.

The historiographical importance of this topic resided in the examination of the historical impact that these artists and songwriters made not only through the written words but also through audio expression of the emotion during this pivotal cultural shift of the 1970s and provided a unique perspective of the culture of the working-class demographic's listening habits occurring during this period. This analysis of the relationship of the lyrics to society presented answers or conclusions beyond the standard historical methods on the culture of the period.⁵² The events of 1970s and 1980s triggered radical actions that led to major changes in society, which resulted in violence, change in politics, and the diversity of multiculturalism of culture and

⁵⁰ James C. Cobb, "Rednecks, White Socks, and Piña Coladas? Country Music Ain't What It Used to Be... And It Really Never Was." *Southern Cultures* 5, no. 4 (1999): 43.

⁵¹ Jocelyn R. Neal, *Country Music: A Cultural and Stylistic History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 384.

⁵² *Ibid.*

counterculture.⁵³ This research reflected that music can express the temperament of society during a specified time period and can provide comprehension to the shift in mentality of the culture and the perception of an individual. The change in the historiographical schools of thought presented the change in culture during this period since opinions were changing.⁵⁴

Scholarship on this topic included social history, cultural history, history of music, and political history.⁵⁵ This research included examining the development of dissemination of music, race, political aspects, and gender.⁵⁶ The focus of this research revealed the importance of music's impact on culture in history and what caused it to evolve and spread for major changes as witnessed during this period. The use of archives, such as the Country Music Hall of Fame, provided additional material of the marketable music of the period within the country music genre. The use of videos, memorabilia, and correspondence provided a reflection of the outlaw movement artists' early years before their pivotal impact through the movement. Southern Folklife Collection, Manuscript Department, and University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, also provided primary and secondary sources that assisted in the analysis for this research. The online archive of the *Country Music* magazine provided a wealth of fan dialogue through the letters to the magazine regarding the reflections on the events occurring in country music.

⁵³ The 1970s had structural trends that began to reform geopolitics to secure America's dominance. Ronald Reagan in the 1980s used the 1970s trends to full advantage to propel America's position in the world. America's returning prominence was aided by the Soviet Union's decline and Mikhail Gorbachev's modern leadership that eased Soviet-American tensions after 1985. Instead, Reagan insisted on aiding anti-communist rebels in Third World countries like Afghanistan. Reagan also decreased East-West trade, openly supported Eastern European dissidents, and pointed out the basest conditions of communism. The Carter administration had begun to spend more on the military budget, but Reagan increased this significantly. Douglas Brinkley, *The Reagan Diaries Unabridged: Volume 1*. New York: Harper Collins, 2009. David Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. David S. Painter, "Oil and Geopolitics: The Oil Crises of the 1970s and the Cold War." *Historical Social Research* 39, no. 4 (2014): 186–208.

⁵⁴ Travis D. Stimeling, *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks: The Countercultural Sounds of Austin's Progressive Country Music Scene*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 132.

⁵⁵ Limited schools of thought on the country music genre. Historians that classically identify the country music genre origins from the South and the outlaw music seem to add geographical diversity to the scholarship on the music during and after the 1970s.

⁵⁶ Bill C. Malone and Laird Tracey E W., *Country Music USA* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018), 296.

The country music record industry responded to the progressive cultural shift that started in the 1960s by moving away from the traditional sound with the introduction of the Nashville sound. The desire to maintain the traditional and authentic sounds along with holding onto the image of the past created the outlaw music that blended sounds of rock, folk, gospel, and blues while maintaining the traditional sounds of country roots. This spoke to the working-class demographic faced with understanding societal changes while trying to adhere to traditions. The spread of country music during this period provided a wider geographical reach that also highlighted the similarities of the working class across the country. This demographic aligned with the sentiment of feeling marginalized by society. The major division in scholarship resides in the debate of the origins of the country sounds in the United States. Ironically, the gap in exploring the specifics of the outlaw music may be the bridge for these differing schools of thought to see the national progression and evolution in the country music genre. There is also the debate on real country music versus commercialized music, which is more of a broad scholarship that debates the changing sound in the country music genre.

Literature Review

The division of scholarship may align best with geographical differences on the influence of country music. This closely aligns with the rise of the outlaw music that emerged in the 1970s. There is recent scholarship that presents a more specific approach to the time frame of the 1970s, examining the progressive movement that emerged in the country music genre. The scholarship that aligns with the classical thought on the topic of music appeared in Bill C. Malone's book *Country Music USA*, originally released in 1968. Malone's book has been re-released multiple times updating with the changes in country music. It provided detailed background information on the origins of country music, the musicians, musical styles, and the

evolving changes and struggles within the country music genre. Malone provided a classical scholarship approach with a comprehensive narrative detailing the development of the art form from the Carter family to present. The debate of the distinction on what is country or not was a continued topic in this work.⁵⁷ This continued debate was in the *Journal of American Folklore* article by Malone entitled “‘The Southern Thesis’: Revisited and Reaffirmed,” published in 2014. It contained discussion of his scholarship on the origins of country music, connecting it to the South as well as responding to critics who argue his scholarship was too narrow. This article also addressed the opposition to his scholarship, noting the roots of country music in the scholarship challenged. Malone’s book claimed the Texas folk music had its own culture due to its diversity but was closely aligned with southern culture.⁵⁸ Texas had strong ties of influence for the outlaw country music that emerged in the 1970s. Malone discussed artists, such as Waylon Jennings, which had to fight for artistic liberty on what he performed that influenced the lyrics of his songs.

Richard A. Peterson took on the narrative of scholarship that questioned the authenticity of the country music genre. In his book *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity*, Peterson examined the commercial use to create an identity to promote the marketing of the country music genre. This aligned with some of the theories on outlaw music that argued the rebellious attitude in the music was not authentic. However, Peterson believed this move towards commercialism of the country music genre began much earlier in the 1920s. Peterson also looked at the generation of the outlaw musicians of Merle Haggard, Willie Nelson, and Waylon Jennings as the last of the singers to present the infusion of “Country-music creativity.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Bill C. Malone and Laird Tracey E W., *Country Music USA* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018), 162.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 471.

⁵⁹ Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 222.

Peterson was a strong proponent for the birth of country music in the rural South as it adjusted to the rise of industrial growth. In the post-1970s era, his argument was that the label of hillbilly was a personal choice. However, he did not believe that the lack of authenticity came from the experimental nature of the artist or song writers to handle the balance of the audience and what was accepted as authentic.

Jocelyn Neal, a historian from University of North Carolina, examined the cultural impacts and stylistic evolutions ongoing in the United States. She provided substantiation on the history of country music by looking through a cultural viewpoint. In her book *Country Music: A Cultural and Stylistic History*, she provided a background of the music and presented the scholarship that examined the global politics, economics, and evolving domestic roles at home and their influence on the country music styles. Neal not only discussed the geographical influence on country music but also provided evidence of the influence of politics, economics, and changing culture on the success of the outlaw music that overtook the mainstream country style during this period in the chapter focusing on the 1970s.⁶⁰ Neal also provided an excellent overview of country music. She agreed with the assessment towards the geographical origins of the South similar to Malone's stance on the geographical origins.⁶¹ This argument tied the origins of country music to the southern region, and these traditions and influence of the southern cultural are still strongly prevalent in the societal culture of the country music listener.

Travis Stimeling, a historian from West Virginia University, examined the cultural aspect of the outlaw movement and the geographical element of Austin, Texas, presented to the outlaw movement of the 1970s. Stimeling examined the counterculture of the outlaw movement in his

⁶⁰ Jocelyn R. Neal, *Country Music: A Cultural and Stylistic History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 223.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 224.

book *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks: The Countercultural Sounds of Austin's Progressive Country Music Scene*. He presented evidence of the relationship of Austin, Texas, to the progressive movement that became the outlaw movement in country music. Stimeling attributed the musical festivals as a strong element that created publicity for this progressive sound in country music.⁶² The term progressive revealed the change that grew in the country music genre during the period of the 1970s. The artists during the 1970s were children of veterans of World War II and experienced the turbulent 1960s full of violence, political discontent and redefining the race, gender, and class lines during this period.⁶³ The location of Austin for this music provided a unique geographical element that was a highly debated item in the historical studies of the country music genre. The comparison of progressive ideals and country music in the early 1970s was not how critics defined the industry. However, these artists and songwriters began to reflect on their own experiences and combined these into their lyrics as they slowly began to get artistic freedom. In his book, Stimeling argued on the impact of the hippie culture within the music scene in Austin.⁶⁴ This book examined the deep-rooted attachment to the cowboy image but the conflicted struggle in the cultural changes of the period. Stimeling points to the music festivals and live shows as the connection for the different sounds that provided this progressive musical sound that grew out of the outlaw movement.

The opposing scholarship in the country music historical thought presented the scholarship and historical idea of the diversity of the background of country music that evolved.⁶⁵ Paul Tyler, an anthropology professor at City Colleges of Chicago, examined the

⁶² Travis D. Stimeling, *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks: The Countercultural Sounds of Austin's Progressive Country Music Scene*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 132.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 4.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 256.

⁶⁵ Paul L. Tyler, "Hillbilly Music Re-Imagined: Folk and Country Music in the Midwest." *The Journal of American Folklore* 127, no. 504 (2014): 160.

hillbilly persona. In his argument he termed American country music, hillbilly music. In Tyler's article "Hillbilly Music Re-Imagined: Folk and Country Music in the Midwest," he presented an examination of the broad geographical element of the evolution of music. However, the major shift of country music was towards a more progressive sound. Tyler provided a unique aspect of scholarship due to his diverse background, and his skill as a fiddle player provided a personal aspect to understanding the music he played on his instrument. Tyler did not deny the connection to the South but believed other areas presented their own contributions to the origins of country music, and it was not isolated to the southern region. He presented an argument that aligned with the musicians of the outlaw music and the migratory aspect present in the United States during the 20th century. Tyler challenged the traditional look at country music and provided an interesting narrative of the national contributions to music that seemed to have some impact on the outlaw music of the 1970s.

Andrew Hartman, a historian from Illinois University and expert in the culture impacts of the 1960s, discussed the cultural aspect during this period. Although he focused on other genres and the cultural shift, he hailed the country music industry for their attempt to connect with working-class Americans with their lyrics. Ironically, this did support the authenticity Peterson discussed, showing that the artists took cues from their audience that molded their music.⁶⁶ Hartman, noted in his book *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* that the message was in the music. He said, "Rock music, the idiom of sixties-style, offered a cacophony of lyrical testimonials to the changes set off during the decade."⁶⁷ These lyrical testimonials began to echo on radios, live stages, and on record players across the United States.

⁶⁶ Paul L. Tyler, "Hillbilly Music Re-Imagined: Folk and Country Music in the Midwest." *The Journal of American Folklore* 127, no. 504 (2014), 190.

⁶⁷ Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 12.

The outlaw music of the 1970s not only came on the heels of the end of the Vietnam War but also emerged in a time of economic and political struggles to continue the pursuit of freedom of expression by the country music artist. The term progressive defined the transformation that was occurring in the country genre. The progressive ideology resonated with the working class through the outlaw image these outlaw artists and the movement embodied in the 1970s.

The cultural shift allowed the marketability of the outlaw music not only to be accepted but also to be aligned with the working-class demographic that supported the country music industry. The advancement in technology, including the introduction of radio and later the television, challenged some of the regional limitations that had been present in the spread of music.⁶⁸ This improvement in technology continued quickly to advance, allowing a much wider scope of reach for artists to expand the regional aspect of music that in the past had limited the artists' range on the lyrical dialogue of their music. The early music of the 20th century in the Midwest region of country music genre did not have the technology or ability to have commercial success of their lyrical music due to the technological limitations.⁶⁹ However, the connection to the local culture with the music was evident during this period. Tyler argued the blend of ethnicity added to the hybrid culture and enhanced a wider range of ethnic diversity influences to the country music genre from the Midwest.⁷⁰ The influences and the debate on how to honor tradition and move into the future became a key element of the outlaw movement. The later neo-traditionalist sound heard by country music artists in the 1980s provided a nod to the outlaw movement in the effort to utilize traditional elements in the music produced during this period. The reflection of continued striving towards traditional themes aligning with conservative values reflected in the lyrics adhered to this drive to maintain tradition.

⁶⁸ Paul L. Tyler, "Hillbilly Music Re-Imagined: Folk and Country Music in the Midwest." *The Journal of American Folklore* 127, no. 504 (2014): 181.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 190.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 164.

This echoed in the rise of the neo-traditionalist movement on the heels of the outlaw movement in the 1980s that provided an element of connection to the American cultural shift during this period.

The neo-traditionalists scholarship provided a connection to the popular culture and the connection to the music in Don Cusic's, *Discovering Country Music*. He provided a history of country and popular music and the evolving relationship and impact of money and technology to address the changing society. Thomas Alan Holmes and Roxanne Harde provided a collection of essays in the book *Walking the Line: Country Music Lyricists and American Culture*. They presented how the country songwriters engaged with the audience by beliefs, lifestyle, and politics, specifically in the 1980s, as the quickly emerging pop country caused a reaction for a demand of traditional sounds. The outlaw movement proved that walking the line for the approval from the fans was a line that can move. David Brackett's book *Interpreting Popular Music* provided scholarship on the evolution within music and its relationship to popular culture. This approach provided Brackett's expert musicologist opinion on lyrical relationship with the music fans. Brackett made an argument that the relationship was constantly evolving. In *The Selling Sound: The Rise of the Country Music Industry*, Diane Pecknold expanded on the delicate balance in country music as it struggled with defining itself among artists, fans, record labels, and critics.

Historically, music has influenced cultural change. In World War II, musical composers along with guidance given by the United States government composed music to support the war movement.⁷¹ The United States government realized the connection the American people had with the music that influenced or supported their opinions. The music, written intentionally, promoted ideas, such as bonds or the patriotic support of the United States' role in the war. As

⁷¹ Ben Arnold, "War Music and the American Composer during the Vietnam Era." *The Musical Quarterly* 75, no. (1991), 317.

the years beyond the end of the war passed, the evolving global role of the United States and the cultural change of the 1960s in equality and humanity conflicted with the underlying ideological war that was occurring during the Cold War of this period. The Cold War had quickly emerged following the end of World War II as did the United States' use of the nuclear weapon. This new weapon created an additional element on a global military scale compiled with the ideological warfare as the world recovered from the World War II.⁷² The events of 1960s resulted in the folk music, country, and rock genres becoming the popular genres that were taking a role in protest music and anti-protest music. These different genres had their own style of responding with protest music regarding the effects of these events. Some were more direct in the message conveyed in their music than others. Folk music emerged as the leading genre in terms of having the most uncompromising attitude towards the conflict in Vietnam. The cultural revolution of the 1960s for some historians started an ongoing struggle as to how much influence the cultural movement had on the American public. Andrew Hartman noted in his book *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* that music affected the change by carrying a message. This was evident in the rock music of the 1960s that reflected through the lyrics the changes that were occurring in society during that decade. This genre often times drove the changes through the lyrics that rocked out in the various sounds of the genre that stated the need for change.⁷³ These lyrical testimonials played throughout the United States via radios, live stage shows, and on record players. The outlaw music of the 1970s followed the upheaval caused by the Vietnam War. Even with the end of the war, the economic and political struggles continued as did the country music artists' pursuit of creative lyrical freedom. The transformation was occurring in

⁷² Lee Andresen, *Battle Notes: Music of the Vietnam War* (Superior, WI: Savage Press, 2003), 18.

⁷³ Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 12.

the country music genre. The outlaw artists received the label of progressive, resulting from their lyrical messages that fit very well in this timeframe. The result was a marketable characteristic that appealed to the working class.

Cecelia Tichi presented in *High Lonesome: The American Culture of Country Music* the interpretive context that these artists, including outlaw artists, draw from including definition of home, class struggle, and the lonely lifestyle defined as a person in America.⁷⁴ Tichi took a simplistic approach not addressing the subgenres, such as the outlaw movement, to continue to define and deepen the connection to the listener. Tichi's argument of the country music genre connection to literature did not credit the artists' need for public acceptance for success. The linguistics in the message displayed with the success of the music provided further comprehension of the fan's response. Utilizing the newspapers and bibliography for analysis revealed the correlation of the presentation and reaction of the music released and the fans' responses, if any. By giving a personal reflection from an immigrant's perspective on the cultural relationship of the outlaw movement artists, such as Haggard and Nelson, Alex Halbertadt, a Soviet Union immigrant, revealed his love for their music in his periodical article on the artists. Halbertadt compared these artists to bards in the Soviet Union who used music with lyrics that focused on social and political commentary. These bards, similar to the outlaw artists, used the music as a form of protest to censorship and oppression.⁷⁵ Like the bards, Willie Nelson's unique sound, evolving appearance, and storytelling lyrics brought new fans to the genre. The collaborations with other artists provided a diverse appeal that transcended the typical

⁷⁴ Cecelia Tichi, *High Lonesome: The American Culture of Country Music* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 5–9.

⁷⁵ Alex Halberstadt, "Willie and Merle." *Stereophile* 47 (2) 2024: 27–28.
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mah&AN=174090104&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

demographics, which is one of the reasons the outlaw movement caused an impact to the country music genre with its growth.

Outline and Research Goals

This dissertation examines the reflections and relationship between the outlaw music movement and its influence on the country music genre as well as the reflection of the demographic of the listener's culture. The representation visually and the lyrics provided a view of the changing of society and the reality faced by the demographic of listeners, which was primarily working class. The fans reacted to the representation and lyrics and in turn played a role in the music's reflection of the culture of the period by making it commercially successful. The use of song lyrics, performances, newspaper, and videos provided evidence for the research of this dissertation. The intent was to minimize the scholarship gap presented on the topic by connecting the cultural element present in this outlaw movement. Examining the outlaw movement and its connection to the conservative movement provided an investigation into the culture of the demographic of the working-class American in the period and how the music themes defined it.

In the first chapter the introduction of the research question explored the cultural connection to the music of outlaw country music from the 1970s and a relationship with the culture of music. The cultural influence in the country music genre had to catch up to the changing societal norms at the end of the 20th century. The outlaw movement of the country music genre presented a viewpoint into the culture of the period. The events and societal shifts impacted artists and how their messages resonated with the audience. The different themes evident in the lyrics and the background of this outlaw movement within the country music genre provided a foundation of this theory of a connection of cultural relationship understood through

the music. The relationship of the culture that evolved towards the end of the 20th century and its presentation in the country music genre provided a unique connection into the working-class demographic of society in the United States. The research on the outlaw country music took a narrow look at a specific genre and the relationship it had with the culture during the time period. The examination of the relationship of music and the listeners presented a musical element of military history intertwined at the individual level. The outlaw music movement evolved in the 1980s to reflect a patriotic movement but left the imprint of the use of outlaw lyrics or actions that country music artists have used into modern day. The success of country music continued to grow, and the outlaw movement and lyrical dialogue broke barriers of the stereotypical country music audience. The lyrical dialogue embodied some of the most relatable expressions that resonated with a large group of people. The outlaw movement used their own experiences in lyrics that connected to the listener's emotions, similar struggles, and imagery. Historians debate the origins of country music and sometimes neglect to realize the migratory aspect and its effect of a large segment of society beyond age barriers in the working class.

In the second chapter the examination of the 1960s protest music and the influence of using a lyrical message to bring about change revealed the outlaw music artists had drawn on this method to make their stance on issues known. The 1960s endured its own counterculture movement with the protest songs and even anti-protest songs. The politics of the period of the 1960s played a significant role in the lyrics, but how much did the culture have a role in the evolution of music of this period? The examination of the emergence of the counter-culture movement and its influence, and then later the outlaw movement, revealed change in the culture. This showed the social culture changed from the status quo to the possibility of being different and expressive with the message detailing these ideals within the lyrics. This period also showed

the rippling effects of the use of music to convey a sentiment or message. The rise of the counterculture in the 1960s created artistic freedom in other genres for songwriters to express opinions on the political decisions occurring during the period. This was seen not only in the pursuit of lyrical freedom by the outlaw music artists but also was seen in the popularity with the outlaw music with listeners agreeing with the message of the lyrics.

In the third chapter an examination revealed who the outlaw artists were and their influences in the genre and beyond. What were the motives behind the original artists' lyrics in their music? Artists, such as Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, Merle Haggard, and Johnny Cash who had their own personal connection to the stigma and image of outlaw, revealed their message in their lyrics. The influence of the protest music transformed country music into expressing its own controversies within the genre, which reflected the working-class struggles, resulting in not only music that was marketable but also a narrative of the period. Understanding the artists' intentions and background revealed how the culture impacted the artists in their craft. The relationship was not one-sided. The culture impacted the artists as individuals before they expressed their reaction in the music. The term outlaw did not always originate with the artists. One of Jennings' early songs with the outlaw theme was written by Lee Clayton entitled, "Ladies Love Outlaws."⁷⁶ Waylon Jennings stated regarding the outlaw label, "I didn't label myself an outlaw...by allowing it, yeah. I'll tell you, when I first came there, they called me 'the Rebel.' I caused a lot of that, I did, but I did it through trying to survive."⁷⁷ Jennings' comment indicated that in his personal case he was focused on the music, and the label placed on him seemed to stem from the marketing team to create the image of an outlaw, which he did personify by his

⁷⁶ "The Vanderbilt Hustler," January 26, 1979, 4. Jack Hurst Collection, Special Collections Library, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.

⁷⁷ Gregg Weatherby, "The Outlaw at 50: Our 1988 Interview with Waylon Jennings," *Spin*, July 30, 2022, <https://www.spin.com/2020/06/the-outlaw-at-50-our-1988-interview-with-waylon-jennings/>.

own actions for his survival in the turbulent record label industry. The struggles artists faced and wrote about in their lyrics seemed to resonate with the listeners, including the outlaw image used in the marketing.

In the fourth chapter the analysis of lyrical dialogue examined culture and how the lyrics connected the events to the American people and presented a progressive mentality that influenced the music released during this time period of the outlaw movement. Outlaw music shifted quickly to a patriotic tone in the 1980s. The music not only defined the era but also transformed the music industry by pushing the political and economic situation and questioning the political leaders during this period. Artists used music not only to convey a message but also to group similar opinions. This period continued to be unique because of the musicians' ability to overcome obstacles and be successful in spreading their message. The success or the failure of the artists' message depended on the support of the listeners as to how they regarded the message presented, which characterized the listeners' culture.

The fifth chapter analyzed the findings of the research on this outlaw movement within the country music genre and the connection to culture. This chapter presented modern evidence of the continued use of lyrics in the country music genre that continues to create social dialogue or opposition as a result of the message in the music. The discussion focused on the relationship between the music and the listeners and how the lyrics and the acceptances of the music showed in the popularity of the sentiments of the message in the lyrics and even the image of the persona of the artist releasing the music.

The sixth chapter is the conclusion and a continued analysis of the outlaw impact that remains in the country music genre. This chapter presents the modern impact of the outlaw musicians and the continued role of the musicians through their lives. The continued debate on

authenticity and tradition for artists while making successful music remains. This struggle and vocal response from fans continue to highlight the connection of the fan base of the country music genre. The outlaw movement provided this connection through their own aspirations of lyrical freedom that allowed artistic expression beyond the reigns of the record industry. This freedom and ability to select the music presented by an artist created an image and honesty, making the country music genre unique to the culture of the demographic of the fans of the period.

The outlaw artists and movement revealed the transitions of the culture and its effort of preserving the American ideals that were evident in years past. The cowboy image in the lyrics of the music echoed the struggles faced by the working class. The evolution of the tone of the music showed the delicate balance of the relationship between the culture of the listeners and the artist to ensure the expression of the sentiments during that period. This attitude quickly changed as was evident in patriotic theme from the outlaw musicians in the 1980s. The use of a message in the lyrics of the country music attempted to present the temperament of society in the music and to achieve popularity in order to fulfil financial goals. The country music genre revealed the significant relationship music played in the outlaw movement in the following decades of the reassociation of defining images and roles through the lyrics. The grasp of the past and romanticizing of the cowboy image showed the desire to return to some of the ideals of the past as society faced new roles for genders and struggles to obtain the American dream of success. These situations created the need for the working class to get lost in the music that spoke of what they labeled as easier times and past definitions for society in the response to the counterculture.

Chapter 1

Breaking Boundaries: An Introduction to the Rise of the Outlaw Movement

Country music genre provided a connection into American culture due to its unique evolution within the culture. The relationship between music and culture provided an avenue to analyze a specific period. The events of 1970s and 1980s triggered radical actions that led to major changes in society. These were decades that endured violence, change in politics, and the diversity of multiculturalism of culture and counterculture.¹ The songs of the outlaw movement and their link with the culture in the United States has continued to be a discussed topic. This desire for freedom by the artists to write their own lyrics and perform the music they chose started this outlaw movement in the country music genre.² The quickly changing society, including the counterculture and the response to the counterculture movement in the second half of the 20th century, set the music industry on a path towards its own changes.

History has shown that music can influence cultural change. The use of music has been utilized in the United States to boost support of military and movements throughout history. The use of music to convey a message or to encourage support of an idea highlighted the emotional connection to music.³ The quickly changing society and political unrest during the latter part of the 20th century allowed music to become an outlet for collective sentiments.⁴ The technology improvement allowing a wider reach of a musical message provided a diverse audience to the music. The migration and movement of citizens due to the economic strains helped provide

¹ Travis D. Stimeling, *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks: The Countercultural Sounds of Austin's Progressive Country Music Scene*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 132.

² Ibid, 343.

³ Ben Arnold, "War Music and the American Composer during the Vietnam Era." *The Musical Quarterly* 75, no. 3 (1991), 317.

⁴ Lee Andresen, *Battle Notes: Music of the Vietnam War* (Superior, WI: Savage Press, 2003), 18.

diversity and mixture of the rural and urban demographic. The country music record industry trying to establish a marketable sound caused the artists and listeners to react. The diversified sound connected to the culture of the listeners trying to balance the societal changes faced during the end of the 20th century.⁵ The artists of the outlaw movement through their own pursuit of artistic freedom created a unique dialogue and relationship between the country music fans and themselves. This dialogue exhibited the evolving culture reflected through the lyrics and the response to the lyrics. The outlaw movement began to bring back the traditional sounds with the lyrics reflecting the cowboy lifestyle. It also provided a modern reflection to define a generation that struggled with the rapid change of society. The women of country music followed the outlaw movement utilizing artistic freedom to pave their own path. The outlaw movement influenced the entire country music genre.

Music and cultural movements can have an influence. The history of American music displayed the connection of country music lyrics to the working-class demographic of society. However, in the search to understand the modern American music by examining the origin of the music influences, this research revealed a strong connection to the blues with influences of the blues in the origins of all American music genres as well as country music.⁶ Although the influence of the country music origin may be located in the Southern region, the early musical studios and recordings in the 1930s were located in New York City.⁷ Woody Guthrie was a great example not only to show how the artists can move around and share music nationwide but also to show how an artist can be considered a bridge between folk and country music. This example

⁵ “Ralph Emery Interview of George Jones and Waylon Jennings - 1979-05-02”

RS.2019.3215 Jones Jennings 3B-4-5 5/2/79 Save-Hold For Posterity
Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, Digital Archive (Nashville, May 28, 2019).

⁶ Ronald Cohen, *Woody Guthrie: Writing America's Songs*. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 8.

⁷ *Ibid*, 17.

highlighted the close relationship of these two genres with the storytelling aspect in the lyrics present in both genres. Guthrie also spent time in New York and had friendships with folk music artists who influenced his music career and those around him.⁸ Guthrie, although his specific genre can be debated between country and folk, echoed his spirit through several genres not just country. The early music of country was similar to the folk music in its sound and the story that echoed in the lyrics. These musicians who endured the Great Depression and then World War II left their imprint on the music by reflecting the culture of the time period in their music and continuing to evolve as society evolved. There can be no ignoring the relationship of folk music and country music in examining the origins of the country music genre. Looking at music historically with the evolution of country music revealed the strong relationship with country and folk and its influence with each other and other genres.

The relationship of country music to the culture of the American working class derived from the relationship of folk music and country music. Patrick Mullen, in his book *Juke Joint: A Personal History of American Music*, noted, “We took our rural background and musical tastes for granted; country music was part of our cultural identity, but we didn’t think of it self-consciously in that way.”⁹ This expressed the close ties of American country music with the culture in America. Using the lyrical expression of American country music to understand the culture of a specific period revealed the interesting relationship that folk music and country music have with the lyrical dialogue. Mullen connected that music expressed the culture around the time frame of the release of the music. In an early example, he referenced the Woody Guthrie song “Oklahoma Hills.” This was the song that Guthrie wrote and released during the 1930s. He

⁸ Ronald Cohen, *Woody Guthrie: Writing America’s Songs*. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 18.

⁹ Patrick B. Mullen *Right to the Juke Joint: A Personal History of American Music*, (University of Illinois Press, 2018), 14.

was originally from Oklahoma, but he sang this song in Los Angeles and on his radio show, using the melody of the old folk song “The Girl I Loved in Sunny Tennessee.”¹⁰ Thus, this also showed an early spread of the regional coverage of country music and folk music in its evolution. This could be described as the expansion of country music even as historians argue regarding the region linked to the origin of the country music. A similar argument abounded in regard to the outlaw music in respect to the strong rock and roll influence during the period that pieces became termed ‘outlaw’ music. The cultural image seemed to be an outward expression exhibiting the masculinity and sexuality with a lackadaisical attitude.¹¹ The spread of country music artists to different demographic areas created different audience exposure to the style of country music. This expansion of the country music genre and the debate of tradition and sound became a dialogue and struggle among artists.

As the music reached new areas, the sounds of folk, bluegrass and country continued to have a home at The Grand Ole Opry. The opening of the Opry identified Nashville as a destination for music aspirations, and the shows and broadcast provided a connection to fans across the nation. The Grand Ole Opry helped keep the original sounds in Nashville, Music City, as it held onto the traditional sounds and had its weekly shows to promote this traditional sound.¹² The Ryman Auditorium hosted the Grand Ole Opry starting in 1943. The tradition of the Grand Ole Opry both loved and hated the changes to the South and finding the balance to honor the past while grasping the changes became a tradition in the Opry.¹³ The balance the Opry held through the music presented created a cultural relationship. Louis Kyriakouides, a

¹⁰ Patrick B. Mullen *Right to the Juke Joint: A Personal History of American Music*, (University of Illinois Press, 2018), 15.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 127.

¹² Jeannette Smyth. "The Grand Ole Opry Ain't Po' no Mo': The Grand Ole Opry Ain't Po' no Mo'." *The Washington Post* (1974-), Mar 18, 1974. 2.

¹³ Louis M. Kyriakouides, “The Grand Ole Opry and the Urban South.” *Southern Cultures* 10, no. 1 (2004), 75.

historian from the University of Southern Mississippi, stated “The Opry, then, was a complex cultural institution that engaged its rural audience in a subtle cultural dialogue about the meaning of modernity.” Ironically, this dialogue and relationship would change into a conservatory of tradition as the years went by. The decision to move away from the Ryman Auditorium in 1974 to Opryland challenged tradition.¹⁴ The Ryman Auditorium is still used for concerts, but the Grand Ole Opry left on March 15, 1974.¹⁵

Another challenge to tradition arrived before the move away from Ryman Auditorium for the Grand Ole Opry. The drive to obtain commercial success altered the sounds at the hands of the record executives with the introduction of the Nashville sound in the 1960s. The introduction of Nashville sound resulted from the death of Hank Williams in 1953. Williams had established commercial success with the country music genre with his traditional sound by using twang in his vocals and using a fiddle, acoustic guitar, and steel guitars for instrumentation. The new Nashville sound emerged with advancing studio techniques featuring a crooning voice and soft background music without the traditional fiddle and steel guitar sounds.¹⁶ The Nashville sound closed the gap between mainstream pop and the country music genre by growing the audience of the genre. Patsy Cline, Jim Reeves, Floyd Cramer, and Eddy Arnold were artists associated with this Nashville sound. This commercialized aspect of the Nashville sound transformed Nashville into the music town while venues, such as the Grand Ole Opry, providing the traditional sounds

¹⁴ Stephen W. Phillips, *Opryland USA*, Arcadia Publishing Inc., 2016, 86.

¹⁵ Ryman Auditorium, “History,” Ryman Auditorium, accessed August 24, 2023, <https://www.ryman.com/about/history#:~:text=A%20Bittersweet%20Farewell,Ryman%20on%20March%2015%2C%201974.>

¹⁶ “Nashville Sound,” PBS, accessed March 12, 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/kenburns/country-music/nashville-sound-branches-of-country-music.>

remained.¹⁷ The Nashville sound created popularity with diverse audiences and secured the country music genre's survival in the changing musical sounds following the 1950s.

Country music evolved in the 20th century along with the cultural changes in the United States. This evolution included the change of technology and instruments available. Bill Malone, one of the original expert historians on the background of country music due to his 1968 published work *Country Music U.S.A.*, presented these changes in the country music genre.¹⁸ Malone discussed the origins and the connection to the folk music and the cultural influences that would become country music. He concluded:

British folk culture did not survive intact in the southern wilderness, nor should one expect it to have done so. The folk music of the South was a blending of cultural strains, British at its core but overlaid and intermingled with the musical contributions of other ethnic and racial groups who inhabited the vast southern region. As they inched their way across the southern frontier, British migrants came in contact with other peoples, whom they often fought with, traded with, and worked with; made love to; and sang and danced with: the Germans of the Great Valley of Virginia; the Indians of the backcountry; Spanish, French, and mixed-breed elements in the Mississippi Valley; the Mexicans of South Texas; and, of course, blacks everywhere. Southern folk music was touched and energized by the contributions of all these people, and country music still bears the marks of these influences.¹⁹

Malone presented the strong connection of the early roots of country music in the geographical area of the South with strong influences of rural background. As his analysis moved towards modern day, Malone presented the idea that the political party connected to the country music genre was most likely the populist party.²⁰ This echoed in the connection of the people who listened to the country music and the lyrical message of the music. The artistic freedom the

¹⁷ Joli Jenson. *The Nashville Sound: Authenticity, Commercialization, and Country Music*. (Vol. 1st ed. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998), 64.

¹⁸ The original text of the book was released in 1968. The source used for this research is the 50th anniversary addition that includes later decades of scholarship regarding music post-1968.

¹⁹ Bill C. Malone and Tracey E. W. Laird. *Country Music USA: 50th Anniversary Edition*, (University of Texas Press, 2018), 5.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 160.

outlaw music pushed provided an outlet for artists to connect on a personal level through the lyrics and inadvertently provided a cultural identity to the listeners of the country music genre.

The geographical origins have been a debated topic among historians to pinpoint the foundation of the country genre. This music was collective emotion expressed through rhythm and lyrics that with technology advancements broke previous geographical limitations. Historian Richard Peterson described this occurrence:

Beginning in Hank Williams' final years, country music began to be exposed via television and the new medium might have quickly become a major addition to the five-element system of country music. Television was vital in exposing Elvis Presley and the other early rockers, but it was no great importance in country music for decades because country music television of the 1950s through the 1980s was produced as if it were a radio barn dance with pictures, or a videotaped live performance. Not until the big success of made-for-television music videos of popular music in the mid-1980s were country videos made that began to exploit the unique potential of the medium for reinforcing the storyline of the song.²¹

This reiterated the importance of lyrics prior to the 1980s to express the sentiment through the words of the song. The visual image of these country stars was in their outward appearance that they exhibited on road shows. These images changed from a clean-cut image when the artists first entered the musical scene into a rougher image that followed them after the introduction of the outlaw image. These images of cowboys and the attachment to the country music genre created the western geographical element within the country music genre.

Even so, the geographical area of the evolving country music continued to be a debated topic among historians. The debate among historical scholarship on music in the 1970s neglected to connect the outlaw country music that emerged to the progressive cultural shift that started in the 1960s and created deviation from the status quo. This shift allowed the marketability of the

²¹ Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 232.

outlaw music not only to be accepted but also to be aligned with the working-class demographic that supported the country music industry. This debate on the geographic origins of country music out of the South resulted from the opposing theory of broader origins in areas of the Midwest. This element presented to the debate that there were demographic influences from different areas. However, the demographic still remained from the same economical class in the American society. This revealed the different geographic areas had similarities present in the working-class demographic. The major migration of the 20th century diversified this demographic caused by the movement of the working class to different areas combining the sounds into the music. Historians do agree on the diverse aspect of the country music genre's reaction to societal changes compared to other genres. The outlaw movement provided a timeline to how artists and the listeners reacted to the societal changes occurring.

The country music genre, although a bit delayed in reacting to the issues addressed in early protest music, still jumped on the progressive movement to use the platform with country music. Evidence showed the early shift in country music genre in expressing opposition to the Vietnam War occurred at an event in Washington, DC, on November 16, 1969. Some of the entertainers, including Earl Scruggs and Charlie Daniels, participated in this peaceful demonstration to call for an end of the war in Vietnam.²² This event drew over half a million protestors and combined the different genres of music on a stage promoting a peaceful end to the conflict in Vietnam. Scruggs had sons who were of draft age. The stance Scruggs took on the anti-war movement was not as much radical as those seen during this period.²³ However, the emergence of the country star who took a stand was different from the pro-American country

²² Bobby Moore, "Charlie Daniels Performed at a Vietnam War Protest with Earl Scruggs," *Wide Open Country*, July 6, 2020, <https://www.wideopencountry.com/earl-scruggs-vietnam/>.

²³ Ibid.

music. The ability to shift the mindset in the steadfast genre of country music revealed the strain of the conflict on all Americans in different walks of life with different backgrounds. This was a testament to the changing temperaments and the pain the events in this period were causing to even the most patriotic genres. They were joining the push for the end of this long, bloody war that continued to claim young American lives with no end in sight. A progressive mentality made its way into the culture of the American people. This progressive thought influenced the music released during this time period. Just as a counterculture movement with the protest and anti-protest songs took place in the 1960s, a similar movement began to take hold in the country music genre in the 1970s.

The controversial political decisions were the impetus for these movements. The political relationship evolved in the lyrics in the musical dialogue after the dynamic 1960s. This lyrical discussion that surrounded the divisive topics created an avenue for the dialogue of the culture and opinions to be expressed. The transformation in the cultural mindset echoed in the lyrics. This music started using the power of words through the melody of music to address or challenge a political climate or situation. This occurred at the peak of the Vietnam War through the draft-resistance songs. The opinions against the war typically were not in the country music genre. However, as the war progressed, the discontent and political message did bleed into the country genre as well as others.²⁴ This message was expressed in these songs in other genres, such as in the folk genres “Draft Dodger Rag” by Phil Ochs. The rock genre had “Fortunate Son” by Creedence Clearwater Revival, and “The Unknown Soldier” by The Doors. These were songs that identified an idea that occurred during the period or an opinion on it. These lyrics not only laid the foundation for what was to come from country music genre in its opposition to the

²⁴ Lee Andresen, *Battle Notes: Music of the Vietnam War* (Superior, WI: Savage Press, 2003), 18.

Vietnam War but also gave the lyrical freedom to break away from the chains of the Nashville sound.

Country music singers seemed to focus more on the emotional impact of the war and those directly affected by the call of duty. In the country music genre, Loretta Lynn, who had a long list of successful music throughout her career, played a pivotal role in introducing the country music genre to an open discussion of the global event of the Vietnam War in her groundbreaking song, “Dear Uncle Sam.”²⁵ In Lynn’s song, she took the perspective of women with struggles after being left behind by the men shipped off to the war zone.²⁶ Lynn’s song spoke to the family left at home as the soldiers went to fight wars in different parts of the world. The words of her song pleaded:

Dear Uncle Sam I know you're a busy man
 And tonight I write to you through tears with a trembling hand
 My darling answered when he got that call from you
 You said you really need him but you don't need him like I do
 Don't misunderstand I know he's fighting for our land
 I really love my country but I also love my man
 He proudly wears the colors of the old red white and blue
 While I wear a heartache since he left me for you
 [trumpet]
 Dear Uncle Sam I just got your telegram
 And I can't believe that this is me shaking like I am
 For it said I'm sorry to inform you²⁷

At the end of the song the traditional military taps played echoing the cost of war.²⁸ This expressed the culture faced by families and showed the country music genre’s sentiments

²⁵ Bill DeMain, "Loretta Lynn Talking about Her Songs." *The Performing Songwriter* 12 (12, 2004): 55- 57.

²⁶ Ibid, 57.

²⁷ “Loretta Lynn – Dear Uncle Sam,” Genius, accessed February 23, 2024, <https://genius.com/Loretta-lynn-dear-uncle-sam-lyrics>.

²⁸ Military Taps is the traditional song played at nighttime on military bases for lights out. The song was used at funeral services. The song was briefly used in battle to replace the customary firing rifles during the Civil War. It also is used during wreath laying ceremonies at the grave of the unknown soldier. Further information on military traditions, including an article on the History of Taps by Kathryn Shenkle, detailed in the Air National Guard Family Guide, accessed March 24, 2024.

https://www.nationalguard.mil/Portals/31/Documents/J1/FamilyPrograms/ANG_family_guide.pdf.

towards the Vietnam conflict at the beginning of the American involvement in the Vietnam War. It also showed parallelism for this frame of mind of United States citizens who faced having a loved one in a combat zone and how the country genre writers connected to the emotions of their listeners.²⁹ Lynn's song regarding the emotional response to the conflict in Vietnam became one of her more popular songs and even at the Brown County Jamboree in Nashville, Indiana, in 1968 "Dear Uncle Sam," was listed as one of the songs on the set list for the show.³⁰ The continued popularity of this song in the controversial year of 1968 regarding the debated situation in Vietnam presented the country music fans an emotional connection to the Vietnam controversy. The song peaked at the fourth spot on the country countdown, showing the acceptance of the song even with the controversial topic of the Vietnam War echoing in the lyrics.³¹ Lynn became an unintended outlaw and as she faced opposition to some of her songs with the banning of them from the radio. Some country fans did not support these controversial songs, such as "The Pill," and "Don't Come Home Drinking, (With Lovin' on your Mind)." However, the support of her fans pushed these songs to be successes, showing a change in lyrical preference and revealing the fans' power to overcome the radios control of the music.³² Her song "Dear Uncle Sam" had not been banned and seemed to touch on the controversial issue of the Vietnam War with the tone accepted by not only the fans but also by radio deejays. It also introduced the delicate aspect of the Vietnam conflict by trying to balance patriotism for the country with the pain of the cost of warfare. Lynn's early years reflected the outlaw image that followed the movement. After appearing on a Buck Owens show in Washington State, she

²⁹ "Outspoken Matriarch of Country Music Says Music Keeps Her Young." *International Musician*, 05, 2015. 19.

³⁰ "Loretta Lynn to Be Featured," *Brown County Democrat*, August 15, 1968, Aug 15, 1968, edition, sec. Page 4.

³¹ Paul Sexton, "'Dear Uncle Sam': Loretta Lynn Writes a Courageous Letter," Discover Music, February 5, 2024, <https://www.udiscovermusic.com/stories/loretta-lynn-dear-uncle-sam-song/>.

³² Grace Lenehan Vaughn, "5 Loretta Lynn Songs That Were Banned for Being Controversial," *Taste of Country*, October 4, 2022, <https://tasteofcountry.com/controversial-banned-loretta-lynn-songs/>.

created a band called Loretta's Trail Blazers playing at a tavern.³³ Even her songs echoed themes of the lifestyle that encompassed the outlaw movement. This provided evidence that the country music genre's attachment to the cowboy and outlaw persona had been tied closely to the traditions embodied in the music. The movement stymied the limitations of the record executives on artistic freedom.

Merle Haggard presented a bit more direct opposition to the protests of the war. He revealed his vivid portrayal of the protesters in the beginning of his song "Okie from Muskogee" by showing them as druggies who burned their draft cards.³⁴ Haggard, who later was associated with the outlaw movement, directly addressed the hippies and the verbiage noted similar visualizations that mirrored some of the outlaw images and lyrics. The second stanza called out the hippies, which ironically became a similar image depicted by some of the outlaw musicians. These lyrics seemed to foreshadow the image associated with the artists of the outlaw movement and their drug use described in some of their lyrics in the late 1970s. Haggard was another country music artist who provided listeners a political message in this song by exploring the counterculture of the protest music. His message was diametrically in opposition to the protest music. His song portrayed the culture of the protest music as a drug-fueled, anti-patriotic group. He was quite direct in his displeasure with those who opposed the war. He did not mince words with how he characterized what he called hippies. Haggard revealed his vivid portrayal of the protesters in the first two stanzas of this song "Okie from Muskogee:"

We don't smoke marijuana in Muskogee
 We don't take no trips on LSD;
 We don't burn no draft cards down on Main Street
 But, We love living right, and being free

³³ Christina Knight, "Loretta Lynn Biographical Timeline," PBS, February 26, 2016, <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/loretta-lynn-loretta-lynn-timeline-photos/5805/>.

³⁴ "AZLyrics - Request for Access," AZLyrics.com, accessed April 6, 2022, <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/merlehaggard/okiefrommuskogee.html>.

We don't make a party out of loving
 But we like holding hand and pitching woo;
 We don't let our hair grow long and shaggy
 Like the hippies out in San Francisco do³⁵

This was also echoed in his song, "The Fightin' Side of Me," but with an added criticism. He still supported the troops but also addressed the cost and was upset with the attitude towards the soldiers just doing their duty as their nation requested.³⁶ Even so, the intention was this song was to be support for the troops who were in the combat zone fighting.³⁷ Yet, he also was revealing the displeasure with the circumstances connected to the soldier's placement in Vietnam. Haggard's song was an early vocal lyrical shift in the country music genre to be expressive on a political topic. It revealed a move away from Nashville as it provided a unique geographical aspect of Oklahoma in the lyrics and showed that a record label out of California could also produce country music.³⁸

Waylon Jennings' album *Honky Tonk Heroes*, noted as one of the earliest albums that embodied the outlaw country music theme with its release date in 1973, had songs written and co-written with Billy Joe Shaver, who ultimately helped to continue to cultivate this outlaw image by assisting in the lyrical creativity of Jennings' songs.³⁹ Although there were disagreements between Jennings and Shaver in the production of this album, it became a successful album and competed with some of the music in other genres of the time.⁴⁰ The release of this album was close in timing to the progressive movement and close to the controversial

³⁵ "Merle Haggard – Okie from Muskogee," Genius, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://genius.com/Merle-haggard-okie-from-muskogee-lyrics>.

³⁶ Jennifer Reiko, "The Political Message behind Merle Haggard's 'Okie from Muskogee.'" *Classic Country Music*, May 13, 2020. <https://classiccountrymusic.com/the-political-message-behind-merle-haggards-okie-from-muskogee/>.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Michael Corcoran, *All over the Map True Heroes of Texas Music*. First edition. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 63.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 63.

events that had carried over from the 1960s, creating this progressive lyrical aspect in music to discuss a topic and sometimes a controversial opinion. This album also continued the theme of the Texas influence in the outlaw movement. Shaver, a Texas native, created the regional influence of the Texas culture in the album. Jennings was also from Texas but had spent many years in Nashville writing music. Additionally, Willie Nelson did not have personal success with his own songs until he took on the outlaw image. However, he had successful songs that he had written in the 1960s, such as Patsy Cline's "Crazy," that completely embodied the Nashville sound.⁴¹ Ironically, one Nelson's album contained the regional aspect of Texas with title of *Texas in my Soul*. Nelson released it before he left RCA records and went to Atlantic, which signaled his geographical move to Texas.⁴²

The aspect of religion in the country music genre continued to be is an important theme present in the lyrics. The outlaw movement provided a unique aspect of the theme of forgiveness. Shaver, one of the most impactful songwriters in country music, provided a strong theme of religion in his lyrics. Shaver was credited as the author of the anthem of the outlaw movement in his song "Honky Tonk Heroes." Shaver through his lyrics created a balance of "sin and salvation," which encapsulated the nature of the movement and lyrics.⁴³ His life consisted of tragedy and success that echoed in the lyrics. These lyrics presented the struggle of mistakes and the road to redemption. This struggle to find balance in life while staying true to the Christian faith resonated with the country music fans. Shaver was a prime example of the intersection of religion and culture in country music. The struggle to find the balance of how to live a life to

⁴¹ Travis D. Stimeling, *Nashville Cats: Record Production in Music City*, (Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2020), 144.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Brian T. Atkinson, *I'll Be Here in the Morning: The Songwriting Legacy of Townes Van Zandt*, (Texas A&M University Press, 2011), 44.

honor his Christian faith but also play and create music became the storyline in this music.⁴⁴ This resonated with fans who faced their own struggles and battles to find this life balance in a turbulent society and adhere to their faith. The central part of the outlaw movement was using music to express the social and political changes in society in an effort to understand it. This resulted in support from their audience who faced the same struggles.

Struggles in society made their way into the music in either a political or non-political manner. The country music genre had some earlier deviations from the normal non-political lyrical use. These artists would later acquire the label outlaw along with the original outlaw artists. One such example was Merle Haggard, who provided a political tone in his “Okie from Muskogee,” in a response to the counterculture of the protest music. This caught the attention of President Richard Nixon, who appreciated this sentiment and invited him to the White House. Nixon had close ties to the country music genre as he performed “God Bless America” at the Grand Ole Opry in 1974.⁴⁵ This provided an uncommon connection to the country music genre by hosting the sitting President at the venue. However, the dialogue was already present in the country music that expressed the songwriter’s opinion on issues, including politics of the time.

The music may have inadvertently provided a story line of the working class struggles that echoed in the lyrics and evolved together into the patriotic theme with an edge. This provided an opportunity for historians to analyze the lyrics, the events, and to understand the political and cultural themes in the music. Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Johnny Cash, Kris Kristofferson, and Merle Haggard were some of the names that came to mind when hearing the term outlaw country music. These artists were questioning their lyrical freedom. This reflected

⁴⁴ Michael Hall, "The Legend of Billy Joe Shaver." *Texas Monthly*, December 2020, 56+. *Gale In Context: Biography* (accessed April 16, 2024).

⁴⁵ *Billboard* Staff, “President Nixon Performs 'God Bless America' at Grand Ole Opry,” *Billboard*, March 14, 2014, <https://www.billboard.com/video/president-nixon-performs-god-bless-america-at-grand-ole-opry-5937539/>.

the way the working class had questioned their struggles that were growing during the 1970s. These struggles included the strains on economy, societal changes, global turmoil, and rise in unemployment. These struggles and changes impacted not only the working-class Americans but also the artists. However, before evolving into patriotic music, the outlaw music took a stand against the status quo in the country music genre. Waylon Jennings conveyed in his autobiography his opinion of the Country Music Association. He felt it tried to control and push its own narrative. Jennings stated, “The CMA were always pulling fast ones like that. They were more concerned with their television show than honoring country music.”⁴⁶ The success of the country music message to the social movement in the rebellious lyrics evolved into the image of this cowboy rebel. Historian James C. Cobb characterized the music by highlighting the Southern culture as more of an accommodating culture that embraced change.⁴⁷ However, the change was occurring from the traditional lyrics heard in previous decades, and the shift away from the Nashville sound was beginning.⁴⁸ This research led to understanding the shift from outlaw to patriotic theme by showing the working-class cultural shift.

Commercial success was an important aspect of record sales not only for the record company but also for the artists to continue to support themselves. The goal to ensure the commercial success of the music began to drive the elements of production in the country music recording industry. Chet Atkins was a household name in the Nashville sound that filled the airwaves of country radio in the 1960s. Atkins produced a session recording “Four Walls” that reached number one on the *Billboard* country music charts and even charted on the *Billboard*

⁴⁶ Waylon Jennings, *Waylon: An Autobiography* (USA: Time Warner International, 1997), 270.

⁴⁷ James C. Cobb, “Rednecks, White Socks, and Piña Coladas? Country Music Ain’t What It Used to Be... And It Really Never Was.” *Southern Cultures* 5, no. 4 (1999): 41.

⁴⁸ Bill C. Malone and Laird Tracey E W., *Country Music USA* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018), 296.

pop music.⁴⁹ It did not include the traditional instrumentation previously used in the country music genre. The new sound had some opposition. As the decade moved into the 1970s, some of these artists, such as Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson, were unable to obtain the success they hoped. The struggle for Jennings to make it big caused the need for touring. The booked venues were located in dangerous areas, and the country music troubadours called them “the skull orchards.”⁵⁰ The record industry relied on the record sales for profit, but it did not mean there was not a system to encourage the songs to move up the charts. Although the data from sales had been exaggerated, favors requested also helped push a climbing record up the chart to help continue the boost of sales.⁵¹ The music still had to be appealing to the public and the audience to boost sales, but it was evident in Nashville there were ways to encourage the push to the number one spot by those in power in the Nashville scene.⁵² However, the struggles of the artists’ creativity presented the background for the outlaw music movement. The popularity of the music showed the listeners’ struggles paralleled the struggles in the lyrics, or the listeners identified with the lyrics at some level. The record executives allowed for artist’s creative freedom when it generated sales. The interesting aspect about the *Wanted! The Outlaws* was that it became the first studio album to sell a million copies.⁵³ However, even with the success, there were tensions in the record industry between artists and the record executives. Neil Reshen, a musician manager from New York City, came to re-write the rules and battled for an increase in

⁴⁹ Travis D. Stimeling. *Nashville Cats: Record Production in Music City*, (Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2020), 130.

⁵⁰ Michael Streissguth, *Outlaw: Waylon, Willie, Kris, and the Renegades of Nashville* (Pymble, NSW: HarperCollins Australia, 2014), 101.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 100.

⁵² *Ibid*, 100.

⁵³ “1976 Hit Album: Wanted! the Outlaws,” *Country Thang Daily*, November 30, 2019, <https://www.countrythangdaily.com/wanted-outlaws-album>.

Jennings' royalty rate along with creative freedom. Reshen's upfront methods had Nashville's attention and allowed Jennings to pursue his own path.⁵⁴

The outlaw music became the escape to combat the limitations on the artistic freedom and a means to express in the lyrics the societal changes occurring during this period. How the progressive country music stars got their start on this path to outlaw music has been a debated topic on the influence of these regions. However, Texas was the birthplace for many of the artists who became labeled as the outlaw artists in the 1970s outlaw music period. It was a hot spot for where some of the outlaw artists of the 1970s began performing. Texas also became a safe haven away from the Nashville sound to provide venues for artists to have creative freedom. As a result, Texas became a leading state to be connected to the outlaw music in country music. However, that did not mean they did not start on the path to create their outlaw country music in the heart of the country music city by first putting roots in Nashville, Tennessee. An example was Kris Kristofferson, who was born in 1936 in Brownsville, Texas, to a military family.⁵⁵ His moving around during his youth provided a diverse exposure to different regional American cultures.⁵⁶ He spent some time in Nashville for moving on with other outlaw artists to become commercially successful away from Nashville.

The commercial success typically echoed the cultural sentiment of the listeners. In order for listeners to purchase the albums, they had to align with the message of the music. This outlaw attitude lasted most of the 1970s and evolved into a more patriotic tone similar to the nation in the 1980s. Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings released patriotic music reflecting this cultural shift in the 1980s. Nelson's "Living in the Promiseland" was his twelfth number one hit,

⁵⁴ Jessi Colter, *An Outlaw and a Lady: A Memoir of Music, Life with Waylon, and the Faith That Brought Me Home* (Thomas Nelson, 2017), 137.

⁵⁵ Mary Hurd, *Kris Kristofferson: Country Highwayman*. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 23.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 25.

indicating his listeners agreed with the lyrical message presented in this song.⁵⁷ Just before Nelson's release during the height of the 1984 presidential election, Jennings' "America" and Nelson's song were popular hits on the country music chart. Released by the songwriter Sammy Johns in the 1970s, the song "America" did not have as much commercial success as Jennings' version in 1984.⁵⁸ The shift toward cross over to pop helped drive the tone of the music as it moved into the 1980s. The country music genre latched on to the successful outlaw theme to echo this cultural shift in a move toward a conservative mindset, such as in Willie Nelson's song released in 1986 "Living in the Promiseland."⁵⁹

Living in the Promiseland
 Our dreams are made of steel
 The prayer of every man
 Is to know how freedom feels
 There is a winding road
 Across the shifting sand
 And room from everyone
 Living in the Promiseland⁶⁰

The song expressed the age-old sentiments of the goal to come to America and change one's destiny to be more prosperous than where one had been before. The patriotic tone that went back to the country music roots continued to echo in the lyrics even by the outlaw musicians. "The Fightin' Side of Me" by Merle Haggard was an early example of a patriotic tone with the edge of what was prevalent in the outlaw-music-era tone in lyrics.⁶¹ An analysis of the country music as

⁵⁷"Living in the Promiseland" by Willie Nelson - Songfacts, accessed August 29, 2023, <https://www.songfacts.com/facts/willie-nelson/living-in-the-promiseland>.

⁵⁸ "A Trend toward Musical Flag-Waving : But These New Songs Aren't in the Unquestioning Spirit of Earlier Anthems like 'god Bless America.' : Robert Hilburn," *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1985, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1985-10-19-ca-15136-story.html>.

⁵⁹ Clayton Edwards, "Country Rewind: Watch Willie Nelson Spectacularly Perform Patriotic Song 'Living in the Promiseland'," *Outsider*, July 5, 2021, <https://outsider.com/entertainment/music/country-rewind-watch-willie-nelson-perform-patriotic-song-living-in-the-promiseland/>.

⁶⁰ "Willie Nelson – Living in the Promiseland," Genius, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://genius.com/Willie-nelson-living-in-the-promiseland-lyrics>.

⁶¹ Diane Pecknold, *The Selling Sound: The Rise of the Country Music Industry*. (Duke University Press, 2007), 232.

it moved into the 1980s revealed not only that the commercialism called for the conservative right to be present but also that some of the songs even crossed over to the pop music, showing a wider ranging audience for the music with a conservative tone. Randy Travis' song "Forever and Ever Amen" became a hit on the pop charts as well as the country charts.⁶² This highlighted the large reach of the country music genre to expand into the pop culture, indicating the cultural shift pattern in the popularity of the cowboy image rooted in the country theme had also become evident in pop culture in the United States during this period.

The struggles in the economy, such as the increasing energy prices and high unemployment, seemed to provide a demographic that found solace in the outlaw music.⁶³ These events in the 1970s presented some of the issues that were fueling the songwriters to establish their own freedom. The songs of the outlaw movement resonated with the listeners, which resulted in making the music marketable.⁶⁴ Waylon Jennings' song "Luckenbach, Texas" emphasized the escape to the time and place moved beyond the feuding that was occurring. The song revealed the dynamics the singers faced to get their music released by stating, "Let's go to 'Luckenbach, Texas.' With Waylon and Willie and the boys, this successful life we're livin's got us feudin' Like the Hatfield and McCoys."⁶⁵ Although the music clearly was a result of the songwriters' struggles, it struck a chord with their listeners as they too longed to escape to an easier time period. The stagnation and the high inflation hit the middle class hard. Although Jimmy Carter met with advisors to try to elevate the difficult economic situation faced by Americans, relief did not occur.⁶⁶ A wage standard set for 1979 required a seven percent wage

⁶² Allison Richter, "Randy Travis: 'Forever and Ever, Amen'." *The Mix* (Berkeley, Calif.) 36, no. 3 (2012): 18.

⁶³ Bart Moore-Gilbert. *The Arts in the 1970s: Cultural Closure*, (Taylor & Francis Group, 1994), 3.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 3.

⁶⁵ "Waylon Jennings & Willie Nelson – Luckenbach, Texas (Back to the Basics of Love)," Genius, accessed April 3, 2023, <https://genius.com/Waylon-jennings-and-willie-nelson-luckenbach-texas-back-to-the-basics-of-love-lyrics>.

⁶⁶ W. Carl Biven, *Jimmy Carter's Economy: Policy in an Age of Limits*, The University of North Carolina Press, 2002, 181-182.

increase intended to combat the rising inflation.⁶⁷ The reliance on older economic guidelines and the struggle to address the items in the wailing economy left the working class yearning for the better times and brighter futures of obtaining the American dream of economic success. These strains echoing in the music also had an impact in the political elections. There was a shift from the strong hold of the Democratic party with a challenge at the federal level when incumbents lost their bid of re-election for the first time since Hebert Hoover.⁶⁸ The rise in popularity of shows with western themes and the popularity of the outlaw movement highlighted the desire of the romanticized version depicted of the era of the cowboy that resonated with the working-class demographic. This desire of easier time with life, which hosted the birth of the Republican party, aligned with the popularity of the cowboy image not only in the country music genre but also in pop culture.⁶⁹ These struggles faced by the working class created the need for an escape found in the lyrical dialogue of the outlaw music.

The 1980s presented new technology that expanded the reach of the lyrical message in the music. The continued growth of technology and the birth of the large stores, such as Walmart which provided easy access to purchase the music, continued to promote the popularity of country music. This attributed to the expanded age demographic of listeners.⁷⁰ The cowboy image had become popular in the culture and introduced rising stars, such as Randy Travis and George Strait, in the 1980s that exhibited this traditional style of music and lyrics in their cowboy hats.⁷¹ The rise of multiculturalism in the 1990s did not cause a response in the country

⁶⁷ W. Carl Biven, *Jimmy Carter's Economy: Policy in an Age of Limits*, The University of North Carolina Press, 2002, 181-182.

⁶⁸ Jim Cullen, *1980: America's Pivotal Year*, Rutgers University Press, 2022, 169.

⁶⁹ Robert Francis Engs and Randall M. Miller. *The Birth of the Grand Old Party: The Republicans' First Generation*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 29.

⁷⁰ Dave Laing, "Record Sales in the 1980s." *Popular Music* 9, no. 2 (1990): 236.

⁷¹ Don Cusic, *Discovering Country Music*, (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2008), 126.

music genre, but the artistic freedom and reflection of the listeners guided the lyrical message of the music.

The outlaw movement carried the singers away from Nashville to Texas and Hollywood, where they continued to pump out the message heard in their lyrics. The outlaw music that had started in the 1970s had evolved into the cowboy image on the big screen of Hollywood. The artists who took the leap to acting in films carried this persona with them in their characters. Waylon Jennings was a prime example. Jennings played in movies and in television shows.⁷² This was not limited to the male singers as the female singers also utilized this image.⁷³ Although women typically in the outlaw movement as singers were the spouses to the singers, there were others who had their own methods of conveying a message, such as Dolly Parton.⁷⁴ Parton was an example of a female singer who shined a light on the inequality in the workplace for women with her song “9 to 5,” which was also the soundtrack to the popular movie in which she starred.⁷⁵ Others conveyed their message via the duet method. The female and male duet had been popular in other genres, such as folk with Joan Baez and Bob Dylan. The outlaw music had the traditional duet of marriage with Waylon Jennings and wife Jessi Colter recording music together. Kris Kristofferson also sang with his wife Rita Coolidge. This added a female element to the outlaw movement in the country music genre.⁷⁶ The plan of these singers was to express their individual temperament by whatever means available.

The lyrical dissent communicated in the genres not only fueled a social movement by spreading the communication of collective sentiment but also categorized distinct political

⁷² Waylon Jennings, *Waylon: An Autobiography* (USA: Time Warner International, 1997), 272.

⁷³ Pamela Fox, “Recycled ‘Trash’: Gender and Authenticity in Country Music Autobiography.” *American Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (1998): 244.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Dolly Parton and Suzanne Sonnier, *Dolly Parton in Her Own Words* (Chicago: B2, 2020), 2.

⁷⁶ Brian T. Atkinson, *Looks Like Rain: The Songwriting Legacy of Mickey Newbury*, (Texas A&M University Press, 2021), 88.

beliefs much more divisive. As the struggles within the music industry began to echo in the lyrics in the country music genre, the artists verbalized their struggles in cowboy lyrics while strumming on their guitars. These struggles were the same that everyday people faced and sought to understand or endure, such as the economic situation, evolving rights for women and minorities, conservative struggles and changes, gay liberation movement, and anti-war movement. The artists faced these struggles in their own way and expressed these struggles or opposition to them in their lyrics. An example was David Allen Coe, who distanced himself from the rising same-sex movement in his lyrics. The outlaw image that Coe presented included himself as a member of the hard-working class of America.⁷⁷ This ability to empathize with the working-class shaped Coe's lyrics as an outlaw musician that let his time in prison and struggles outside of prison align with some of the struggles facing the people purchasing his albums. He expressed those sentiments in his song, "On My Feet Again."

I spent a lifetime in prison believing I'd never get over the fall
 Busted for first degree I was too blind to see who was to blame for it all
 Some said the devil, but God only knows if I put my future in him
 Other folks bet that I'd never get on my feet again
 Running and jumping free as a bird just like a child left to play
 Freedom was one more thing I took for granted until they took it away⁷⁸

The 1970s also noted a shift in the working class from previous generations, specifically prior to World War II, with the farming community. These working-class people had moved into the industrial jobs.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Hubbs, Nadine. *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music*, (University of California Press, 2014), 154.

⁷⁸ "AZLyrics - Request for Access," AZLyrics.com, accessed April 27, 2024, <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/davidallancoe/onmyfeetagain.html>.

⁷⁹ Jocelyn R. Neal, *Country Music: A Cultural and Stylistic History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 216.

This outlaw image evolved to reflect the working class. The image that started out as an outlaw image reflected from the artistic struggles and evolved into a marketable theme in country music had become an anthem to working class Americans and aligned with the public image of the patriotic American. It became patriotic to be an outlaw who loved America. The marketable success of the music provided evidence of the aligned struggles the listeners felt and understood with the lyrics. To understand the role of country music at the working-class level required an examination of the country music genre in 1970s and 1980s that provided evidence to reveal the cultural shift in society highlighted in the lyrics through the music. The elements in the music resulted from a battle of creative freedom and money that caused the emergence of these outlaw country music artists. The push against the narrative that arose in the 1960s through the use of music provided an avenue to convey a message. This created the perfect situation with the rise of the counterculture that allowed music to be the medium used to share a message to provoke a social movement. As the struggles within the music industry began to surface in the country music genre, the artists verbalized these struggles in their lyrics. The country music released in the 1970s deviated from its roots and joined a rebellious attitude that coined the term “outlaw” country music. Historian Brian Atkinson connected this movement to the song writer Mickey Newbury when he was released from the RCA records in Nashville.⁸⁰ Newbury, an established songwriter in Nashville, had parted ways after some royalties’ disputes, but his impact on country music was evident in the lyrics of Jennings’ song “Luckenbach, Texas.” This deviation from the preferred sound labeled him an original “hippie cowboy.”⁸¹ Newbury paved the way for artists to depart from the powers who held control of artistic freedom of songwriters in Nashville.

⁸⁰ Brian T. Atkinson, *Looks Like Rain: The Songwriting Legacy of Mickey Newbury*, (Texas A&M University Press, 2021), 2.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

After his move to Austin, Texas, Willie Nelson discussed this diversion from the typical Nashville-style music in his autobiography. “I’m not sure I would have called our music ‘progressive country’ the term used often by FM radio but here in the seventies I did feel like we were making progress in bridging the generation gap that had opened up in the sixties.”⁸² Ironically, being one of the popular outlaw musicians, Nelson seemed to be a combination of a hippie and country music star that melded into one. Nelson identified as an artist and did not consider his music progressive, but there was no denying that his image did reflect a connection to the hippie movement of the 1960s. This deviation from the clean-cut image that had aligned with country music in the previous decades was evident in his looks and lyrics in the 1970s. Nelson took on the long-haired look that Haggard described in his popular song “Okie from Muskagee.”

Just as circumstances brought about the outlaw movement, this rugged outlaw cowboy image evolved into a patriotic theme in the country music genre as a result of events occurring in the nation. The Iran hostage situation began in 1979. The resolution would not come until 1981 after negotiations by the newly-elected President Ronald Reagan on the release of the hostages.⁸³ Yet, success of this event boosted pride as a result of a positive outcome on the global stage. The 1979 invasion of Afghanistan heightened the tense relations between the Soviet Union and the United States.⁸⁴ This aggression in Afghanistan caused the United States Senate not to ratify the treaty of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks II that had been in discussions since 1975.⁸⁵ The

⁸² Willie Nelson, *My Life: It's a Long Story* (London: Sphere, 2016), 233.

⁸³ U.S. Department of State accessed September 19, 2023, <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/short-history/iraniancrises>.

⁸⁴ Following the end of World War II and the introduction of the nuclear weapon, the global debate on regulation of the weapon became a topic of discussion. As the Cold War emerged and continued, the impact of these negotiations affected political decisions. For further information on the evolution of these discussions please see the dissertation by Joshua Martin Handler, ““A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Ratification”: U.S. Strategic Nuclear Arms Control Policy, 1963–2000.” Order No. 3067145, Princeton University, 2003.

⁸⁵ Lawrence Freedman, “Salt II and the Strategic Balance.” *World Today* 35, no. 8 (1979): 315-323.

punches in the 1970s kept hitting the American citizens. Although the Vietnam War had ended during that decade, it did not remove any of the global struggles the United States faced. The significance of analyzing and understanding and questioning the outlaw country music phenomena of the 1970s offered a window into the culture of the demographics who were listening and purchasing the music during this period. This aligned with the emotions that made this music marketable. The circumstances that not only the artists, but also the listener faced, prompted the evolution of the outlaw music that evolved to a patriotic tone on the heels of the controversial involvement in the Vietnam War.

The period that introduced the outlaw era triggered radical actions that led to major changes in record labels. This resulted in change in location of key country music artists, lyrical change of political lyrics in country music genre, and the diversity of dialogue in country music. Country music reflected the culture of the American society. As society evolved in the 1980s, the tone changed to reflect a patriotic tone. The counterculture movement laid the tracks that impacted the culture and led the way for the evolution of country music that the outlaw movement reflected. The progressive mindset that started with the protest music in the 1960s spilled over to the country music genre and the lyrics reflected the culture of the listeners. The result was commercial success for the outlaw artists. Subsequently, the outlaw movement in the country music genre connected itself to the working-class Americans, providing the lyrical roadmap to understanding the cultural shift in the United States from the 1970s to the 1980s through the music. This analysis of the relationship of the lyrics used in the country music of the 1970s and its evolution into the 1980s presented answers or conclusions that provided additional information on the historical understanding of the culture of the listeners of the music of this

period and its shift in the 1980s back to the roots of country music with the patriotic and conservative tone that remained a strong element within the genre.

Chapter 2

Revolution in Music: The 1960s Influence on Outlaw Country

Events during the 1960s caused society and music to express opinions opposing the political actions or demanding change. In this period Americans endured societal changes after World War II that shifted its role on a global scale and provided a transcript for the transformation of music and its message. Americans were facing possible nuclear attack as the Cuban Missile Crisis was coming to a head along with the involvement in Vietnam. They were further frustrated by segregation, poverty, and inequality between the genders.¹ Musical artists of the period were able to connect to the public by mobilizing and creating music expressing these feelings. Music became the soundtrack of a collective message that connected society and culture. The complexity of the period echoed in the music, and the impact to society played out through the different genres. The 1960s endured events causing the American society to respond, and this can be heard in the music. Advancements made in technology provided a means for music to be shared in Vietnam to the soldiers. They were able to listen to the evolution of the opinions of the war through the music.² Use of music to convey and spread the message of a movement became commonplace. Changes in this period resulted from the political decisions made on foreign policy including the Cuban Missile Crisis and Vietnam War that molded the American opinion, creating a narrative in music to express the cultural and social temperament of the period. This decade provided evidence that music was a powerful medium for social and political activism by connecting the listeners with artists. These artists used their music to advocate for change and spread important messages. In 1961, country music stars from Nashville

¹ David James, "The Vietnam War and American Music." *Social Text*, no. 23 (1989): 130–132.

² Lily Rothman, "The Vietnam War: Why That Conflict Produced Iconic Music," *Time*, September 27, 2017, <https://time.com/4949617/music-vietnam-war/>.

played a country music show at Carnegie Hall. These stars typically playing at the Grand Ole Opry presented the country music genre beyond the rural limits.³ This introduction to mainstream America connected to a wider audience in new geographic locations. The 1960s' influence of lyrics in songs carrying a powerful message and echoing in the different genres showcased a diverse split in the culture of Americans, and as the outlaw artists experienced this change, their own music reflected the countercultural movements of the era by voicing dissent and promoting individual freedom.

Music lyrics used in the 1960s to articulate the collective sentiments added an element to broaden the reach of public opinion to aid in the spread of social movements. The country music genre established the Nashville sound and embraced sounds from other genres during this period.⁴ The cultural climate of the period influenced the lyrics and the artists alike in how lyrics were used through music. A relationship that emerged in the 1960s between the counterculture and culture movement became narrated in the lyrics of the music of the public opinion as these two sides became further divided. Music and lyrics helped to communicate the message of the movement. These social movements used music to give a voice to those marginalized by society to react to those in power. The music of the Vietnam War era became a reflection of the cultural change occurring during that time period. The pivotal time period produced cultural changes in the United States that bled into the lyrics of the music for both of the divided sides. Some genres, such as folk, carved the way for artistic freedom to express opinions on the events occurring. The experience of the outlaw artists in the 1960s with the use of music as an avenue to express a

³ "Grand Ole Days: A Heritage Worth Preserving." *Billboard*. Vol. 112, no. 25 (2000), 48.

⁴ The record company management in 1950s, introduced the Nashville sound, incorporating a more studio sound. In a 1971, *Billboard* article the GRT records is noted to "cash in" on the Nashville sound making a move to release music marketed to the Top 40, Easy Listening and Country music markets. "GRT Nashville LP's" *Billboard*, Vol. 84, No. 6, February 6, 1971, 4.

sentiment became a strong foundation for these artists when they embarked on their own movement against the controls of the record industry. The country music genre faced its own transformation. The new sound created a subgenre, known as outlaw music, and reshaped the country music genre. The cultural shift that occurred in the 1960s was not only a pivotal time for the use of music to express culture movement but also a pivotal time when the artists in the early outlaw movement experienced a dynamic period when they could express themselves in the lyrics in the music of the time. The dialogue present during the counterculture and culture movements created a narrative on the cultural events among musical genres and ultimately the demographic of the listeners of the music. Artists who would become the faces of outlaw country music experienced this shift. The music composed during the 1960s used lyrics to communicate a message. This method remained in the music industry and the culture beyond the turbulent decade of the 1960s.

During this pivotal cultural shift, the music released in the 1960s provided a unique perspective of the mindset and experience occurring during this period.⁵ The songs conveyed the message through not only the written words of the songwriters but also through the singers who in some cases provided a deeper emotional connection to the words or message from personal experiences.⁶ The music provided a reflection of the cultural change experienced. The division of opinions echoed in the music in the 1960s and impacted the artists who experienced this shift including the outlaw artists.⁷ Musical genres of this period participated either for or against the war in the protest music. The folk genre led the way in the protest movement that impacted how

⁵ Michael Stewart Foley, "A Politics of Empathy: Johnny Cash, the Vietnam War, and the 'Walking Contradiction' Myth Dismantled." *Popular Music and Society* 37, no. 3 (2014), 340.

⁶ Warren Goldstein. 2008. "Progressive Patriotism." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 28.

⁷ Michael Stewart Foley, "A Politics of Empathy: Johnny Cash, the Vietnam War, and the 'Walking Contradiction' Myth Dismantled." *Popular Music and Society* 37, no. 3 (2014), 340.

music expressed the cultural tone. This genre adamantly opposed the involvement in the Vietnam War. However, the well-known anti-war protest music had opposition in the country music genre. Events that inspired or swayed the message did not change the culture. However, music was a method to communicate outside the normal channels of information. This allowed the social movement to gather groups having similar opinions as those in the messages in the music. The music was an expression of their opinion.

This influence of the changing society and the musical artists experienced of the events appeared in the music. The music of this period mimicked the use of social media in modern day to spread a message to a large group of people. The artists as witnesses to the cultural revolution of the period utilized their experiences to spread the messages via their songs. This impacted the music industry. These artists, including the outlaw artists, used music to convey emotions or longing for former times. This created a soundtrack for the period that provided insight into the emotional elements of the outlaw movement. The outlaw artists had personal intentions for success and artistic freedom. However, the outlaw movement provided a bridge for listeners as the artists themselves attempted to balance tradition and change in society.

The inspiration of music resulted from the communities that passed down their musical skills through porch singing with friends and families who filled the lyrics with stories and expressions of culture. Then the radio became a factor in the way the masses heard music. The folk music had an early introduction to the masses when The Carter Family aired on the radio in the early 1920s. This also provided strong influences on bluegrass, gospel, country, pop, and rock music. The storytelling aspect provided a strong foundation for later folk and country music to use as the moral fabric of the culture within the lyrics.⁸ The lyrics captured the temperament of

⁸ Wells Family Notes in the PineCone #20563, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

a specific demographic of listeners as evident in their aligning with the attitude of the music. The outlaw movement that occurred in the 1970s expressed the culture of the listeners within the lyrics. The lyrical dialogue of the 1960s played a pivotal role in reflecting and fueling the cultural and social movements of the period by providing a platform for social protest against the politics. The outlaw movement within the country music genre reflected similar opinions. Analyzing the use of the lyrical message as a form of communication within the turbulent 1960s gave evidence on how lyrics provided a view into the cultural aspect of the listeners of the period. Andrew Hartman, a historian from Illinois University and an expert in the relationship of the cultural impacts in the United States, presented evidence of the importance of the lyrics in the music and the culture stating, “Rock music, the idiom of sixties-style liberation, offered a cacophony of lyrical testimonials to the changes set off during the decade.”⁹ Through the lyrics the music presented the mentality of Americans. It also created a platform for the division of opinions to publicly have a dialogue. These different outlooks on the events also tended to align with specific genres. This further presented evidence regarding the listeners’ demographic and cultural backgrounds. In their musical message, the songwriters vividly detailed these current events and experiences of the violence occurring locally and globally.

The musicology history of folk and country music presented similar backgrounds. Folk music and country music have a shared history and common elements. The blends caused by migration of rural residents moving to different areas presented new elements to the genres. The cultural element of folk music and its oral tradition of passing down from one generation to another through the storytelling lyrical element provided a strong intersection of similarities

⁹ Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 12.

between the two genres.¹⁰ The modern advancement in recording took folk music to New York City to record these ‘hillbilly’ tunes for mass distribution.¹¹ This move shifted the regional limitations of folk music from limited exposure to the culture of the communities from which the music originated. This supported the idea that the culture typically identified with the rural South had a much wider impact. Historian Paul Tyler made the argument that the origins of country music was not limited to the South, including the aspect of folk influences from the similar European background.¹² The spectrum of where folk ends and country begins is a difficult finite line. The *Billboard* music industry tried to create a divisive line by introducing the country genre label in 1949. However, Hank Williams song “Lovesick Blues” landed number one on the *Billboard* top Folk Charts in 1949.¹³ Williams, considered one of the earliest country music stars with his traditional sound and twang success on the charts of both genres, showed the close similarities of the two genres.

Folk music had historically taken the events occurring around the singer and provided a storyline in the lyrics. The turbulent period of the Cold War introduced competing ideologies and a debate of the United States’ role on a global scale. These discussions became an element of the lyrics as the role in global conflicts continued. In 1961, the popular folk singer Pete Seeger received a guilty verdict on ten counts of contempt of Congress resulting from his being accused of communist ties throughout the 1950s.¹⁴ The central time frame of the Cold War Era during

¹⁰ Paul L. Tyler, “Hillbilly Music Re-Imagined: Folk and Country Music in the Midwest.” *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 127, no. 504, 2014, 160.

¹¹Patrick Huber, “The New York Sound: Citybilly Recording Artists and the Creation of Hillbilly Music, 1924–1932,” *Journal of American Folklore* 127, no. 504 (April 1, 2014): 140–58, <https://doi.org/10.5406/jamerfolk.127.504.0140>, 144.

¹² Paul L. Tyler, “Hillbilly Music Re-Imagined: Folk and Country Music in the Midwest.” *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 127, no. 504, 2014, 165.

¹³ “The Year’s Top Selling Folk Artists.” *Billboard*. January 14, 1950, 38.

¹⁴ David Blake, ““Everybody Makes Up Folksongs”: Pete Seeger's 1950s College Concerts and the Democratic Potential of Folk Music.” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 12, no. 4 (Nov 2018), 383.

the 1960s provided a perfect storm of ideology, creating a divide of thinking.¹⁵ The ideology shift and fear of the communist ideology in the United States created blame and accusations as Seeger experienced. The involvement in the Vietnam War further created division on the role of the United States on a global scale. This created a shift in policies, causing a reaction to the political choices that created a division, specifically on whether America should be involved in the conflict in Vietnam. This rise in differing opinions on the global role of the United States began to transform the relationship between the music and social movement against the conflict.

The artists of the country music movement experienced the use of music within these culture movements that led to the culture shift of the 1960s. The listeners experienced the emotion of the music to push towards their goals. Joan Baez was an artist who emerged early in the decade with songs in support of the civil rights movement and then shifted the lyrics in support of the anti-war movement. Throughout her career Baez used music and non-violent activism to push against violation of human rights or inhuman treatment in the world.¹⁶ The influence of the lyrics on the listeners emerged at music festivals. The Woodstock festival at the end of the decade presented an in-person connection of the anti-war music to the evolving culture of the period. Woodstock became a pivotal combination of the genres, and Baez had an interesting perspective of the mix of atmosphere as well as the mix of genres present at the festival of music embedded in the anti-war movement. Baez discussed the impact of Woodstock stating:

Woodstock was drugs and sex and rock and roll. Woodstock was Janis “coitus interruptus” Joplin, and Jimi ‘genius’ Hendrix, and the gorgeous sweating chest of Roger Daltry of the Who. Woodstock was Country Joe McDonald, handsome as a wild Indian. “So it’s one, two, three, what are we fightin’ for, don’t ask me, I don’t give a damn, the next stop is Viet-Nam.” Woodstock was Dirty Sly and the Family Stone gettin’ HIGH-YUH! Along with a half a million people. Woodstock was cockeyed Joe Cocker, bent up

¹⁵ Lee Andresen, *Battle Notes: Music of the Vietnam War* (Superior, WI: Savage Press, 2003), 18.

¹⁶ Joan Baez, *And a Voice to Sing With* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 150.

like a weird, palsied street person but singing like Ray Charles. Woodstock was rain and mud, GI's in disguise, and cops putting their guns up and cooking hot dogs for hungry hippies. Woodstock was white ladies of the lake emboldened by the roadblocks set up between the golden city of freedom and their sororities, pulling back their river-rat hair with the lake dripping from their pretty elbows, not really unaware of the cameras grinding away on the shore, focused on their lovely breasts.¹⁷

The event at Woodstock showed the connection between musical protests and its relationship with the listener. Baez continued to be involved in combining the elements of music and movements throughout her career. Later in the 1980s, she called Live-Aid concert that generation's Woodstock. In response to the battle against the global pandemic of AIDS that had become a worldwide issue during this time, several artists gathered to raise money towards combating this humanitarian crisis.¹⁸ Willie Nelson, an original outlaw musician in the later 1970s' country outlaw movement, was an artist who used similar venue. He became involved in the Farm Aid benefit concerts in the 1980s. These events of grouping people together to combat an issue exhibited how the bond of musicians in social movements could provide a soundtrack to promote change.

As the 1960s introduced a period of counterculture, the use of music to express the opinions that could propel a movement in society became a tool in this shift of culture in the United States. Artists and participants of movements used music to spread the message containing their sentiments and beliefs to the listeners. While the music did not cause the counterculture, the music distributed the messages in its lyrics that provided a connection. The advancement of technology resulted in a much wider impact of the message as groups of people with the same sentiment as expressed in the music now had the means to listen to the same message.¹⁹ The ability to communicate audibly the music and information over radio waves to

¹⁷ Joan Baez, *And a Voice to Sing With* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 163.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 318-319.

¹⁹ Ryan J. Kirkby, "Dramatic Protests, Creative Communities: VVAW and the Expressive Politics of the Sixties Counterculture." *Peace and Change* 40, no. 1 (2015), 44.

the soldiers in the jungles created a unique element of communication through music in the combat zone. The music technology of recording on tapes made it possible to connect those in the combat zone via the radios of the soldiers to the music released in the United States.²⁰ Unique to the history of United States warfare was the ability of recorded music to be available quickly in combat zones. The advancing technology of tapes provided this ability to quickly share music.²¹ The availability of vinyl records at a consumer level created a connection between the listener and the musician beyond the play on radio. The cassette tape was introduced in 1962 and became a popular item for consumers with portable players that allowed them to repeat the song quickly.²²

The historical analysis reflected the cultural change within the lyrics and the dialogue, detailing the relationship of music to the events during the 1960s that influenced the message presented in the lyrics. While the music did not cause the counterculture, the messages in its lyrics provided a connection. The songwriters and singers by distributing their message via the music took on the responsibility of expressing the temperament of the people in an attempt to broaden the understanding of the events. These movements were able to use the music to spread the message that described the mindset of this shifting culture and gathered the groups of people together with the same sentiment.²³ The outlaw artists used their platform to answer the counterculture movement with lyrics to the listeners trying to understand the complexities of the shifting societal norms. However, the use of music to spread a message during the rise of the

²⁰ "Hanoi Tapes made in U.S.: 'Freedom fighter' prepared anti-war broadcast." *The Baltimore Sun (1837-)*, Feb 09, 1966. 1.

²¹ Ibid.

²² "A Brief History of Vinyl Records," The Vinyl Revivers, accessed September 18, 2023, <https://thevinylrevivers.com/a-brief-history-of-vinyl-records/>.

²³ Ryan J. Kirkby, "Dramatic Protests, Creative Communities: VVAW and the Expressive Politics of the Sixties Counterculture." *Peace and Change* 40, no. 1 (2015), 44.

counterculture movement created an element to study in history with the music providing a cultural reflection of the events surrounding the music.

The lyrical response to global and local events that followed the end of World War II began to emerge in the lyrics of the music of the 1960s.²⁴ The involvement of the United States in the Vietnam conflict created a strong divide in opinions regarding how to handle the global conflicts. After Americans witnessed the effects of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, the Tet Offensive, and the My Lai Massacre, there was an increase in the amount of protest music created. A response to the temperament that fueled the social movement culminated in the moratorium against the Vietnam War. This was a dramatic change from what Americans had done previously in their reaction to military engagements.²⁵ The musical artists used lyrics to communicate their reflection or response on those events. These artists became participants in a movement and had to choose a side. The political and global elements that arose in this period brought about a response in the lyrics. The dialogue used to spread a message concerning these events did so with rhythm provided in the music that carried the lyrics, giving insight to the culture. Examining the music narrative and how it aligned with the cultural movement in a specific period provided insight to a wider demographic that broke barriers of historical thought by adding a medium to identify the understanding of the lyrics.

The message inside the music of all genres was able to be shared more quickly than in the past, allowing soldier's access and the ability to listen to the musical messages even in the combat zones. Doug Bradley, a history professor from the University of Wisconsin, examined the soldier's experience. He provided insight from his own reflections of music and also from his

²⁴ Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 12.

²⁵ Lily Rothman, "The Vietnam War: Why That Conflict Produced Iconic Music," *Time*, September 27, 2017, <https://time.com/4949617/music-vietnam-war/>.

participation in the conflict in Vietnam. The perspective he had on the gathering at Woodstock and then a first-hand experience of serving in Vietnam made his analysis unique. Bradley argued the interpretation that soldiers and hippies were enemies during this period was not accurate. Some historians have portrayed the idea of the opposition of the two groups. However, the opposing sides on the issue of Vietnam with the theme of questioning the motives of the Vietnam War created a similar theme in both the anti-war and protest music regarding the purpose of the conflict. Bradley championed how important the music in this period was to the cultural awakening of this period.²⁶

The lyrical element of music that communicated the cultural climate of a period was specific to the form of medium the music used to spread the message. However, the analysis of the events that influenced the music and its connection to the culture of the period also revealed connections to the listeners' viewpoints. The debate on the impact of the music had focused on the cause and effect from the music and not on examining the relationship of the events to the songwriters and Americans being affected by these events. The interpretation of the events by the songwriters conveyed a message regarding these events to the American public and even to the soldiers in the jungles of Vietnam. Previous studies have shown either the music had cultural impact, or it did not. Therefore, historians typically have debated on how the music impacted the social environment or culture of the era and the response to the music.²⁷ Either the music of the 1960s expressed the temperament of the people or reflected the events of this period.

Consequently, the music of the 1960s played a pivotal role in reflecting and fueling the cultural and social movements of the period, providing a platform for social protest against the Vietnam

²⁶ Doug Bradley, "I Served in Vietnam. Here's My Soundtrack.," *The New York Times* (The New York Times, March 13, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/13/opinion/vietnam-war-rock-music.html>.

²⁷ Ryan J. Kirkby, "Dramatic Protests, Creative Communities: VVAW and the Expressive Politics of the Sixties Counterculture." *Peace and Change* 40, no. 1 (2015), 44.

War and its politics. The outlaw musicians contributed to the anti-protest element of the movement. Outlaw musician Merle Haggard's music is "The Fightin Side of Me," and "Okie from Muskogee," are well-known songs exhibiting an opinion on the conflict in Vietnam. At the time Haggard, newly released from his time in prison, opposed those who protested the soldiers who were fighting for freedom. He held anger against those who protested and felt they had the freedom that the soldiers were fighting for. The personal feeling of recently gaining his freedom from prison fueled this opposition. The stereotypical description used embodied the perception of hippies during that period not his opinion on drug use.²⁸ Ironically, later in life another country music artist, Dave Dudley, released "What We're Fighting For" that conveyed a tone from a soldier's perspective. The soldier had received a letter from his mother on the protests occurring back home that questioned the soldier's motives for fighting. He captured the soldier's reaction when he wrote these lyrics:

You tell me there are people marching in our streets
 The signs they carry say that we don't fight for peace
 There's not a soldier in this foreign land, who likes this war
 Oh mama, tell them what we're fighting for
 Tell them that we're fighting for the old red, white and blue
 Did they forget Pearl Harbor and Korea too
 Another flag must never fly above our nation's door
 Oh mama, tell them what we're fighting for²⁹

Dudley continued this theme with "Vietnam Blues," a piece written by the outlaw musician Kris Kristofferson. Dudley sang this song to convey a bitter and angry tone with the anti-war sentiments.³⁰ This highlights the early connection of the outlaw musicians to the events around

²⁸ Will Kaufman, *American Culture in the 1970s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 116.

²⁹ "What We're Fighting For," Dave Dudley - What We're Fighting For Lyrics | Lyrics.com, accessed April 20, 2024, <https://www.lyrics.com/lyric/21042852/Dave+Dudley/What+We%27re+Fighting+For>.

³⁰ Doug Bradley and Craig Hansen Werner, *We Gotta Get out of This Place: The Soundtrack of the Vietnam War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015), 53.

the world before the movement received the label. The common theme in many genres during the period aligned with the anti-war ideology. The country music genre presented a clear opposition to those who blamed the soldiers doing their duty in their effort to preserve peace. As time passed, participants in the outlaw movement rose against authority of the leadership. This became a strong theme, but traditional elements remained, including patriotism even in the face of controversial leadership decisions.

The world witnessed musicians who used the music to spread their message. The outlaw musicians in country music were not only trying to work towards their success as artists but also trying to navigate the changes in society and the turmoil in the record industry. They were witness to the anti-war movements and how the use of the lyrics could spread a message that evoked a response to these movements with a message in opposition or in support of the soldiers. The anti-communist message aligned with the conservative movement of the period trying to address the best course of action in Vietnam.³¹ Country, rock, and folk music were contributing messages that also echoed opinions during the 1960s. The reason the music and lyrics were so powerful in the 1960s resulted from several genres not only showing a lyrical response to the reform and political change but also showing the response and dialogue among genres regarding the political and culture shift.³² This period is important to understanding not only how the cultural relationship in music emerged but also how historians examined this relationship.

The 1960s brought changes to music. It was during this time that the growth of country music had begun expanding to a national level. The radio stations that played country music

³¹ Sandra Scanlon, *The Pro-War Movement: Domestic Support for the Vietnam War and the Making of Modern American Conservatism*. (University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 128.

³² Lily Rothman, "The Vietnam War: Why That Conflict Produced Iconic Music," *Time* (Time, September 27, 2017), <https://time.com/4949617/music-vietnam-war/>.

grew from around sixty to over six hundred.³³ The introduction of televisions in the homes during the 1950s provided the country music genre the ability to reach a large number of American listeners on the Grand Ole Opry broadcast on Saturday nights.³⁴ This delved into the honky-tonk's roots with popular singers like Hank Williams driving the popularity. However, his untimely death brought a halt to the evolving traditional image and sound associated with him. Even as country music created a focus on the older generation of listeners, other genres and artists, such as Merle Haggard, did release music containing lyrics using a progressive tone and words in the music opposing political decisions. The culture of the American society began to change within this dynamic time period. The shift in the culture included the movements, such as women's rights and civil rights, which changed the roles in society and introduced laws to reduce discrimination on race and gender.³⁵ Debates on Vietnam War, multiple political assassinations, the accelerated space race that propelled technological advancement provided issues that created a divide in opinions. This was evident as the message in the lyrics became accepted by the listeners. The country music genre even had its own responses to the events of the time that resonated with the listeners of the period. Change in country music began the change in audience. Johnny Cash's manager labeled him as a folk musician at an event with Pete Seeger and Joan Baez in 1964 with the intent of trying to attract a younger demographic to Cash's

³³ Paul Hemphill, *The Nashville Sound : Bright Lights and Country Music*, University of Georgia Press, 1970, 177.

³⁴ Bill C. Malone and Tracey E. W. Laird. *Country Music USA: 50th Anniversary Edition*, (University of Texas Press, 2018), 208.

³⁵ The racial tensions limited the ease of African American artists to achieve success. Although it was rare and not common in the country music genre for an African American artist, there were African American artists or musicians found success. However, race in the country music genre and the image of the white cowboy made it difficult for African Americans to become country artists. Even so, there were rare success stories, such as Deford Bailey on the Grand Ole Opry and Charley Pride. The 1970s did allow this barrier to be broken, but it did not become the norm in the country music genre. Additional information regarding the race struggles in the country music genre and geography can be found in Burfeind, Hendrik. "'Mississippi You're on My Mind': Stoney Edwards and the Complex Interplay of Race and Region in 1970s Country Music." *Southern Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (Spring, 2021): 151-72, Mann, Geoff. "Why does Country Music Sound White? Race and the Voice of Nostalgia." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31, no. 1 (2008): 73-100, Hughes, Charles L. *Country Soul: Making Music and Making Race in the American South*. 1st ed. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016.

audience. Cash, the announcer for introducing Bob Dylan at the show, noted Dylan's success as a songwriter and stating he was the best since Pete Seeger, giving a nod to the songwriting skills of Seeger. This started a friendship between Cash and Seeger, including an invite to Seeger's television show *Rainbow Quest* in 1966. Later in 1970, Seeger joined Cash on his variety show *The Johnny Cash Show*.³⁶ Although Seeger is not considered country, the influence of his songwriting skills and impact to artists in the country music scene was evident. The friendship between the two allowed an overlapping of audiences to enjoy the music of both artists. This allowed the message of the music to reach both audiences.

Music as a method to communicate outside the normal channels of information provided insight into the culture of the period. The country music genre did not join the anti-war movement in the early stages. However, the country music genre did eventually express its opinion through lyrics. The events that inspired or swayed the message created a stance of opposing sides. The listeners had to choose a side impacting the evolution of the culture. The cultural transference of the American society into a generation that questioned the global decisions the political leaders were making played out through the music released during this period. The military draft had become a key element as men through forceable random selection had to fight a war that many did not understand the purpose. The draft order for men during the Vietnam War created a forcible aspect for those serving in Vietnam and seemed to be a strong motivation for the emotions that drove the anti-war movement and influenced the protest music. The draft affected everyone whether it was a brother, friend or colleague, and this element of forced military service did not isolate itself into a specific genre. It spoke through the powerful message of the music released during this time. All Americans felt the message which fueled the

³⁶ "Johnny Cash & Pete Seeger," Johnny Cash *Infocenter*, accessed September 15, 2023, <https://www.johnny-cash-infocenter.com/news/entry/johnny-cash-pete-seeger>.

anti-war movement. Although the draft was one element of several that emerged during this turbulent time of the Vietnam War, this order affected everyone by either association or personally. Merle Haggard, who later along with other artists became a member of the outlaw movement in the 1970s, presented a political retort to the progressive protest music of the 1960s and provided listeners a political message in his “Okie from Muskogee,” by exploring the counterculture of the protest music. Haggard witnessed the protests in response to the events occurring, specifically the response by those of the anti-war movement in the 1960s. However, as events continued to evolve so did the attitudes of some artists. Haggard had another song that presented strong lyrics in his “The Fightin’ Side of Me.” This song still supported the troops but also presented themes of human cost.³⁷ The attitude of Americans towards the soldiers who were just doing their duty as their nation requested played through the lyrics of Haggard’s song that still supported the troops even while questioning the cost of the involvement in the conflict. Haggard’s intention was to send a message of support for the soldiers in the combat zone fighting.³⁸ Haggard revealed within the lyrics the displeasure with the circumstances connected to the soldier’s placement in Vietnam. The poetic expression in the beginning of the song provided sympathy to the shift in thought, but as the song continued the sentiment of those who spoke ill of the United States was clear as unacceptable to Haggard when he wrote these lyrics:

I hear people talking bad
 About the way they have to live here in this country
 Harping on the wars we fight
 And griping 'bout the way things ought to be
 And I don't mind them switching sides
 And standing up for things they believe in

³⁷ Jennifer Reiko, “The Political Message behind Merle Haggard's ‘Okie from Muskogee.’” *Classic Country Music*, May 13, 2020. <https://classiccountrymusic.com/the-political-message-behind-merle-haggards-okie-from-muskogee/>.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

But when they're running down our country, man
They're walking on the fighting side of me³⁹

This showed that the lyrical message adapted to external factors reflected in the culture. The continued loss of life and no resolution to the war spread to the country music genre, resulting in a more progressive message of questioning the purpose. Ironically, it created a strong political element when Haggard received an invitation to the White House from President Richard Nixon. Just as the lyrics in the song portrayed the culture of the protest music as a drug-fueled, anti-patriotic group, Haggard did present very direct words with how he characterized what he called hippies or those who were part of the protest ideology.⁴⁰ Haggard displayed patriotism in his music, but he did have progressive lyrics in his song "Irma Jackson." This song embodied themes of interracial relationship in the face of societal challenges during the period. It highlighted Haggard's lyrical growth with his expounding on social injustices even in the country music genre that had been slower to encompass diversity during the period. This song highlighted the freedom that Haggard had at Capital records even though his producer, Ken Nelson, did not approve of the song on an album due to the controversial subject of an interracial relationship. However, it was on his album *Let Me Tell You About a Song* released in 1972.⁴¹ The song provided a progressive theme to Haggard's album expressing an honest and emotional connection to a social injustice of the period. The lyrics revealed the culture of the time by stating:

I'd love to shout my feelin's from a mountain high
Tell the world I love her and I will till I die
There's no way the world will understand that love is colour blind

³⁹ "Merle Haggard – the Fightin' Side of Me," Merle Haggard "The Fighin Side of Me," accessed August 30, 2023, <https://genius.com/Merle-haggard-the-fightin-side-of-me-lyrics>.

⁴⁰ Jennifer Reiko, "The Political Message behind Merle Haggard's 'Okie from Muskogee.'" *Classic Country Music*, May 13, 2020. <https://classiccountrymusic.com/the-political-message-behind-merle-haggards-okie-from-muskogee/>.

⁴¹ "Merle Haggard." *Billboard*. 89, no. 7 (1977).

That's why Irma Jackson can't be mine
 I remember when no one cared about us bein' friends
 We were only children and it really didn't matter then
 But we grew up too quickly in a world that draws a line
 Where they say Irma Jackson can't be mine
 If my lovin' Irma Jackson is a sin
 Then I don't understand this crazy world we're living in⁴²

Each genre took its own stance towards specific events during this period. The rock genre had music that presented lyrics and message of the opposition to the draft with songs, such as “Fortunate Son” by Creedence Clearwater Revival, which stated “some folks are born silver spoon in hand.”⁴³ “Fortunate Son” showed support to those who served and disdain towards privileged children who were able to avoid the draft. The “Draft Dodger Rag” by Phil Ochs expressed the other element of those who chose to find their own way to dodge being drafted. Ochs placed every means for avoiding the draft in his song. The humor used drove the seriousness of the political message intended in the lyrics. The Doors’ song “The Unknown Soldier” was a juxtaposition to show the dying soldiers as life went on as normal in America. The quickly advancing technologies presented the ability for this message to be spread on a global scale, including to the American soldiers drafted into the combat zone of Vietnam.⁴⁴ There were elements of the draft that caused some to find ways to dodge the draft to fight in Vietnam. The emergence of a generational divide appeared in the music of this period. In his book, *Battle Notes: Music of the Vietnam War*, Lee Anderson discussed this cultural aspect that echoed in the music. Highlighting this culture shift of defiance between parents and children, he wrote:

⁴² “Irma Jackson,” Merle Haggard - Irma Jackson Lyrics | Lyrics.com, accessed May 20, 2024, <https://www.lyrics.com/lyric/1443044/Merle+Haggard/Irma+Jackson>.

⁴³ “Creedence Clearwater Revival – Fortunate Son,” Genius, accessed January 19, 2024, <https://genius.com/Creedence-clearwater-revival-fortunate-son-lyrics>.

⁴⁴ “Hanoi Tapes made in U.S.: ‘Freedom fighter’ prepared anti-war broadcast.” *The Baltimore Sun* (1837-), Feb 09, 1966. 1.

The anti-war movement seemed to be predominantly composed of the young who often found themselves at odds with their parents who were more cautious about criticizing the government's policy in Vietnam and were often deeply offended by their offspring's anti-war views. This led to bitter arguments and even estrangement between children and their parents in families already troubled by the well-known "generation gap." Victor Lundberg's "Open Letter to My Teenage Son" describes a veritable chasm that has opened up between a dad and his male offspring, who is apparently contemplating growing a beard and/or long hair, the notion that God is dead and burning his draft card.⁴⁵

The Vietnam War became a peak conflict that created a deep divide of opinions on the proper handling of the situation. This music provided a medium to express the opinions on the events occurring. This provided a new role for the artists and challenged the cleverness of the artists to create these lyrical messages that could also appeal to a large demographic. The ability to publicly express an opinion through lyrics regarding the conflict of Vietnam created an important archive of powerful lyrical ballads, providing not only powerful messages that would be used not only to fuel future cultural movements globally but also to examine as an historical element regarding the cultural climate of this period. The cultural transformation of Americans who had reservations on the political decision of the period began to play out through the music of the time. Motown had joined the revolution with the anti-war movement. The song by Edwin Starr "War" showed the impact of the music beyond genres and into the shifting movement from civil rights to black power that was occurring after the death of Martin Luther King Jr. These songs showed their commitment against what they believed was morally wrong, such as the war in Vietnam.⁴⁶ Starr was explicit in his feeling about war. That is expressed so well in his song.

He sings:

War, I despise/Cause it means destruction of innocent lives/War means tears to thousands of mothers' eyes/when their sons go off to fight/and lose their lives/...It ain't nothing but a heart-breaken/(War) Friend only to the Undertaker/Oh, War its an enemy to all

⁴⁵ Lee Anderson, *Battle Notes: Music of the Vietnam War*. (Superior, WI: Savage Press, 2003), 34.

⁴⁶ Charles E. Sykes, "The Black Forum Label: Motown Joins the Revolution." *ARSC Journal* 46, no. 1 (2015), 11-12.

mankind/... War has caused unrest/within the younger generation/Induction then destruction...⁴⁷

The soldiers also heard the words of this music. The music made its way to Vietnam via tapes, where the music and news were broadcast for soldiers to be able to listen and hear the music from the states as well as the information from the headlines that communicated the anti-war sentiment. This ability to communicate audibly the music and information over radio waves to the soldiers in the jungles of the combat zone created a unique element with this communication through the music. The advancing technology of tapes provided this ability to quickly share music.⁴⁸ The music was driving a social movement.

Historians were split on the historical scholarship surrounding the music and its connection to the cultural movements of the 1960s into different opposing viewpoints. These historians either disagree or agree that the music protest impacted the anti-war movement or that the music interconnected with a major cultural shift against the conflict. There are also historians who dispute the ability of the propaganda lyrics in protest music of having any impact on societal movements as a myth. The argument that music has a low impact as opposed to the claim that music impacted the social movement of protest during this period was evident in the article "Takin' Care of Business": Rock Music, Vietnam and the Protest Myth." The counterculture had strong demographic support within of the upper middle class younger generation. This generation's relationship with the rise of counterculture was due to their circumstances not their anti-war stance. This is evident in the student movement that attached itself to the anti-war movement. The relationship of the Vietnam War and its influence on the protest culture was

⁴⁷ "AZLyrics - Request for Access," AZLyrics.com, accessed April 6, 2022, <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/edwinstarr/war.html>.

⁴⁸ "Hanoi Tapes made in U.S.: 'Freedom fighter' prepared anti-war broadcast." *The Baltimore Sun* (1837-), Feb 09, 1966. 1.

evident in the opposition to the American involvement in global issues. The rise of the counterculture of the decade of the 1960s and the protest music aligned with a surge in opinions of political discourse and domestic social change. The use of music to convey a message across the country with the advancement of technology was unprecedented.⁴⁹ The narrative of the lyrics expressing opinions on the events provided a dialogue among genres in the 1960s regarding the reflection of an event. These interpretations of the events in the lyrics that songwriters created provided music and a message for the listeners, and even the soldiers serving in Vietnam heard the frustrations through the lyrics. It gave a voice to listeners that commiserated with their reality. The lyrical dialogue presented what some people collectively agreed or experienced, such as the draft. The music of the Vietnam War era became a reflection of the cultural change occurring during that time period. The support or dismay towards the conflict of Vietnam echoed in the lyrics of the music. In the country music genre, Porter Wagner released “Green, Green, Grass of Home” in 1965. Although the lyrics of the song are from the perspective of a prisoner returning home, many soldiers identified with the song with the loneliness felt with their return home.⁵⁰ The album review in the *Billboard* 1968 January edition

⁴⁹ The scholarship by historians about the impact contends that the music protest propelled the anti-war movement and became tightly intertwined. Conversely, since the close of the conflict, there are some historians who have debated the hype of the protest in music as a myth. Limited schools of thought concerning the meaning and extent of the effect of protest music of the Vietnam War have been debated since the end of the conflict. Classical historians agree with the impact of the music to the social movement, and non-classical argues it was a product of the social movement or a myth. Classical historical thoughts include Ben Arnold, "War Music and the American Composer during the Vietnam Era." *The Musical Quarterly* 75, no. 3 (1991): 316-335, Sarah Kraaz, *Music, and War in the United States*. (Taylor and Francis, 2018), Beate Kutschke and Barley Norton, *Music and Protest in 1968*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), James E. Perone, *Songs of the Vietnam Conflict*. Vol. 83. (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2001) Non-classical thoughts include Kenneth J. Bindas and Craig Houston. "'Takin' Care of Business": Rock Music, Vietnam and the Protest Myth." *The Historian* (Kingston) 52, no. 1 (1989): 1-23, Timothy Kubal and Rene Becerra. "Social Movements and Collective Memory." *Sociology Compass* 8, no. 6 (2014): 865-875, Bruce Dancis, *Resister: A Story of Protest and Prison during the Vietnam War*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), and Penny Lewis. *Hardhats, Hippies, and Hawks: The Vietnam Antiwar Movement as Myth and Memory*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).

⁵⁰ FelinFach, “Green, Green, Grass Lyrics,” FelinFach, accessed December 19, 2023, <https://www.felinfach.com/pages/green-green-grass-of-home>

noted the song as one of the best on the album.⁵¹ "The Ballad of the Green Berets" by Barry Sadler was an example of a song that provided support or presented a patriotic element within its lyrics stating, "These are men, America's best."⁵² The popularity of this song was evident in the certification of gold status in March 1966 after its release in January 1966.⁵³ The anti-war lyrics released began to gain momentum towards the end of the decade. The rise of the opposing music lyrics regarding the protest music was an example of the divided nature of the American culture during this period to the point of the different sides expressing their stand through the music. The outlaw artists took their experience of this period of shift and became a reflection of the working-class demographic while also trying to address the social issue and bridge a topic. This was evident in the song "The Ballad of Ira Hayes," that not only blended the patriotic mentality but also revealed the social injustices faced by Native Americans.⁵⁴ However, overlooking the utilization of the music to rally and encourage support of the movement sometimes occurred.

The use of music in America to resist change in society became a common theme in the 1960s. This relationship of music and culture in the United States provided insight into the culture of society. The uniqueness that arose in the latter part of the 20th century resulted due to the widening divide between different viewpoints on issues. The music in America provided insight to the struggles and protests in society. The debate among the public on how to handle the rights or freedoms of those outside of the United States became a key element of protest music. The increased involvement in the Vietnam War and the rise in draft that affected a larger group of people caused questions on the appropriate role of the United States *globally*. The opposition

⁵¹ Album review. *Billboard*. January 6, 1968.

⁵² "Barry Sadler – Ballad of the Green Berets," Genius, accessed December 30, 2023, <https://genius.com/Barry-sadler-ballad-of-the-green-berets-lyrics>.

⁵³ "The Ballad of the Green have turned to gold" *Billboard* March 5, 1966.

⁵⁴ John M. Alexander, *The Man in Song: A Discographic Biography of Johnny Cash*, (University of Arkansas Press, 2018), 57.

to the pursuit of preserving freedom outside of the United States and its costs was what fueled the music of the 1960s for both sides. The lack of certainty of whether these societies preferred democracy or the American-termed freedom created doubt for support of conflict to ensure freedom. The songwriters of this period used music as the platform to give a voice to the changing opinion that had veered away from the unified support for military actions.⁵⁵ The relationship between music and society can evolve over time. The global changes in the 1960s that coincided with political turmoil and technology shifts resulted in greater need for the voice of the differing opinions to have an avenue for its message. It eventually found its way into musical lyrics and into the American culture.

The powerful relationship of music to the culture as a reaction to political change revealed itself globally during this period.⁵⁶ However, it was on American soil that events that were averse to political decisions would end up in the lyrics of songs. The student anti-war protests that took place on the campus of Kent State in Ohio with violent response from the national guard evoked a lyrical response. The students had gathered at the school in protest to express their opposition against the United States for the invasion of Cambodia that had just been announced by President Nixon.⁵⁷ Details of such a tragic event quickly moved into the musical airwaves through Neil Young's "Ohio." This song used the typical storytelling style of country

⁵⁵ Timothy E. Scheurer, *Born in the U.S.A.: The Myth of America in Popular Music from Colonial Times to the Present*, Kindle (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), 2382.

⁵⁶ The cultural reactions presented during this period through music focused on the country Chile that faced major political changes at the end of the 1960s. The evidence of an established connection to the lyrics stimulated the collective cultural sentiment in Chile. This is evident by historian Steven Volk, in his book *Chilean New Song: The Political Power of Music, 1960s–1973*. He presented a strong case in the area of Chile by connecting its social and political movement to the influence of the use music to send a message to the citizens. He provided evidence that outside of the United States in the country of Chile during the same period the music pumped out through the radio and other technologies made it possible for the musical message to be easily distributed. Volk argued the musical message did help in the transformation of the changes in Chilean politics. Steven S. Volk, *Chilean New Song: The Political Power of Music, 1960s–1973*. (San Francisco: Social Justice, 2016).

⁵⁷ David Browne, "After the Kent State Massacre, 'Ohio' Spoke to the Country -- and Helped Save CSNY," *Rolling Stone* (Rolling Stone, May 3, 2020), <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/kent-state-massacre-neil-young-csny-ohio-history-992126/>.

music. The blending of sounds while presenting a message of the emotional response to the event experienced had an impact on artists of the period, including the outlaw musicians. This song released the same month of the casualties of Kent State expressed the sentiment of anti-war movement and its effect on American soil.⁵⁸ This showed the quick lyrical response to the events that were happening. During this period of the Vietnam War, the musical response became either a disagreement or a message with strong support for troops.⁵⁹ As this conflict progressed, this lyrical response resulted from the political decisions that impacted the American people through things with direct impact to them, such as the draft. This period provided advancing technology that was facilitating the use of the lyrical message to create change or echo the social movements. This period that showed a shift in the culture was not limited to the United States nor the use of music isolated within the borders of the United States. This supports the importance of using music to spread the message.

There was much to fuel the opposition heard in the lyrics. The 1960s had tragedies of assassinations and violence within in the borders of the United States as society established changes with the civil rights movement. The images of the conflict in Vietnam were on the nightly news.⁶⁰ In the past Americans had been supportive in their reaction to military engagements. However, during this period the ballad of music linked these social ideas together nationwide.⁶¹ This was a direct result of this generation, including the soldiers in Vietnam, having much better access to the music being distributed. The lyrical dissent communicated in

⁵⁸ David Browne, "After the Kent State Massacre, 'Ohio' Spoke to the Country -- and Helped Save CSNY," *Rolling Stone* (Rolling Stone, May 3, 2020), <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/kent-state-massacre-neil-young-csny-ohio-history-992126/>.

⁵⁹ Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 12.

⁶⁰ "Justin Brummer, Phd," Vietnam War: My Lai & Lt. William Calley Songs, accessed February 17, 2023, <https://www.justinbrummer.com/projects/429-vietnam-war-my-lai-lt-william-calley-songs>.

⁶¹ James H. Willbanks, *Vietnam War the Essential Reference Guide*. (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2013), 16.

the genres not only fueled a social movement by spreading the communication of collective sentiment but also categorized distinct political beliefs much more divisive.

Events were occurring that exacerbated the divisiveness. In 1968, events even globally, such as the My Lai massacre, became a public trial for the actions of the military personnel involved. Once the appalling behaviors of some of the soldiers in Vietnam became public, the songwriters expressed their disapproval of the situation in the music.⁶² My Lai massacre involved Lieutenant William Calley, who led the first platoon into a village in Vietnam. Although the defense and prosecutor debated the massacre in the court room, the appalling fact coming from the debate to many Americans was that the American soldiers had killed hundreds of villagers, including women and children.⁶³ This event captivated the nation and songwriters responded with their songs by trying to make sense of the horrid situation as well as the consequences of those involved.⁶⁴ As information regarding the My Lai massacre began to become public, inspired songs that directly referenced the event resulted. This event alone inspired over ninety songs.⁶⁵ The rumble of change flowed through the airways across America. The event had been suppressed from public knowledge until the trial accusing soldiers of the massacre occurred. The public interest grew on the topic due to the timing of the trial, which occurred at the height of the social movement climate against the war. The lyrics of the music conveyed the horrors of this atrocious event occurring in Vietnam. An example of the actions was in the song "Now or Never" by Yoko Ono that did not point to a specific event, but the

⁶² "Justin Brummer, Phd," Vietnam War: My Lai & Lt. William Calley Songs, accessed February 17, 2023, <https://www.justinbrummer.com/projects/429-vietnam-war-my-lai-lt-william-calley-songs>.

⁶³ Kendrick Oliver, "Atrocity, Authenticity and American Exceptionalism: (Ir)Rationalising the Massacre at My Lai." *Journal of American Studies* 37, no. 2 (08, 2003): 247-68, 247.

⁶⁴ Carol Becker, "Pilgrimage to My Lai: Social Memory and the Making of Art." *Art Journal* 62, no. 4 (Winter, 2003, 55.

⁶⁵ "Justin Brummer, Phd," Vietnam War: My Lai & Lt. William Calley Songs, accessed February 17, 2023, <https://www.justinbrummer.com/projects/429-vietnam-war-my-lai-lt-william-calley-songs>.

single had the photograph of civilian bodies taken by a military photographer as the featured artwork for the single. Other songs, such as “Pinkville Helicopter,” that stated, “As they flew over Pinkville, the choppers could see the slaughter going on down below them.”⁶⁶ “The Cry of My Lai” also depicted the scenes of carnage with lyrics like this, “There in a ditch in My Lai, a small baby cried.”⁶⁷ These songs provided a more direct approach within the lyrics in the vivid description of the massacre.⁶⁸ The message presented reflected this inhumane act that occurred at the hands of United States military. These songs noted the horrors; however, there were songs that presented a message of defending the soldiers’ actions, such as C Company featuring Terry Nelson’s recording of “The Battle Hymn of Lt. Calley.” This song carried the beat of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” specifically defending the actions of Lieutenant William Calley. The lyrics presented the side of society that sympathized with the experiences that the soldiers were facing in Vietnam. The song depicted the idea that the actions of Calley resulted from the lack of rules from the opposing side. Supportive of the soldiers, the lyric state:

I've seen my buddies ambushed
 On the left, and on the right
 And their youthful bodies riddled
 By the bullets of the night
 Where all the rules are broken
 And the only law is might
 As we go marching on⁶⁹

The lyrics did have a cultural impact as the message most often expressed blame for the actions occurring in Vietnam on the leadership. The release date of 1971 provided evidence of

⁶⁶ “Pinkville Helicopter (Full Song & Lyrics) - Thom Parrott - Download or Listen Free,” JioSaavn, accessed December 27, 2023, <https://www.jiosaavn.com/lyrics/pinkville-helicopter-lyrics/BQQkegBkY2M>.

⁶⁷ “Ivan Lee - The Cry of My Lai,” Antiwar Songs (AWS), accessed December 27, 2024, <https://www.antiwarsons.org/canzone.php?id=49252&lang=en>.

⁶⁸ “Music of My Lai,” PBS, accessed December 20, 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/my-lai-music-of-my-lai/>.

⁶⁹ “C Company – Battle Hymn of Lt. Calley.” Genius. Accessed December 20, 2023. <https://genius.com/C-company-battle-hymn-of-lt-calley-lyrics>.

the continued public debate on the actions in Vietnam. This lyrical message of the song defended the central player of the situation by arguing Calley had been the victim of following his duty as a soldier and obeying orders, which hinted to leadership being to blame. This provided a common thread for both sides on the lyrical dialogue. This song also showed evidence of the sentiment present in the country music genre of the support of the troops during this period.

Conversely, this theme of taking the blame away from Calley was not present in the folk music genre. The music of this period had lyrics that described the cultural temperament of this cultural shift and aligned groups of people together with the same ideologies.⁷⁰ The folk genre presented a lyrical message that took a stance to hold Calley responsible for the occurrence. This was evident in Pete Seeger's "Last Train to Nuremburg." The blame was not isolated to just Calley. This questioning the leadership was clear in the lyrics stating, "Who gave the orders? Who planned the campaign to lay waste to the land?"⁷¹ Seeger was an example of the quick response to the event, sharing the sentiment of questioning the leadership, which was a common thread of the sentiment of the culture from all angles. This was also echoed in Haggard's songs, which reflected the tone of questioning the leadership.

Country, rock, and folk music were involved in the messages that echoed these rising opinions during the 1960s. This period was important in understanding not only how the culture relationship in music emerged but also how historians examined this relationship. The reason the music and lyrics were so powerful in the 1960s was that several genres not only showed a lyrical response to the reform and political change but also showed the response and dialogue among

⁷⁰ Ryan J. Kirkby, "Dramatic Protests, Creative Communities: VVAW and the Expressive Politics of the Sixties Counterculture." *Peace and Change* 40, no. 1 (2015), 44.

⁷¹ "Pete Seeger – Last Train to Nuremberg," Genius, accessed November 24, 2023, <https://genius.com/Pete-seeger-last-train-to-nuremberg-lyrics>.

genres regarding the political and culture shift.⁷² The message in the music usually aligned on the topic but during this period was present either with clear support or opposition on an opinion. This period experienced the departure of collective majority opinion, leading to distinct opposing sides that arose when understanding the persuasive aspect of the music on the cultural movement and became a debated topic among classical historians. Ben Arnold, a music historian, discussed this aspect in “War Music and the American Composer during the Vietnam Era.” Arnold explained the historical use of music during wartime throughout history. The conflict in Vietnam became a visual conflict with televisions being used to share visually the events of Vietnam. The public’s opinions began to reflect the raw emotion rising to the surface as the music created rhythm to the opinions. Arnold presented his argument by noting the social movements settled into the anti-war movement with the rock and roll genre music and folk music as the key genres with protest music. Arnold also stated that early in the conflict there were musical pieces that supported the conflict in Vietnam. Examples that Arnold presented as supportive of the war were “Ballad of the Green Berets” and “Wish you were Here, Buddy.”⁷³ These songs exhibited the pride and support towards the military as well as revealing that the soldiers faced sacrifices in their duty. Although these songs appeared during the earlier stages of the war, he referred to the later one “The Ballad of Lt. Calley” being released in 1971 but also noted this was not so much pro-war but showed Calley was the scapegoat.⁷⁴ Even within the opposition, the genres continued the division with their own focus on the atrocities of the conflict. The rock music tended to have the opposition to the draft, which was evident with the lyrical message of

⁷² Lily Rothman, “The Vietnam War: Why That Conflict Produced Iconic Music,” *Time* (Time, September 27, 2017), <https://time.com/4949617/music-vietnam-war/>.

⁷³ Ben Arnold, “War Music and the American Composer during the Vietnam Era.” *The Musical Quarterly* 75, no. 3 (1991), 320.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

“Fortunate Son.” This song expressed in the lyrics the benefits of having the good fortune of having a connection to keep the ‘son’ out of the draft to Vietnam. Folk music seemed to have a deeper opposition to the collective political decisions, including but not limited to the conflict in southeast Asia. Pete Seeger expressed this sentiment in his songs “Bring ‘em Home” and “Waist Deep in the Big Muddy.” The lyric stated, “And the big fool said to push on.” This reflected the questioning of authority even in the midst of war in Vietnam.⁷⁵

The lyrical significance during the latter part of the 20th century communicated in the message of music created a melody of collective sentiment. However, that sentiment also undergirded the major shift in American society with the increase of divisiveness of political beliefs. The historical significance of analyzing the music to present the cultural climate provided insight on the culture of multiple demographics of society. As a result of the folk genre having strong political opinions during this period, it became the genre that helped fulfill the need of people to have their opinions heard. Pete Seeger stated, “YOU AND I MUST BE HEARD. THE PEACE-LOVING AMERICAN PEOPLE, ALL COLORS AND KINDS, MUST BE HEARD.”⁷⁶ The singers provided the rhythm to help spread the message. The turbulent societal changes needed a way to be expressed. The genres aligned their message with the listeners of their music to get their message out. The Vietnam War was one of the major events that began to transform the relationship between the music and social movement against the conflict. Although the music did not cause the social movement, music connected people through the message in the lyrics. The use of the lyrical message through the music created a delicate relationship between the listeners and the songwriters. The movements that arose during this

⁷⁵ “Pete Seeger – Waist Deep in the Big Muddy,” Genius, accessed December 27, 2023, <https://genius.com/Pete-seeger-waist-deep-in-the-big-muddy-lyrics>.

⁷⁶ Pete Seeger, et al. *Pete Seeger in His Own Words*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2012, 139.

period not only depended on the music as a way to share their message but also used it to understand the events that were occurring. The music presented the temperament of discontent with events arising in society. Certain groups of the American people were experiencing the consequences of these events. The African Americans faced struggles with push back of not only the civil rights movement in certain areas but also of those serving in Vietnam.⁷⁷ The youth of America with the highest risk of being involved or knowing someone drafted became more involved in forming an opinion. The longevity of Vietnam created rising questions from different demographics on the necessity or value of the involvement in Vietnam. These cultural groups aligned together strengthening the impact of the movement.⁷⁸

An examination of the lyrical message revealed the songwriter's reaction to the events, which resulted in communicating the sentiments in music. The messages created among genres established a general demographic of listeners to each genre. This alignment of listener demographics in the genres allowed later movements, such as the outlaw movement in the country music genre, to express cultural representation through the opinions expressed in the lyrics. The lyrics also expressed the American public's opinions through the music, and the events provided the narrative for the lyrical background. These songs for both protest music and anti-protest music created an innovated way to get the message out by using advancing technology to challenge the norm and creating diversity in reflection of the events. The lyrics expressed a strong opinion on the political climate of the situation in Vietnam. The grassroot movements effectively used this message against the establishment that controlled the

⁷⁷ Paul Tewkesbury, "A Time to Break Literary Silence: Lessons from the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam in Anthony Grooms's *Bombingham*." *African American Review* 52, no. 2 (2019), 168-170.

⁷⁸ Ryan J. Kirkby, "Dramatic Protests, Creative Communities: VVAW and the Expressive Politics of the Sixties Counterculture." *Peace and Change* 40, no. 1 (2015), 44.

information.⁷⁹ The unique thing about this period was it created different sides and elements of support or disagreements of events across a spectrum of people from all walks of life who gravitated to their own choice of a music genre that pumped out the message with which they agreed.

The analysis of the genres provided insight into the message in the genres. The anti-war movement impacted how music expressed the cultural tone during this period and revealed how adamantly opposed this group was to the involvement in the Vietnam War. This movement had a strong connection to the folk genre. A key figure in the folk music genre of the anti-war music was Joan Baez. She was one of the more well-known folk singers of the anti-war movement. When she first began her advocacy, she focused on civil rights, a key issue in the 1960s. However, as the war continued, Baez shifted her attention to the anti-war movement as the decade and the conflict in Vietnam continued. Among her songs of resistance were “Saigon Bride” and “Song for David.” Throughout her career Baez used music and non-violent activism to push against violation of human rights or inhuman treatment in the world.⁸⁰ This example of a shift in the opinions expressed in the folk music genre revealed that music can be at the forefront of cultural change when the various demographics are focused on the same issue.

The debate toward the war presented in the lyrics of the period communicated the emotions that the listeners agreed with regarding the events and involvement of the United States during this turbulent period. Warren Goldstein, a history professor at University of Hartford, discussed this emotional element as a healing method to handle the situation of the Vietnam War.⁸¹ The different approaches by the different genres provided insight to the disillusionment of

⁷⁹ Charles Kaiser, *1968 in America Music, Politics, Chaos, Counterculture, and the Shaping of a Generation*. (New York: Grove Press, 2012), 208.

⁸⁰ Joan Baez, *And a Voice to Sing With* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 150.

⁸¹ Warren Goldstein. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 55, no. 14 (2008): B.20.

the situation in Vietnam by questioning why the soldiers were there. Goldstein presented the observation that the psychological element during this cultural shift occurred not only in the lyrics of the music but also in the sounds.⁸² A musical analysis of Jimi Hendrix's guitar playing at Woodstock revealed the intention was probably to create the sound of explosions.⁸³ The culture shift that had begun with the American people had found a way not only to express but also to heal through the words and sounds of the music.

The folk music genre grew in popularity due to the lyrical message of support of the anti-war movement that was uniting the listeners. In the folk music genre, singers and songwriters used their musical platform to convey the opposition to the war in their music. Phil Ochs, a popular folk music singer and songwriter, used his music to share his message of discontent. As the folk genre and country music genre had strong roots in their background, Ochs revealed the influence from some of the country music artists of his time, including Hank Williams and rock and roll influences, such as Buddy Holly.⁸⁴ His song "Draft Dodger Rag" can possibly be his most popular as well as one of the most controversial songs. In the lyrics of the song, he discussed reasons used to avoid being drafted. These lyrics described the cultural shift in American society during this period of avoiding the military draft. This military service avoidance culture being expressed in this song released in 1965, which was before the height of the anti-war, revealed a shift in the attitude towards the draft that was much different than in previous decades in the United States. This particular song and anti-draft sentiment reached listeners before the use of daily drawing of lottery numbers appeared later in the decade. His

⁸² Steven S. Volk, 2015. "A Season of Anger." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 30.

⁸³ Wayne Pernu, "Star Spangled Banner - Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock: The Anthem of a Generation," The Official Jimi Hendrix Site, February 24, 2023, <https://www.jimihendrix.com/editorial/star-spangled-banner-jimi-hendrix-at-woodstock-the-anthem-of-a-generation/>.

⁸⁴ Terence J. O'Grady, "Ochs, Phil (1940-1976), folksinger and songwriter." *American National Biography*. 1 Feb. 2000.

songs along with others brought attention to a war that the American people had become weary of as it affected them daily on a personal level through the draft that was taking people, they knew to the other side of a world to fight a conflict they did not understand. Although Ochs did not live past the age of 35, he did survive to see the last of the United States military pull out of Vietnam in the 1970s.⁸⁵ His music along with others had been a contributing factor to this event.

The folk genre music continued to evolve in the 1960s with the use of symbolism and the use of music as protest. Bob Dylan is one of the early folk musicians in this era who used symbolism and traditional ideology of the American spirit from poets, such as Emerson and Whitman, to influence his early music.⁸⁶ The study of poems to examine the specific period and society of the time can be useful to historians. Carolyn Steedman, a British historian, studied poetry, specifically by W.H. Auden, to understand the ethical decisions about public events and moral dilemmas.⁸⁷ Music is poetry set to a melody and can reflect the changes occurring in society. An example of this is in the lyrics of Dylan's song "The Times They Are A-Changin'." His message spoke of cultural changes early in this dynamic decade of the 1960s in his song. The song was released in 1961 at the early part of the decade as many changes globally, politically, economically, and scientifically were still in the early stages or had not occurred yet. It was clear that Dylan understood the shifting of society and culture during this period. Dylan mastered the ability to create music in which symbolism allowed the listener to utilize it for a movement for themselves. An excerpt of the lyrics from the song stated:

Come writers and critics/Who prophesize with your pen/And keep your eyes wide/
The chance won't come again/ And don't speak too soon/ For the wheel's still in spin/

⁸⁵ Terence J. O'Grady, "Ochs, Phil (1940-1976), folksinger and songwriter." *American National Biography*. 1 Feb. 2000.

⁸⁶ James Dunlap, "Through the Eyes of Tom Joad: Patterns of American Idealism, Bob Dylan, and the Folk Protest Movement." *Popular Music and Society* 29, no. 5 (2006), 552.

⁸⁷ Carolyn Steedman. *Poetry for Historians: Or, W. H. Auden and History*, (Manchester University Press, 2018), 230.

And there's no tellin' who that it's namin'/ For the loser now will be later to win/ For the times they are a-changin'/ Come senators, congressmen/ Please heed the call/ Don't stand in the doorway/ Don't block up the hall/ For he that gets hurt/ Will be he who has stalled There's a battle outside and it is ragin'/ It'll soon shake your windows/ And rattle your walls/ For the times they are a-changin'⁸⁸

Similarly, this mood of disgruntlement was washing over the country music genre. The country music genre typically presented the struggles of warfare without opposing it in some of the early songs in the 1960s. For example, Loretta Lynn became the artist who originally introduced this topic to the country music genre by having an open discussion of the global event of the Vietnam War in her song, "Dear Uncle Sam."⁸⁹ In Lynn's song, she presented the perspective of the struggles of the women left behind by the men shipped off to the war zone.⁹⁰ This song became timeless as Lynn's song had lyrics that resonated with modern generations on the emotions faced by family left at home as the military members continued to be sent to fight wars in different parts of the world. The unique element of the country music genre was that its music resonated with the average American. This song on a lyrical level from its introduction time period provided insight into the mentality that was occurring earlier in the Vietnam conflict. This also provided cultural parallelism for this frame of mind for United States citizens who faced having a loved one be in any combat zone even into the modern era. Lynn did not categorize herself as an outlaw but in an interview in 2018 responded, "I was writing and singing about topics that meant something to me and my life. Thank goodness that millions of other women felt the same way. Anybody who sings their truth is an outlaw."⁹¹ The truths presented in the lyrics were truths for the working-class families, and the idea was outlaw as it went beyond

⁸⁸ "The Times They Are A-Changin': The Official Bob Dylan Site," The Times They Are A-Changin' | The Official Bob Dylan Site, accessed May 5, 2022, <https://www.bobdylan.com/songs/times-they-are-changin/>.

⁸⁹ Bill DeMain, "Loretta Lynn Talking about Her Songs." *The Performing Songwriter* 12 (12, 2004): 55.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 56.

⁹¹ "Loretta Lynn: An Original Outlaw's Advice – Spotify for Artists," – Spotify for Artists, accessed May 21, 2024, <https://artists.spotify.com/en/blog/loretta-lynn-an-original-outlaws-advice>.

the status quo to present the truths and question the reason it resonated with the audiences and listeners. It provided a poetic soundtrack to the culture of society and the struggles or even triumphs. Lynn's most famous ballad that became a movie and soundtrack was "Coal Miner's Daughter." This true story of her background provided insight into the struggles endured and the ability to persevere to survive and have each other as family.⁹² These truths resonated with the working-class families that endured similar struggles. The outlaw theme even before it became labeled a movement had artists, like Lynn, providing what defined the movement in presenting honesty within the lyrics that expressed a culture within the working-class Americans.

The outlaw musicians wanted to obtain some of the lyrical freedom that the artists of the folk genre and the rock and roll genre had experienced as a result of the counterculture movement of the 1960s. The listeners enjoyed hearing the truths and emotion of personal experiences from the artists, and it was not isolated to folk and country. This spread to other genres to express the sentiment of the culture through lyrics. Similar to Loretta Lynn, some artists used their own personal experiences. Reflection of society and emotions were evident during this period even in the Rhythm and Blues (R&B) genre. The R & B genre had music that discussed anti-war or protest music. Artist Marvin Gay used his reflection from the letters he received from his brother serving in Vietnam to pen his breakout song "What's Going On."⁹³ These lyrics provided details of the challenges faced by society and the continued division in society while also conveying the message of acceptance and love. This can be seen in the following stanzas of the song:

Mother, mother/There's too many of you crying/ Brother, brother, brother
There's far too many of you dying/ You know we've got to find a way
To bring some lovin' here today - yeah

⁹² "The Story behind Loretta Lynn's 'Coal Miner's Daughter,'" NPR, April 16, 2000, <https://www.npr.org/2000/04/16/1072994/coal-miners-daughter>.

⁹³ Gillian G. Gaar, "Marvin Gaye: What's Going on." *Goldmine*, 03, 2011. 24.

Father, father/We don't need to escalate/You see, war is not the answer
 For only love can conquer hate/You know we've got to find a way
 To bring some lovin' here today, oh (Oh)⁹⁴

The lyrical response to global and local events that followed the end of World War II began to emerge in the lyrics of the music of the 1960s. The country music genre had internal struggles of the 1960s. The influence of lyrics in songs sharing a message affected a diverse split from the status quo in the culture of Americans that echoed in the different genres. All genres worked towards presenting the lyrics and the music to what their specific audience wanted to hear. The quickly advancing technologies provided the outlet to reach larger groups of people. In the country music genre, the music reflected the evolving mentality of the working-class Americans. This introduced a method to align opinions through the use of music. Country music endured its own changes in the sound, and an internal debate ensued on keeping the traditional sound heard in the popular songs in the 1950s. The changes began to evolve. Willie Nelson had established himself as a songwriter, including the smash hit “Crazy,” sung by Patsy Cline, that topped the charts in 1961.⁹⁵ Cline had another song “I Fall to Pieces” along with “Crazy” were two popular songs before her untimely death in a plane crash.⁹⁶ Nelson, during the 1960s, had the clean-cut look much different to the rugged look he took on later in his career. The introduction of the Nashville sound during this period that moved away from the traditional sounds of the country music genre resulted from the record executives making many of the decisions on the music during the period of the 1960s.⁹⁷ However, the country music artists

⁹⁴ “AZLyrics- ‘Whats going on” AZLyrics.com, accessed April 6, 2022, <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/marvingaye/whatsgoingon.html>.

⁹⁵ James E. Perone, "'Crazy' (Song, 1961)." In *Pop Culture Universe: Icons, Idols, Ideas*, ABC-CLIO, 2023. Accessed November 16, 2023. <https://popculture2-abc--clio-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/Search/Display/2247620>.

⁹⁶ Warren R. Hofstra, *Sweet Dreams: The World of Patsy Cline*, (University of Illinois Press, 2013), 2.

⁹⁷ Joli Jensen, *The Nashville Sound: Authenticity, Commercialization, and Country Music* (Nashville: The Country Music Foundation Press; Vanderbilt UP, 1998), 80.

wanted the record industry to ensure the marketability of the sound of the music. The introduction of the new pop sound created its own division within the country music genre with the artists trying to establish their own sound. Superseding the desires of the artists was Chet Atkins, who became the record image guru controlling the style and targeting the audience during the 1960s.⁹⁸ This move in country music negated artistic freedom. The 1960s evolved into what it was due to Chet Atkins, RCA Records, and his performance role in the Nashville sound. This move towards suppressing the traditional sound and softening the steel guitar and fiddle became the country pop that helped increase the popularity of the music.⁹⁹ The intention was for this sound to grasp the expanded geographical changes that occurred following the end of World War II. The rise of suburbs and the need to relocate for jobs moved many of the generational geographic locations that isolated the country music genre to a geographic location, like the South, to having country music fans all over the nation.

The spread of people geographically created influences outside of the historically influential South in the country music genre. Gram Parsons made it his mission to create a new separate sound that he termed “Cosmic American Music.” This sound would influence many artists and bands beyond the country music genre, and they would term it “country rock.”¹⁰⁰ The change in the record industry for the country music genre resulted from challengers from other geographic areas, such as Capital Records in Bakersfield, California. The rise of this sound coming out of California had the influences of the Oklahoma music.¹⁰¹ One artist, Merle Haggard, had become one of the leading artists who blended the original sound and had artistic

⁹⁸ Michael Jarrett, *Producing Country: The Inside Story of the Great Recordings*, (Wesleyan University Press, 2014), 376.

⁹⁹ Scott Derks, *This Is Who We Were* (Amenia, NY: Grey House Publishing, Inc., 2015), 174.

¹⁰⁰ Grimshaw, Michael. "‘Redneck Religion and Shitkickin’ Saviours?’: Gram Parsons, Theology and Country Music." *Popular Music* 21, no. 1 (2002): 93-105.

¹⁰¹ Peter La Chapelle, *Proud to Be an Okie: Cultural Politics, Country Music, and Migration to Southern California* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007). 18.

freedom as well as success with his music in the 1960s. Haggard signed with a smaller company record studio in 1962 called Tally Records before he signed with Capital Records. The music inadvertently aligned with the storyline of the working-class working Americans, who were struggling to find their identity as the 1960s quickly had some societal changes that were much different than the previous years. The conflict in Vietnam remained as a new decade dawned with 1970s. Domestic movements began to expand to other marginalized groups in the United States. Women's right movement and gay rights movement emerged. The political debacle presented with the Watergate scandal fueled mistrust of authority. The expansion of the country music genre found new locations for artists to break away from the Nashville sound and to vocalize through their lyrics the struggles Americans faced. This western geographical location created in Bakersfield, California, highlighted the national spread of country music due to the movement of people following World War II.

The movement away from the traditional sounds, instigated by the record executives push for the Nashville sound, provided more revenue due to the crossover ability of the music to appeal to a wider range of listeners. Willie Nelson, one of the original outlaws, contributed to this sound with his song "Crazy." This song presented the skill of Nelson as a songwriter to produce lyrics that were emotional and soulful. This early song still had the sound of the steel guitar but utilized the orchestration production techniques associated with the Nashville sound, categorizing it within that designation of Nashville sound. The new tools of production in the after recording helped to stylize this pop sound. Although Nelson contributed this timeless song, his own musical style did not align with the Nashville sound and naturally kept a rooted traditional sound.¹⁰² The experience of the 1960s and the challenges he faced making his own

¹⁰² Warren R. Hofstra, *Sweet Dreams: The World of Patsy Cline*, (University of Illinois Press, 2013), 2.

way caused a naturally divergence away from the Nashville sound. The rise of a political message within folk and country music provided the desire for lyrical freedom in his own music.

The lyrics of Nashville sound typically focused on relationships and heartache. The production and orchestration provided a sound that influenced artists outside of the country music genre, such as Jim Reeves, which utilized the polished sound in his song "He'll Have to Go." These songs did not present any issues of a controversial nature and focused on daily struggles, such as heartache or love. The use of innovative production methods to provide a smooth sound created this sound that became popular beyond the country music genre.¹⁰³ Chet Atkins, one of the key creators of the Nashville sound, noted on the importance of the words of the songs stating:

I didn't pay any attention to the words of country songs for years. Then I found out the words are the most important ingredient of the record. People listen to the words. But the great combination is a great melody and great words. With the marriage of the two you get a tremendous hit.¹⁰⁴

This polished sound did not gain the support of some of the country music artists. These musicians yearned for their own artistic freedom with music. The impact of what would later become the outlaw movement was not the artists' intentions. The desire to make honest and real music evolved into the movement. The intentions to connect the country listeners to the lyrics progressed organically on its own. The outlaw musicians became the most involved in the music industry trying to find their own style and place within the country music genre. Similarly, the listeners faced with understanding the events around them looked to music for expressions and understanding. Allan Parachini, a journalist for the magazine *Stereo*, interviewed Waylon Jennings in 1974, discussing the crossover of musicians and exploring his opinion. This

¹⁰³ Michael Jarrett, *Producing Country: The Inside Story of the Great Recordings*, (Wesleyan University Press, 2014), 98.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

interview took place at Troubadour in West Hollywood, known as a folk-rock club. In 1974

Jennings stated:

The important thing is to know what makes a country record. It's not instruments. There was this kick in Nashville to keep country music pure. But if we do that we're going to have to go back to exclusively to acoustics instruments. A country record is an art form all to itself. You can even put a kazoo on a country record and be authentic—if you know what you're doing.¹⁰⁵

Jennings was determined to remain country and believed that fans would seek him out for what he did with the music. This highlighted how the artists knew the audience that aligned with the music provided had a specific listener. Nashville sound in the 1960s promoted the crossover with the style of music and lyrics and did bring new listeners to the country music genre.

The evolution of the country music genre and the artists' struggle to find an identity created an outlet within country music genre to contribute diverse political opinions and messages. Although during the early period, the music reflected the raw emotion that was beginning to pulsate in the people who were opposed to the war. The country music dynamic that made it so unique was the constant evolution of the sound and the strong ties that some artists and listeners had to the traditional sound. This relationship created a strong tie to the evolving middle class. The unique thing about the middle class or the working class was not only the change with each generation but also the strong tie to tradition. Although society has changed with each generation, the traditions and the sound or authenticity in country music have remained important aspects to the brand. The balance to being successful without being too mainstream was a delicate balance. The Nashville sound allowed the ability for artists to cross over. Kris Kristofferson became a song writer in Nashville during the 1960s. In the 1970s when Kristofferson's song "Sunday Mornin' Comin' Down" won song of the year, there was shock in

¹⁰⁵ Allan Parachini, "Waylon Jennings," *Stereo Review* 32 (February 1974), 64.

the auditorium. Kristofferson then approached the podium with his long hair and seemed to stumble to the stage and through his speech. He later noted the shock caused him to hit his head when he was announced the winner. This resulted in the appearance of being on substances, which he denied.¹⁰⁶ The explosion of country music popularity during this change in sound was evident through the articles written from various journalists noting this new modern sound in country music. In Alex Macaulay's article discussing this new sound, he noted this and even noted one review stating that this was "a new minstrel capable of carrying the poetry of plain folk to the sophisticated masses."¹⁰⁷ Kris Kristofferson in 1965 obtained a record deal from Majjoh Wilkin, who had formed her new publishing company Buckhorn. This was a coveted contract since it offered artistic freedom for Kristofferson that was not common during this period in Nashville.¹⁰⁸ This allowed "crossover" of artists to occur and opened the door to future artists who started out in the country genre to crossover to other genres.¹⁰⁹ Among those who soared from their beginning in country genre to pop icons were Glen Campbell, Dolly Parton, Garth Brooks, Shania Twain, and Taylor Swift.¹¹⁰

The change in the sound of country music that drifted from traditional sound had occurred earlier in limited roles. A great example of this happened in the 1960s when Johnny Cash, originally a gospel-based musician, had created a sound that blended country with a spin of rock and roll. Cash's music played an impactful role that aligned with the Vietnam War and

¹⁰⁶ Alex Macaulay, "Going Up and Coming Down Kris Kristofferson, Authenticity, and Country Music's "New Breed"." *Southern Cultures* 25, no. 2 (2019): 79.

¹⁰⁷ "Going Up and Coming Down Kris Kristofferson, Authenticity, and Country Music's "New Breed"." *Southern Cultures* 25, no. 2 (2019): 89.

¹⁰⁸ Mary G. Hurd, *Kris Kristofferson: Country Highwayman* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 22.

¹⁰⁹ Travis D. Stimeling, *Nashville Cats: Record Production in Music City*, (Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2020), 119.

¹¹⁰ "Country Pop Music Guide: 5 Notable Country Pop Artists - 2023," MasterClass, accessed November 20, 2023, <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/country-pop-music-guide>.

the political shift of the anti-war movement.¹¹¹ The 1970s and 1980s termed this new spin of the Nashville sound as countrypolitan. This new competition from other geographical areas may have been what spurred the record executives in Nashville to gain the new sound they called the Nashville sound in the hopes of pushing the commercialized success of the country music genre into the mainstream. This was a successful move as it widened the listener base of country music, but this move created an internal struggle surrounding the authenticity of the music that is still heard in the country music genre. This sound created a diverse palette of subgenres that now make up the country music genre that collectively connected with different facets of the working-class Americans as it continues to evolve to adhere to the societal changes. The continued influence of pop culture and the relationship with music created country music that went beyond just catering to the previous demographic of listeners by becoming more marketable to more Americans. Dolly Parton is considered one of the key artists that helped blend the older sounds of country with music that moved into other genres. This is evident in her song “Islands in the Stream.”¹¹²

Nashville itself experienced the shift from rural society to urban development even before the 20th century. This migration of people to find work included movement to other states, including Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, and Arkansas.¹¹³ This expansion from the rural areas impacted the culture and the sound of the music of the country music genre. The success of the country music message to the social movement in these rebellious lyrics evolved into the image of this cowboy rebel. Historian James C. Cobb characterized the music by highlighting the

¹¹¹ Michael Stewart Foley, "A Politics of Empathy: Johnny Cash, the Vietnam War, and the 'Walking Contradiction' Myth Dismantled." *Popular Music and Society* 37, no. 3 (2014), 340.

¹¹² “Countrypolitan,” Country Music Project, accessed October 20, 2023, <https://sites.dwrl.utexas.edu/countrymusic/the-history/countrypolitan/>.

¹¹³ Louis Kyriakoudes. *Social Origins of the Urban South: Race, Gender, and Migration in Nashville and Middle Tennessee, 1890-1930*, (University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 94.

southern culture as more of an accommodating culture that embraced change.¹¹⁴ However, the change was occurring from the traditional lyrics heard in previous decades and the shifting away from the Nashville sound. The artists wanted success with their own sound and lyrics that the other genres had in this turbulent time of the 1960s.¹¹⁵

The 1960s and the counterculture movement and its influence on music hit a turbulent era. It changed the relationship of music and the listeners of this period and established the country music genre with a close relationship with the demographic of the working class. The period of the 1960s lay the foundations of the use of lyrics to connect a message to the listeners. The artists had become politically motivated. A cultural shift had begun. This cultural aspect of the music industry behind the lyrics had a psychological element that revealed that the music can provide additional insight to the cultural change in the United States. The music of the period did more than just provide the message of the social element. It helped to define the shift in the culture. The reason the music and lyrics were so powerful in the 1960s was that several genres not only showed a lyrical response to the reform and political change but also showed the response and dialogue between genres regarding the political and culture shift.¹¹⁶ The relationship that occurred between an artist and the listeners was evident in the original outlaw movement. This shift to the patriotic theme in the 1980s firmly established the relationship of the listener to the music and the lyrics. However, before evolving into patriotic music, the outlaw music took a stand in the country music genre to secure their artistic freedom. Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Johnny Cash, Kris Kristofferson, and Merle Haggard are some of the earlier artists

¹¹⁴ James C. Cobb, "Rednecks, White Socks, and Piña Coladas? Country Music Ain't What It Used to Be... And It Really Never Was." *Southern Cultures* 5, no. 4 (1999): 43.

¹¹⁵ Jocelyn R. Neal, *Country Music: A Cultural and Stylistic History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 196.

¹¹⁶ Lily Rothman, "The Vietnam War: Why That Conflict Produced Iconic Music," *Time* (Time, September 27, 2017), <https://time.com/4949617/music-vietnam-war/>.

who acquired this outlaw term. However, their challenge to the record industry to secure their lyrical freedom created an avenue for future artists to establish a voice to challenge the status quo.

The working class evolved after the 1950s due to the change in culture from several factors. Society faced an economic boom during this period that promoted consumerism and the suburb lifestyle. The technologies were advancing more quickly than previously and were connecting the different areas of the United States. The use of music for a large collaboration of sentiments was not a new idea; however, the reach continued to get wider and wider as the years progressed. The children from the previous generation became adults and this new mentality arose in the working-class. The events they were experiencing in their lives made the outlaw music more attuned to their own circumstances. In 1999 the song, "Murder on Music Row," discussed the turn away from the traditional original music.¹¹⁷ The debate of the country music authenticity continues in modern day.

Whether authentic to the traditions of country music or not, the results of the outlaw music becoming popular spoke to the fact that listeners react to the message carried in the lyrics. The words related to the situations surrounding the listeners, and they became emotionally attached to the songs. When this occurred, the songs became an anthem to the listeners and the result was change in society. This occurred in the 1960s and impacted the government policies on the Vietnam War. Similarly, the songs in the outlaw movement changed the culture of the record industry in the country music genre and further brought about a patriotic movement among the listeners. When this movement moved into the patriotic era in the 1980s, this new group of artists became known as the New Traditionalists. However, unique to the country music

¹¹⁷ Jocelyn R. Neal, *Country Music: A Cultural and Stylistic History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 433.

genre was the ability of the artists to move in and out of these subgenres in order to appeal to their listeners.¹¹⁸ Willie Nelson, an example of an original outlaw artists, had humble beginnings. In the early 1960s he contributed to the popular Nashville sound with his song writing. He was also able to align later with the patriotic theme with his song “Living in the Promiseland.” This 1986 song went number one and became Nelson’s twelfth number one hit that still resonated with country music fans.¹¹⁹ This showed how even the artists of the movement evolved as society changed and it is reflected in the lyrics of the music.

The listeners of the music of this period and citizens of the United States continued to educate themselves and ask questions regarding this conflict in Vietnam, and the social response contained analysis of the sides of the conflict that also presented the cultural shift of the period. The emotions behind the lyrics were a psychological aspect needed to view the cultural change that shaped the United States. The music created during this period also created a message that allowed songs from all genres to be able to be used in movements later in the United States. This also culturally changed how music communicated messages not just locally over the radio but across the world. The protest music provided a voice for social change and will continue to be a beacon of raising questions on the actions of leaders. The music asked these questions or pointed out the inequalities that seemed to be buried in a national discussion. It gave a voice to those who may not have been heard otherwise and provided a unique way to present a campaign for change in a non-violent manner. Each of the musical genres not only defined the era but also changed the music industry to push for change in the political situation and question the political leaders.

¹¹⁸ Country music roots - the '80s, accessed November 20, 2023, <https://www.benoconnor.com/countryroots/80s.html>.

¹¹⁹ “Willie Nelson Performs Meaningful Patriotic Hit ‘Living in the Promiseland,’” Country Rebel - Unapologetically Country, March 21, 2023, <https://countryrebel.com/blogs/videos/willie-nelson-performs-meaningful-patriotic-hit-living-in-the-promiseland/>.

The music of the period did more than just provide the message of the social element. It helped to shift a culture.

The music shined a light on events affecting the listeners. It gave a voice to those otherwise unheard and provided a unique way to present a message on a topic. The debates on national issues created definition of the musical genres that not only defined the era but also changed the music industry to push its grievances of a political situation and question the political leaders. The protest music created the element of artistic freedom to use the lyrics in the music to spread the message on a large scale. This ability to identify with the listener of the music resonated within the country music genre beyond the protest music of the 1970s. The country music genre became a blend of lyrical messages due to exterior events and interior factors. The Nashville sound created a new pop style that helped promote the rise in popularity of the country music genre. The artists struggled to establish their artistic freedom but stayed true to the traditional sound. These struggles and balance between the lyrical message and identifying with the listeners ultimately changed the country music genre. Once the identification of the outlaw movement occurred in the 1970s, the country music genre became the sounding board for the working-class people.

Chapter 3

The Original Outlaws: Musicians Behind the Outlaw Movement

Country music had its own evolution of protest ideology eventually turning into patriotism which reflected the narrative of the working-class Americans who faced labor struggles of their own.¹ The outlaw artists, through their own experiences and achievement of lyrical freedom, were able to connect the lyrics to the cultural climate of the working-class American, and this outlaw movement forever connected the genre to the evolving culture of the country music listener. This subgenre of outlaw music consisted of a few musicians whose label of outlaw attached to the type of music they sang. In his 1996 article in *The Washington Post* entitled "The Outlaws Ride Again," Geoffrey Himes stated, "A group of scruffy singers and songwriters, most of who hung out at a disreputable bar called Tootsie's Orchid Lounge, were insisting they wanted the same sort of freedom that rock musicians took for granted."² This desire for freedom to write their own lyrics and perform the music they chose started this outlaw movement in the country music genre. However, the complexity of this image and meaning behind the lyrics were more than the words on the page. The day of the cowboy had long faded into the memory of Americans during the emergence of the outlaw movement. The commerciality of the music indicated the desire of the listeners for this authentic cowboy life of the past.³ That way of life was emblematic of a person who was far removed from government intervention and wanted only to prosper through hard work of his own choosing in order to provide for his family. The connection, however, is difficult to capture since the idea of a true

¹ Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class*, (New Press, 2010), 215.

² Geoffrey Himes Special to The Washington Post. "The Outlaws Ride again." *The Washington Post* (1974-), Jun 09, 1996. 116.

³ The use of label Outlaw is to refer to the movement of the 1970s but has taken on various artists beyond the original outlaw movement including into modern day.

cowboy as depicted by image is no longer obtainable due to the urbanization and reduction of freedom and lawlessness of the West becoming a thing of the past. Even so, the idea of a cowboy not being answerable to anyone and free to roam about pulled many Americans to long for such a life. Among those longing for such freedom to create their own music would be a group of country music singers who would receive the label of outlaws because they dared to step outside the norms of the Nashville sound.⁴ Among the more popular musicians in the outlaw music subgenre were Merle Haggard, Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, and Kris Kristofferson. These musicians earned this label due to their opposition to the control of the record labels which held to constraints that included simple songs with orchestration by studio musicians in Nashville. The outlaw movement connected with the country music fan base by evoking in the lyrics the very things they were confronted with in the cultural and social climate of the period. Through the lyrics, the outlaw artists presented a reflection of personal experiences, emotions, and cultural situations. The listeners gained insight into the motives behind the lyrics and connected with the lyrics because they had similar experiences with the outsourcing of jobs and global conflicts.⁵ Outlaw musicians, through the power of the music, served as a source to help narrate the struggles of the artists that aligned with the listeners. As the artists experienced the events surrounding them the lyrical message evolved as society changed, creating a narrative of the culture of the artist and the demographic of listeners.

The preservation of the interviews, music and biographies of the outlaw artists provided a different perspective than that of artists before the advancement in technology allowed this type of preservation. Getting answers to questions about why these artists had become so politically

⁴ The Nashville sound was the commercialized sound promoted by the country music record industry in the 1950s-1960s.

⁵ Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class*, (The New Press, 2010), 242-243.

motivated provided insight into the cultural shift that was occurring during the same span of time. Understanding the emotions behind the lyrics was a psychological factor needed to assess the cultural change that shaped the United States. The music of the period did more than just provide the message of the social element. It provided a communication within the lyrics that evolved with the shift in the culture. The outlaw artists had personal reasons for their lyrics, but the lyrics also spoke to their audience because the words encouraged one to stand up for individuals rights. These words reflected similar sentiments with the fan base.⁶ The listeners of the music of this period were living in these circumstances and needed to educate themselves and ask questions regarding any conflict affecting society. Thus, an examination of that social response should be a continuance of analysis of that conflict to understand the resulting cultural shift. The biographical examination showing the events of history experienced and the social connection made revealed that the outlaw image they would eventually embrace resulted from their own struggles to break away from the Nashville machine and gain their own control for artistic freedom. Examining the country music of the 1970s and 1980s will showed the cultural shift in society expressed through the music since the country music genre reflected the working-class temperament during this period by way of the lyrics.

The outlaw artists challenged the status quo of country music and the long-standing establishment in Nashville and not only became successful in their endeavor but also created marketable music that became timeless in the country music genre.⁷ The push back exhibited by the outlaw artists also resonated with the listeners as they experienced a society with corrupt leadership. The corruption at the top levels of the government was on display when the Pentagon

⁶ Waylon Jennings and Lenny Kaye, *Waylon: An Autobiography* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2012), 277.

⁷ James C. Cobb, "Rednecks, White Socks, and Piña Coladas? Country Music Ain't What It Used to Be... And It Really Never Was." *Southern Cultures* 5, no. 4 (1999): 43.

Papers created concern about the information provided to the public on the events the United States was involved. The court case in 1971 at the Supreme Court analyzed how sensitive information should be handled regarding the leaks in this situation occurring during the Vietnam War.⁸ The same type of control permeated the record industry. The record executives had control of the artists' music, just as the government controlled information released. Although the Pentagon Papers had much more serious and sensitive information involved, the level of control created the distrust of the government in the people just as the outlaw artists distrusted the record executives in the country music genre. A few years later the examination of information that included lies, bribes, and tape-recorded evidence resulted in the resignation of President Richard Nixon. For the first time in history, an American President resigned.⁹ Gerald Ford stepped into the presidential role and took on the difficult task of restoring some of the faith in the government. Coincidentally, the bicentennial of the United States was in 1976 which allowed Ford to use this reminiscence of the past and founding of the United States to create unity. There were large celebrations of the bicentennial celebration and anticipation throughout the year of the special milestone.¹⁰ Similarly, the outlaw music reminisced of the past. The outlaw music did that through honoring the traditional sounds and styles of earlier country music. The nostalgia in the lyrics echoed the difficulties faced by those in the past. An example of an outlaw song that exudes this nostalgia of the past and embodies the wondering lifestyle is "Are You Sure Hank Done It This Way." This song also expressed how some things change but also remain the same but sometimes things need a change. The lyrics expressed that sentiment as follows:

⁸ Geoffrey R. Stone, and Lee C. Bollinger, *National Security, Leaks and Freedom of the Press: The Pentagon Papers Fifty Years On* Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2021, 3.

⁹ Tom Brokaw, *The Fall of Richard Nixon: A Reporter Remembers Watergate*. (Random House Publishing Group, 2019), 18.

¹⁰ Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, from the John O. Marsh Files (White House Counsellor), accessed August 7, 2023, <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/exhibits/bicentennial/bicentennial.asp>.

It's the same old tune, fiddle and guitar
 Where do we take it from here?
 Rhinestone suits and new shiny cars
 It's been the same way for years
 We need to change
 Somebody told me when I came to Nashville
 "Son, you finally got it made!
 Old Hank made it here, we're all sure that you will"
 But I don't think Hank done it this way, no
 I don't think Hank done it this way, okay ¹¹

This song by Waylon Jennings not only put the past in a positive light but also presented the sentiments of the opinion against how Nashville was operating.¹² Music can bring forth positive memories.¹³ The commercial success of the Nashville sound in the 1960s provided motive to draw the audience away from the traditional sounds and to use music the record executives chose to produce without input from the artists. However, there was no creative freedom on the artist's part.

Using music to identify with the listeners started in the 1960s and transformed country music via the outlaw artists. The lyrics revealed situations of the struggles the artists endured on an individual level that made a connection with the working class.¹⁴ The artists of this period had faced trials on their path to becoming country music artists, and these struggles were similar to the listeners.¹⁵ The music was not only a marketable product but also a narrative of the period. Johnny Cash, one of the original outlaw artists who used his music to protest and raised

¹¹ Barbara Schultz, "Music: Classic Tracks - Waylon Jennings: 'Are You Sure Hank Done It This Way,'" *The Mix*, 2010, 40.

¹² Ken Burns and Dayton Duncan, *Country Music: An Illustrated History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019), 351-352.

¹³ Kelly Jakubowski, "Why Does Music Bring Back Memories?" *The Hindu*, March 11, 2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/science/why-does-music-bring-back-memories/article66603759.ece>.

¹⁴ Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 223.

¹⁵ The economic struggles along with the changing society during this period and political impacts. Further reading on these struggles and the impact can be read in Benjamin Temkin's Dissertation "The Political Impact of the Energy Crisis on American Working-Class Organizations." Order No. 8105107, Columbia University, 1980.

awareness of those who were poor, incarcerated, and fighting a war. He also related the “livin’ hell” the soldiers faced in his song “Singin’ in ‘Vietnam Talkin’ Blues,” He had been on tour to entertain the troops when he experienced what they did by being near areas close to shelling and seeing the wounded being brought back from the battlefield.¹⁶ The artists’ struggle for artistic freedom, resulting from the record label controlling a large portion of the music, aligned with the working-class Americans’ struggles they faced with the energy shortages, inflation, and unemployment.¹⁷ The result was the creation of a close kindred spirit that made it possible to identify with the audience of country music genre.¹⁸ The message echoing in the music without the Nashville sound that the record producers preferred resulted from a battle for creative freedom and money that caused the emergence of these outlaw country music artists. The battle was against the record industry led by Chet Atkins, who was a trailblazer in utilizing a commercialized sound of music that deviated from the traditional country music genre sound. His found success became synonymous with this term Nashville sound in the 1960s.¹⁹ However, Atkins and the Nashville sound encountered a challenge. In a ripple effect after the peak of protest ideology of the 1960s, the outlaw movement united hippies and rebel country music artists in a fight towards being in control of their own creativity beyond the control of record labels that influenced and controlled Nashville sounds. Understanding the influence of the other genres on country music will provide insight on why there was a rise in these country music bandits.

¹⁶ Kenneth D. Tunnell and Mark S. Hamm. “Singing across the Scars of Wrong: Johnny Cash and His Struggle for Social Justice.” *Crime, Media, Culture.*, (vol. 5, no. 3, 2009), 276.

¹⁷ Michael Bryan, “The Great Inflation,” Federal Reserve History, accessed September 19, 2023, <https://www.federalreservehistory.org/essays/great-inflation>.

¹⁸ Jeremy Hill, “Country Music Is Wherever the Soul of a Country Music Fan Is’: Opryland U.S.A. and the Importance of Home in Country Music.” *Southern Cultures* 17, no. 4 (2011), 91.

¹⁹ Travis D. Stimeling. *Nashville Cats: Record Production in Music City*, (Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2020), 130.

The highwaymen collaboration was the continuation of the outlaw musicians to oppose the pop culture sound the record executives were pushing.²⁰ The concept of the highwaymen resulted from the artists joining Johnny Cash on his Christmas show. Afterwards the idea of collaboration began to form.²¹ The highwaymen tour and subsequent movies, including the artists, continued to address the rebellion to the record executives' push for what these artists termed the purification of country music. The concept of the outlaw image resulted from the Lee Clayton song "Ladies love Outlaws" that Jennings recorded on the album with the outlaw theme. The popularity of the album coined the term the outlaws, and the artists continued to record music with the theme. The idea of outlaw musicians stemmed from the desire to have freedom in their own styles within their music. The movement aligned with the American public's fascination with the outlaw culture with the connection to criminal behavior as a positive endeavor, such as the Robin Hood story of stealing from the rich to give to the poor.²² The outlaw musicians' input was a much more personal endeavor than how it was glamorized in the outlaw image in society. They wanted to make music the way they chose. However, the popularity of the music within the demographic of working-class Americans showed the artists' poetic lyrics aligned with the views of this group. The term outlaw that stuck with the artists came about haphazardly. Michael Streissguth, an author and a journalist, detailed how a disc jockey in North Carolina in 1973 contacted Hazel Smith of Glaser Brothers and asked how to describe the music of the upcoming concert for Waylon Jennings and Tompall Glaser. Smith opened a dictionary and ultimately decided on the outlaw term after reading the dictionary's

²⁰ Scott Mervis, "“Never a Great Singer, Kris Kristofferson Has Had an Amazing Career Nonetheless,”” *Pittsburg Post-Gazette*, June 10, 2010, sec. Music, 54.

²¹ Mary G. Hurd, *Kris Kristofferson: Country Highwayman* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 81.

²² *Ibid*, 82.

description of “Living on the outside of written law.”²³ The fans of these artists also aligned with this culture identified as outlaw due to the opposition of the non-conformist attitude the artists exhibited against the mainstream sound. The artists’ own personal struggles inspired the honesty expressed in the lyrics that listeners appreciated because of experiencing similar experiences. The changing society and the artists’ ability to address controversial topics created a public image that provided sympathies for the listeners with similar experiences. Focusing on topics, such as incarceration, substance abuse, poverty and politics, brought discussion of the silent majority to the forefront through the lyrics of the artists. This musical movement created dialogue on social commentary that the mainstream tended to stray away from in the pop-style music.

Further, the impact of the outlaw movement changed country music and the relationship with the listeners and the artists. The lyrics and the music helped to communicate the lyrical message to whoever listened and aligned similar mindsets. However, the situation that country music artists faced was the result of the established hierarchy of record executives in the country music genre being focused on commercial success. The record executives had major control of the message in lyrics.²⁴ The desire for making more money resulted in the creation of a more sophisticated sound that moved away from the traditional sound in the 1950s. However, the movement towards artistic freedom that the outlaw artists advocated and fought for resulted in an evolution in the country music genre. The artists’ reaction to the societal events happening around them echoed in the music. The country music genre and the reflection of the lyrics to the working class’s traditions and experiences tied this outlaw movement closely with this

²³ Michael Streissguth, *Outlaw: Waylon, Willie, Kris and the Renegades of Nashville* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013), 153.

²⁴ Bill C. Malone and Laird Tracey E W., *Country Music USA* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018), 297.

demographic. The songwriters and singers, by distributing their message via the music, took on the responsibility of expressing the temperament of their audience broaden the understanding of the societal changes that occurred during this period.²⁵ This subgenre of country music provided an outlet for the working-class Americans in the lyrics, but a large number of the fans were white males. This working-class masculinity portrayed in the lyrics drew in the hard-working men struggling to provide for families or the struggle with love.²⁶ Yet, there were some lyrics in the outlaw music that held the words that described the mindset of the culture that related to women and men, gathering the groups of people together with the same sentiment. This group faced changes that challenged the norm. The struggles they faced were the ideals required by faith and society. The society was changing on many fronts and the lyrics expressed the struggle of everyone to adhere to the societal norms or create their own path. The failures and struggles in trying to adhere to the required norms when the desire may have been to wonder as the cowboys of the past resonated with the listeners. One example was the rise in divorce rates and the roles of women outside of the home. This change in the societal norm created a conundrum of a move away from the nuclear family.

The American people and music audience of this era were trying to understand the changing society. The shift in the cultural mindset began following World War II. The music began to showcase the political and cultural climate. The lyrical message expressed the tone of the culture, or the struggles faced. These artists presented a mindset or mentality concerning these changes that resonated with listeners and connected them to the musical movement. The people who were central to the message encompassed in the music were the artists. Their

²⁵ Bill C. Malone and Laird Tracey E W., *Country Music USA* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018), 88-89.

²⁶ Leigh H. Edwards, *Johnny Cash and the Paradox of American Identity* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 67.

personal experiences as well as their own reflections of the societal climate reverberated in their lyrics. Whether intentionally or not, the artists created a ballad of the sentiments of many of the working-class Americans. This dialogue created a relationship by expressing the mindset of the listeners of the country music genre.²⁷ The backgrounds of the singers gave them experiences for their lyrical stories. However, the events in the 1970s presented some of the political and economic issues that created the environment which allowed the songwriters to edge out of their own comfort zone and confront what they perceived as injustices, and the listeners could relate because these issues were also affecting their lives. The result was the music became marketable. Most of these artists understood economic struggles from their youth and the struggles encountered as they attained success as an artist. At the core of the lyrics was a presentation of the struggles of the working class. The artists balanced it with patriotism and the desire of freedom that embodied the spirit of America.²⁸ The struggles in the economy, such as the increasing energy prices and high unemployment, seemed to provide a demographic that found solace in the outlaw music.²⁹

A transformation was occurring in the country genre. The use of the term outlaw grasped this concept, revealing the breakaway from the limitations of the Nashville sound that had moved toward orchestration and away from the steel guitar and the fiddle. The outlaw music overcame the obstacles that had limited the musician's lyrical freedom of the message. This new sound of the outlaws gave the music a marketable characteristic for a more polished honky tonk that resonated with the working class. How much of a lasting impact on culture did the music have,

²⁷ Pamela Fox, "Recycled 'Trash': Gender and Authenticity in Country Music Autobiography." *American Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (1998): 244.

²⁸ Jonah Ward, "Remembering a Dying Era of Country," The La Salle Falconer, accessed September 19, 2023, <https://lasallefalconer.com/2023/10/remembering-a-dying-era-of-country/>.

²⁹ Bart Moore-Gilbert. *The Arts in The 1970s: Cultural Closure*, (Taylor & Francis Group, 1994), 3.

and did the music continue to be an outlet for political and cultural messages? An examination of the original outlaw artists and their motives with the lyrics revealed that the country music artists experienced this shift and witnessed the freedom of the artists in other genres with their lyrics. The impact of the message to the culture of the society was evident in the reach of the music and the demographic with which it resonated. An analysis of the message spread by the outlaw artists can provide the impact the message had on the culture.

The fight of the outlaw artists for creative freedom lasted most of the 1970s but evolved into a more patriotic tone similar to the nation's collective patriotic tone in the 1980s. The emergence of outlaw artists in the modern era presented evidence of the relationship of the culture with the music connected to the country music genre. The global events of 1970s and 1980s, such as the ending of the Vietnam War, Watergate, and the hippie movement along with human rights demands, triggered radical actions causing major changes in society. Violence, scandals in politics, and the diversity of multiculturalism of culture and counterculture were factors that led to the changes.³⁰ Trying to understand the changes as families struggled to survive in a difficult economy drove a desire of achieving normalcy and returning to tradition. Outlaw music helped the struggle as it triggered memories of happier times through the lyrics.

The diverse nature of listeners from defined geographical locations, such as the South, created a unique demographic of listeners to the country music genre. The working-class demographic of listeners tended to respond more slowly to external changes, such as progressive ideology, than what was witnessed in other musical genres of the period. Time proved these artists could encapsulate the changes in society in their lyrics, reach the various demographics across the nation, and produce marketable music. The changes continued to occur quickly as

³⁰ Travis D. Stimeling, *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks: The Countercultural Sounds of Austin's Progressive Country Music Scene*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 132.

technologies and global roles involving the United States impacted the average American. In the 1950s the television started filling the homes to provide a visual medium of not only news and shows but also music. The barn dance that had filled homes with music, comedy, and skits through the radios had moved to television and provided the visual element.³¹ Ironically, these broadcasts held tight to tradition in the country music while the record executives were pushing the new Nashville sound to spread the commercial success of country music beyond its historical audiences. *The Johnny Cash Show* provided the medium of television in 1969-1971 to a wide range of audience through the diverse musical guests on the show from different genres. This type of variety show also provided a connection to the in-person audience to share their stories creating a more personal connection.³²

The experiences of adversarial conditions provided a foundation for the outlaw artists to pursue their desire to acquire artistic lyrical freedom. As seen in some of the music of the 1960s, the outlaw music struck a chord with their listeners with the lyrics.³³ These listeners represent a wide range of different geographical areas. They all connected through the release of music that carried a message that spoke to their own situation. Scrutinizing the circumstances of the artists and the songwriters as they became involved in this movement can connect their message within their lyrics to the culture that influenced the message. Examining a specific movement within a genre can also present information on the culture of the listeners.

The strains within the country music industry resulted in the artists finding a way to get their lyrics and style to the listeners. Those with the outlaw label attained success with their own

³¹ Bradley Hanson, "The Tennessee Jamboree: Local Radio, the Barn Dance, and Cultural Life in Appalachian East Tennessee." *Southern Spaces* (2008), <https://doi.org/10.18737/M7FS41>.

³² Michael Popke, "The Best of the Johnny Cash show." *Goldmine*, 2008 Jan 18, 45.

³³ Stephen A. King, "'Between Jennings and Jones': Jamey Johnson, Hard-Core Country Music, and Outlaw as Authenticating Strategy." *Popular Music and Society* 37, no. 1 (2014): 2.

words. However, the debate of trying to find authenticity in music seemed to neglect the outlaw musician's background. The desire for artistic control and freedom of these artists resulted when musicians refused to have the same outcome as happened to Mickey Newbury when RCA records in Nashville released him because he would not write or sing what the executives directed.³⁴ This is evidence of how quickly the record industry could silence a songwriter. This situation prompted the push back to the record executives from artists, such as Jennings, Cash, Nelson, and Kristofferson, and led to the label of outlaw. Newbury did not go on to be a successful solo artist. However, his name appeared in the popular song "Luckenback, Texas, (Back to the basic of Love)" made famous in 1977 by Jennings and Nelson.³⁵ Their lyrical freedom and hints of traditional sound revealed the impact of the outlaw push against the Nashville sound. The outlaw artists would not become silenced like Newbury. The outlaw movement and impact rippled through the music industry.

To study the artists behind the music can provide insight to the soundtrack to history being sung in the lyrics of the music. The outlaw image of the Wild West was the image that these outlaw artists held close whether in their costumes or in their lyrics. The lyrics became their story and sometimes had very direct messages in responses to the events occurring at the time. The romanticizing of the freedom of the cowboy lifestyle rooted as an ideology surrounded the outlaw movement. The long-established control by record executives motivated the push of this rebel image with a traditional spin that resonated with the listeners across the nation. The individual artist through a desire of artistic expression evolved to develop the relationship between the country music fan and the connection to the lyrics. This evolution by the outlaw

³⁴ Brian T. Atkinson, *Looks Like Rain: The Songwriting Legacy of Mickey Newbury*, (Texas A&M University Press, 2021), 2.

³⁵ Texas Co-op Power, "If Mickey Newbury's Name Doesn't Ring a Bell, His Songs Will," Texas Co-op Power, accessed August 4, 2023, <https://texascooppower.com/you-know-newbury/>.

artists cemented the relationship between country music listeners and artists who are still forming that relationship through the message in their lyrics even in present day. However, the evolving national reach of country music fueled the shift away from demographically specific listeners. Thus, the message enveloped in traditional sound became the means for the outlaw artists to reach the scattered audiences. The lyrics embodied some remembrance of the past, and tradition became the foundation that bound them to the culture of country music listeners. The outlaw artists had to adjust to those changes as they reflected on their own backgrounds and how it mimicked that those who endured the quick change out of the rural farm fields into the factory-employed society. These artists also had to try to understand the changes in their own society.

These artists and songwriters took a stand against the Nashville music establishment when they moved their base of operation away from the country music capital to cities that had record companies that were more accommodating in allowing the creativity of the artists' music. These artists scattered across the country in areas that promoted their independence and gave them freedom to record the message and style they wanted their listeners to hear. California and Arkansas played a strong role in Johnny Cash's life, but Texas is another geographic area that had common threads among the outlaw artists. Geographically, the area of Austin, Texas, seemed to be a location that had a large number of the honky tonks, concerts, and progressive lyrics in the music. As technology advanced, some of the nationally successful artists, such as Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings, found solace in Austin. Although there was seemingly a progressive pocket in Austin, the geographical location of close proximity to the South provided strong influence from the southern culture.³⁶ The artists who had Texas roots were Jennings and Nelson. These two had several things in common, including their connection to Texas. They had also

³⁶ Jason Mellard, *Progressive Country: How the 1970s Transformed the Texan in Popular Culture*, (University of Texas Press, 2013), 137.

spent time in Nashville at some point in their career. They, along with others, became the foundation of the outlaw movement.

Merle Haggard

Following these innovative country music artists who gained their artistic freedom into the 1980s provided the evidence of the impact of the outlaw and country vibe in pop culture that made its own mark on the music industry. Merle Haggard, from California, was an early artist who expanded the geographic footprint of the country music. Historian John Einarson looked at Buck Owens, Wynn Stewart, and Merle Haggard as the country rock musicians who were redefining music and called the Bakersfield sound the “bridge between country music and the Beatles.”³⁷ Einarson further explained the sound created in Bakersfield had presented a distinct attitude at odds with the Nashville establishment.³⁸ The sound intentionally pushed against the commercialized Nashville sound being produced in the Nashville record studios. The birth of the country music roots in California resulted from the migration of farmers forced to move during the Dust Bowl from the Midwest areas.³⁹ This migration spread traditions and musical sounds to other parts of the country, and the record companies in these areas used this to make it distinctly different creating an early rival to Nashville’s Music Row. These artists and their traditional sound projected a rebellious spirit that paved the way for the later outlaw movement. This implied that even the sound of Bakersfield had the rebellious or outlaw attitude with the pitch accompanying the lyrics.⁴⁰ The Bakersfield sound was the geographic outlaw to Nashville due to its location in California. This area had seen a rise in

³⁷ John Einarson, *Desperados: The Roots of Country Rock* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2001), 8.

³⁸ Bakersfield sound is the term used to describe the country music released from Bakersfield, California during the 1960s and 1970s.

³⁹ Randy Fox and courtesy of Capitol-EMI, “Music Row’s Archrival, the Bakersfield Sound, Occupies the Country Music Hall of Fame,” *Nashville Scene*, March 22, 2012, https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/music-row-s-archrival-the-bakersfield-sound-occupies-the-country-music-hall-of-fame/article_65c6941e-48c0-5839-9f44-745a6be5495a.html.

⁴⁰ John Einarson, *Desperados: The Roots of Country Rock* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2001), 21.

conservative ideology after the Great Depression as a result of the movement of workers to the area. It was even termed the southernization of America due to the mass movement of people around the country.⁴¹ The traditional sound embodied a twang element connected to the early music in the country music genre.⁴² The return to the original twang sound that the Nashville sound had moved away from gave Bakersfield its own unique sound dubbed 'Bakersfield Sound.' It also introduced the popularity of traditional sounds and lyrics the listeners desired.⁴³ In 1969 a music journalist John Grissim had written to name Bakersfield as the Country Music Capital of the West. California Governor Ronald Reagan and Vice President Spiro Agnew made it official with a proclamation and celebration. This new proclamation in country music widened the geographical reach well beyond Nashville, and the inclusion of conservative politicians created a conservative political element to the country music genre.⁴⁴ Haggard had put Bakersfield on the country music map along with Buck Owens.

Success from the music industry would have been difficult for Haggard to imagine its impact to him in his youth. Haggard's background presented a rebellious nature as it was riddled with law breaking that resulted in jail time. This included armed robbery and a botched attempt of escaping jail. His time spent in San Quentin changed him for the better. When he became a musician, he did display the outlaw image.⁴⁵ The Oklahoma-born singer had faced some difficult challenges, including his father dying when he was young. As a result, in his mother struggled as

⁴¹ James C. Cobb, "From Muskogee to Luckenbach: Country Music and the 'Southernization of America.'" *Journal of Popular Culture* 16, no. 3 (Winter, 1982): 81

⁴² The term twang in music refers to the string instruments that the sounds blend together while playing due to the plucking of the strings vibrating into the next note. The vocal aspect refers to the hypernasality of the sound when the vocal cords are twanged. A more detailed breakdown of the musical definitions of the term twang can be found in the book chapter on country music genre in *The Relentless Pursuit of Tone*. Robert Fink, Melinda Latour, and Zachary Wallmark, *The Relentless Pursuit of Tone: Timbre in Popular Music*, edited by Robert Fink, et al., (Oxford University Press, Incorporated), 2018.

⁴³ "Solidifying Bakersfield's Country Music Heritage." *Amusement Business* 110, no. 51 (Dec 28, 1998): 1.

⁴⁴ David Cantwell, *The Running Kind: Listening to Merle Haggard*, (University of Texas Press, 2022), 72.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 24.

a single mother. As children, Haggard and many of the other Americans of this period had experienced the Great Depression, which was followed by a global conflict in which most of them were too young to participate. As they became teenagers and young adults, the United States had engaged in more global conflicts that included drafting the young men. They struggled trying to find their way as the turbulent society had changes occurring that shifted the nuclear family. He eventually turned to a life of crime that ultimately resulted in his serving time at San Quentin State Prison in California.⁴⁶ Although his early years were spent as an outlaw to the law, his time in prison changed his trajectory in life. Part of the influence for his change that led him into music actually came when Haggard heard Johnny Cash perform at a prison show, which tied into Cash's popular album *Folsom County Prison* in the late 1950s. The struggles of Haggard's past are reiterated in his 1967 song "Branded Man." This song contained the lyrics of his struggles to move beyond his criminal past.⁴⁷ This song along with his desire not to be identified by his past was one of the reasons initially that he did not present the outlaw image visually on records at the dawn of the outlaw movement. In the lyrics of one of Haggard's more popular songs "Mama Tried," he expressed the difficulty of growing up in the quickly changing world and the struggles of being raised by a single mother. He wrote:

Dear old Daddy, rest his soul
 Left my Mom a heavy load
 She tried so very hard to fill his shoes
 Workin' hours without rest
 Wanted me to have the best
 She tried to raise me right but I refused⁴⁸

⁴⁶ David Cantwell, *The Running Kind: Listening to Merle Haggard*, (University of Texas Press, 2022), 24.

⁴⁷ "Merle Haggard's 'Branded Man' Teaches Us Not to Judge Someone Based on Their Past," Country Thang Daily, December 17, 2021, <https://www.countrythangdaily.com/merle-haggard-branded-man-country-music/>.

⁴⁸ "AZLyrics - Request for Access," AZLyrics.com, accessed October 30, 2023, <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/merlehaggard/mamatried.html>.

These lyrics echoed the outlaw lifestyle noted in the verses of spending life in prison without parole. Haggard jumped into the country genre as an outlaw as a result of his record label being outside Nashville. His music was not one of the groomed Nashville sounds that had been burning up the airways in the 1960s. Haggard, known as the “Working Man’s Poet,” did not believe in holding back from expressing his beliefs in his lyrics. The listeners of his music who were dealing with the economic and social situations could commiserate with the message in his lyrics. One such song is “Big City.” Some lines from it that caused a strong reaction are:

Turn me loose, set me free
Somewhere in the middle of Montana
And gimme all I’ve got coming to me
And keep your retirement
And your so-called social security
Big city, turn me loose and set me free⁴⁹

This message resonated with the listeners, who were mostly in the conservative camp politically. His music as opposed to what was being released from Nashville further established his place in the outlaw movement. Although he did not purposefully grasp the commercialized image of the outlaw that became popular in the 1970s, he personified the outlaw musician and was one of the earlier artists to obtain his artistic freedom by expressing his opinions in his songs.

Although he had the storyline and the lyrics of an outlaw musician, he did not embrace the image during that movement in the 1970s. During the turbulent times of the 1960s, Haggard had become the opposition to the progressive anti-war movement that swept the country. The lyrics and sound in his music held onto the traditional sounds but had an edgy rebellious tone that deviated from the typical Nashville sound. The use of the lyrics to express a message started before the outlaw movement became a popular movement in the 1970s. However, Haggard was

⁴⁹ “Merle Haggard’s 5 Greatest Lyrics,” The Word On Pop Culture, accessed January 30, 2024, <https://www.thewordonpopculture.com/music/merle-haggards-5-greatest-lyrics>.

an early country music artist who used the lyrics to convey a message that took a stand on an issue before the outlaw movement emerged in the 1970s. Haggard's sound aligned him to the outlaw movement even though he never intentionally adhered to the outlaw image. This showed the controversy of the message in the lyrics created the association early on to the outlaw movement.

When Haggard returned to Bakersfield with his musical ambitions, he worked next to Wynn Stewart and Buck Owens, who had already paved the path for making Bakersfield a source of country music. The honky tonk sound Haggard used and the lyrics he sang were filled with his own experiences of his struggles and anxieties in the quickly changing society. Haggard's song "Okie from Muskogee," recorded in Bakersfield, used lyrics to present a message that revealed an aversion by conservatives to hippies and the counterculture that had risen in the 1960s.⁵⁰

The accolades did not guarantee the outlaw movement would have an easier path in making a foothold in the record industry. The artists may have gained an inch and unanswered promises, but they did not receive the play time that they wanted because the radio stations controlled what was being played. Haggard signed with Curb Records in 1989 and even stated that he had signed with another "bullshitting music executive."⁵¹ This was a struggle for artists constantly having to re-invent themselves and to ensure that the music they released was reaching the listeners. The struggle to get music released remained even in the following decade, according to Haggard.⁵²

Although Haggard had straightened his life up from his early criminal behaviors (mostly because his musical success removed the need to steal to survive), he got wrapped up into the life

⁵⁰ James C. Cobb, "From Muskogee to Luckenbach: Country Music and the 'Southernization of America.'" *Journal of Popular Culture* 16, no. 3 (Winter, 1982): 81

⁵¹ Merle Haggard, *My House of Memories: An Autobiography* (New York: Books, 2011), 218.

⁵² *Ibid.*

of drugs. This lifestyle mirrored the rebel attitudes seen in rock and roll music and became a struggle in Haggard's life. Haggard did not consider himself an abuser of drugs, but a user who was able on his own to combat these demons and overcome.⁵³ However, Haggard's family life continued to change him and his perspective of life. He witnessed the changes in society and even pulled his children out of public school due to the violence he had seen in the schools.⁵⁴ Sadly, his struggles returned again when he announced in 1997 that he was broke, which he admitted was a bit of an exaggeration since he had experienced at a young age a true impoverished life that had driven him to crime. However, he discussed how the overhead costs of being an entertainer took a large portion of proceeds no matter how many decades of success. This continued to show the power of the establishment in the record industry. Even with their lyrical battle and struggle against the recording machine, these artists did not achieve the financial freedom they desired.⁵⁵

Johnny Cash

In the 1960s arose the outlaw known as the "man in black." Johnny Cash was one of the older artists associated with the outlaw movement. The experiences of losing a brother at a young age as well as serving in the military defined his character at a young age. Facing his own demons and ups and downs of the music industry while trying to balance family life took its toll on him. Cash even self-professed that his experiences and reflections influenced the songs he recorded. Cash had experienced the exhaustion of picking cotton in the fields, and he wrote songs expressing that hard work. Even early in his musical career the message in his music

⁵³ Merle Haggard, *My House of Memories: An Autobiography* (New York: Books, 2011), 230.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 235.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 239.

presented the rebellious nature connected to an outlaw image. The search for true freedom while holding onto tradition became a theme in Cash's music and his life.

Haggard and Cash had similar experiences in their dealing with drugs and difficult home life. They found solace in the lyrics and music in which they could express their beliefs and frustrations with situations in society. Cash seemed to wrestle a bit more with the acceptance of the past as was evident in his lyrics expressing the struggles of his youth. The loss of his brother Jack, which he witnessed, created a pain he carried with him.⁵⁶ The freedom Cash saw in the cowboy lifestyle that embodied no restrictions by laws laid a foundation for his lyrics and his prison shows. Cash never faced serious time in prison and mostly had short one-night stays in jail. Although he never spent extended time in jail, he had a passion for fighting for social justice for inmates. He was empathetic to social situations of race, Indian affairs, prisons, and war. Cash had to listen to his father's deep-rooted racist mentality while growing up and also endured the violence meaded out by his father. Cash grew beyond the racist tendencies he was raised with in his youth and realized his father would never grow out of his deep seeded hatred.⁵⁷ He moved on from his roots. Cash had played his first prison concert in 1957 at Huntsville State Prison in 1957, a few years after the success of his song "Folsom Prison Blues."⁵⁸

Although Cash's early successes were the result of his recordings in Tennessee, he had desires of moving out West to get into Hollywood and onto the big screen as a movie star.⁵⁹ This period held the movie theater as a social destination, and as a celebrity the goal was to be on the screen. Fortunately, Elvis Presley had paved the way to Hollywood fame after success in music.

⁵⁶ Michael Streissguth. *Johnny Cash: The Biography*, (Da Capo Press, 2007), 25.

⁵⁷ Tunnell, Kenneth D. and Mark S. Hamm. "Singing Across the Scars of Wrong: Johnny Cash and His Struggle for Social Justice." *Crime, Media, Culture* 5, no. 3 (2009), 271.

⁵⁸ Johnny Cash Trail, "Why Did Johnny Cash Play at Folsom Prison?" Folsom Cash Art Trail, July 24, 2023, <https://folsomcasharttrail.com/the-trail/blog/why-did-johnny-cash-play-at-folsom-prison..>

⁵⁹ Colin Edward Woodward, *Country Boy: The Roots of Johnny Cash*, (University of Arkansas Press, 2022), 122.

Cash achieved the ability to play the part of an outlaw in Hollywood. This element created an even larger exposure for the audience to connect with the celebrities in the roles they were playing. In movies the artist became the character and the audience identified with the character. The roles that Cash played carried the outlaw cowboy image. This was a great example of the advancing technology allowing country music to spread not only geographically but also nationwide into the movie theaters. This shed light on the struggles endured in the areas these singers were from. The lyrics and roles played by these outlaw artists not only connected with the audience but also shed light on the economic divides prevalent in areas outside of the urban centers in the United States.⁶⁰

As with many of the men coming of age during the drafts, Cash served time in the military. His experience in the military provided him the skill of decoding Morse Code, which he utilized in 1953 by decoding the message regarding the Soviet Union leader Joseph Stalin's death due to brain hemorrhage.⁶¹ This coding skill bled over into his songwriting. He put messages in his lyrics pointing to suppressed truths in history. Cash clashed with records executives when he recorded "Ballad of Ira Hayes," which is a Peter LaFarge song depicting a Native American and one of the marines in the famous flag photo from Iwa Jima. One lyric stated:

There they battled up Iwa Jima hill
Two hundred and fifty men
But only twenty-seven lived
To walk back down again
And when the fight was over
And Old glory raised
Among the men who held it high

⁶⁰ Ben Mna Ilias, "This Country Ain't Low—The Country Music of Dolly Parton and Johnny Cash as a Form of Redistributive Politics." *Arts* 12, no. 1 (2023): 17.

⁶¹ Tunnell, Kenneth D. and Mark S. Hamm. "Singing Across the Scars of Wrong: Johnny Cash and His Struggle for Social Justice." *Crime, Media, Culture* 5, no. 3 (2009), 272.

Was the Indian, Ira Hayes⁶²

The record company did a soft censorship by not marketing the album at all and only sent out minimal records. After this disagreement, Cash spent his own money to distribute an advertisement claiming the record industry had suppressed the background of Ira Hayes and his role in Iwa Jima.⁶³ This revealed Cash's political stance as leaning toward progressive ideology but not as progressive as in other genres. Although his political ideology may have been seen as progressive, he played for the troops in Vietnam, and the White House hosted him while under conservative leadership.⁶⁴ He wanted his lyrics to contain a message to transcend different demographics. This was very evident in his support of the prisoners and his trying to align these different roles that society had created a stigma around. This made his songs resonate with traditional country music listeners and progressive listeners of the time.⁶⁵ The artists themselves had already interjected their own views into the music to try to influence the listeners or present them with an alternative mindset. Cash possessed a unique outlook in his lyrics that reflected society as it navigated the quickly changing social norms. That was what defined the outlaw artists before the record agencies used the outlaw image as a marketing tool.

Willie Nelson

Willie Nelson's journey was incredibly captivating, He was an original outlaw who experienced the counterculture movement of the 1960s and the new opportunities in the record industry in the country music genre. Initially, a polished, conformist country singer in Nashville,

⁶² "The Ballad of Ira Hayes," Song of America, February 22, 2023, <https://songofamerica.net/song/ballad-of-ira-hayes/>.

⁶³ Jonathan Silverman, "A "Dove with Claws"?: Johnny Cash as Radical." *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 1, no. 2 (2008), 92.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 91.

⁶⁵ Daniel Geary, "'The Way I Would Feel About San Quentin': Johnny Cash & the Politics of Country Music." *Daedalus* 142, no. 4 (2013): 64.

he became disillusioned with the music industry and the loss of creative autonomy. No longer content with the image crafted for him by music executives, he chose to rebel. This led him to abandon Nashville and embark on his artistic pursuits in Texas, where he could truly express his unique musical vision. In his autobiography he spoke about the location of Nashville. “I went to Nashville because Nashville was the marketplace, and if you wanted to succeed in country music you had to go to Nashville---so I went to Nashville.”⁶⁶ He did have some experience with being a guitarist for Paul Buskirk’s band and had recorded “Night Life.”⁶⁷ The success of his “Family Bible” song in 1960--recorded by Claude Gray--provided the opportunity to pursue his dream of a musical career. Nelson’s talent quickly had him writing songs that some of the top country music singers were singing and having success by landing on the song charts. “Crazy” by Patsy Cline was one of Nelson’s hit songs.⁶⁸ Nelson signed with RCA where Chet Atkins had taken over the song selections and every other aspect. Atkins pushed for the Nashville sound, but Nelson’s vocal style did not fit. He did not have the success as a singer that his songs sung by other people had when he arrived. Nelson also struggled with failed marriages and alcohol while his records were not selling. However, his time on the road showed there were listeners who supported him.⁶⁹ Even so, Nelson’s style of music was not widely appreciated. Although he had success as a song writer, he felt rejected for his style of music. However, Neil Reshen, who had helped Jennings with his record dealings, helped Nelson negotiate his own buy-out to leave RCA.⁷⁰ After his return to Texas in 1972 and his deal with Columbia records, he had taken on a much more rugged look that went along with the artistic freedom that he had found. The success

⁶⁶ Kinky Friedman, *Roll Me up and Smoke Me When I Die Musings from the Road* (William Morrow, 2015), 26.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 27.

⁶⁸ “Country Music,” PBS, accessed November 4, 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/kenburns/country-music/willie-nelson-biography>.

⁶⁹ Zackary Kephart, “The Unbroken Circle: The Willie Nelson Story (Part Two),” *The Musical Divide*, July 19, 2021, <https://themusicaldivide.com/2021/07/13/the-unbroken-circle-the-willie-nelson-story-part-two/>.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*.

of his first record *The Red Headed Stranger* resulted from artistic freedom and the outlaw brand that combined to provide the perfect recipe for its success.⁷¹ The ability to break the chains of the Nashville machine not only allowed solo success for Willie Nelson but also changed his whole appearance to a more rugged look that easily fit into the use of the outlaw image. His appearance was evidence of his separation from the norm. He definitely set himself apart with the sounds heard in his music.

The outlaw image had taken a much deeper effect on Nelson. Nelson's new appearance embraced the bearded style along with longer hair. He used festivals as a way to connect to the audience. After he fled Nashville and embraced a more rugged appearance, he appeared at his July picnic at Gonzales in 1976. The outlaw image that had a violent side had caused chaos at this picnic. It was full of crime and violence. The owner of the venue, the ambulance services, and the electrical contractors ultimately sued him for the chaos that ensued. The popularity of the event resulted in a much higher response than anticipated, showing the listeners craved a connection to the artists and their music of this outlaw movement. The event was plagued by a ten-mile traffic backup, inadequate water and bathroom facilities, extreme temperatures of 100 degrees, and the sound system failing.⁷² After only playing a short set, Nelson jumped on a jet to Hawaii before the end of the picnic.⁷³ The type of behavior displayed at the picnic had caused Nelson to run away. The wild, carefree lifestyle reminisced in the lyrics had caused havoc and legal troubles for Nelson. The rise in outlaw music being presented in park venues and concert festivals provided a personal element to the music being released. It also created strong publicity.

⁷¹ "Country Music," PBS, accessed November 4, 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/kenburns/country-music/willie-nelson-biography>.

⁷² Natalie Moore, "The Lasting Legacy of Willie's Picnic," Texas Highways, August 18, 2023, <https://texashighways.com/culture/art-music/lasting-legacy-of-willies-picnic/>.

⁷³ Graeme Thomson, *Willie Nelson: The Outlaw* (London: Virgin Digital, 2012), 149.

This type of venue created something that Nelson used to have direct access to his audience. The interaction of the audience with his songs was the springboard for his popularity.

Although the violence and outcome of the picnic was a mess, he stayed in Texas. Nelson, after his move to Austin, Texas, discussed this diversion from the typical Nashville-style music in his autobiography. “I’m not sure I would have called our music “progressive country” the term used often by FM radio but here in the seventies I did feel like we were making progress in bridging the generation gap that had opened up in the sixties.”⁷⁴ Nelson identified as an artist and did not consider his music progressive, but there was no denying that his image did reflect what had earlier been connected to the hippie movement of the 1960s. This deviation from the clean-cut image that had aligned with country music in the previous decades was evident in his looks and lyrics in the 1970s. He was an outlaw to the core but one of the more laid-back ones that did not like confrontation and preferred to try to keep the peace. Nelson seemed to be a combination of a hippie and country music star that melded into one.

Nelson probably considered himself a highway cowboy as he moved from city to city to sing his songs. The song by Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings “Mamas Don’t Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Cowboys” depicted the loneliness of the cowboy lifestyle. It also contradicted the viewpoint of this cowboy lifestyle as true freedom when it conveyed sadness in the lifestyle. It was much different from some of the outlaw songs that looked at this lifestyle as the goal. However, in a deeper viewpoint the battle for artistic freedom may have not been what they imagined it to be. Sometimes rising to the top was a lonely spot. Although this lifestyle seemed like true freedom, the cowboy lifestyle was lonely even with someone. The plea to moms to steer them clear of this lifestyle was:

Mamas, don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys.

⁷⁴ Willie Nelson, *My Life: It's a Long Story* (London: Sphere, 2016), 233.

Don't let 'em pick guitars or drive them old trucks.
 Let 'em be doctors and lawyers and such.
 Mamas don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys.
 Cause they'll never stay home and they're always alone.
 Even with someone they love.⁷⁵

The philanthropic and patriotic style presented by Nelson showed he had hit his stride in the 1980s. The philanthropist side of him and his involvement in Farm Aid revealed the softer side of the outlaw musician. He held this first concert in 1985 in Illinois after the success of Bob Dylan's Live Aid to support Ethiopian farmers during the famine. Nelson wanted to help the farmers in America.⁷⁶ In his several decade-long career, he had changed country music and also had given back to the community. His kind and raspy voice carried him to success. Once he found his success in festivals, he created a country outlaw who had found his own path.

Using lyrics to express a sentiment was a key element of the outlaw musicians. Nelson also utilized letters to express his opinion. He wrote letters to the record executives in the 1960s and again in the 1980s. He sent a letter in 1982 to the executives along with a song expressing his sentiments. He noted in his letter the record executives only cared about the bottom line. He did point out in the postscript that Jerry Wexler at Atlantic records pushed for Nelson to make the records with his artistic freedom. The song entitled, "Write Your Own Songs" showed even in the 1980s that the struggle and rebellion against the Nashville establishment continued. The song title also was Nelson's album title for the record. His lyrics clearly related the message of discontent among the artists by stating:

You're callin' us heathens with zero respect for the law
 But we're only songwriters just writing our songs and that's all
 We write what we live and we live what we write is that wrong

⁷⁵ "Mammas Don't Let Your Babies Grow up to Be Cowboys," Waylon Jennings - Mammas Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Cowboys Lyrics | Lyrics.com, accessed September 4, 2023,

<https://www.lyrics.com/lyric/14278574/Mammas+Don%27t+Let+Your+Babies+Grow+Up+to+Be+Cowboys>.
⁷⁶ Gayle-Thompson, "37 Years Ago: First Farm Aid Held in Champaign, Ill.," The Boot, September 22, 2023, <https://theboot.com/first-farm-aid/>.

If you think it is Mr. Music Executive
 Why don't you write your own songs
 And don't listen to mine, they might run you crazy
 They might make you dwell on your feelings a moment too long
 We're making you rich and you're already lazy
 So just lay on your ass and get richer or write your own songs
 Mr. Purified Country don't you know what the whole things about
 Is your head up your ass so far that you can't pull it out
 The world's getting smaller and everyone in it belongs
 And if you can't see that Mr. Purified Country
 Why don't you just write your own songs
 And don't listen to mine, they might run you crazy
 They might make you dwell on your feelings a moment too long
 We're making you rich and you're already lazy
 So just lay on your ass and get richer or write your own songs⁷⁷

Waylon Jennings

Waylon Jennings was also one of the original outlaw music musicians. Jennings, an artist who with many years in the music industry of experiencing the country music genre, understood the control on lyrics and image that the record executives had in the early years of the genre.⁷⁸ The change of pace needed a new direction and that came in the form of a New York accountant turned record producer ready to shake up the Nashville record industry. That was Neil Reshen. He gave Jennings the freedom and conceived this outlaw image that took hold of the movement.⁷⁹

In addition to upgrading Waylon's bookings, Neil also garnered him national press in *Time* and *Newsweek*. Somewhere along the line, Hazel Smith, a local publicist who championed Waylon's music, christened his art as Outlaw. The name stuck. It seemed to apply not only to Waylon but to other artists working outside the tight-and-narrow Nashville box—Willie Nelson, Kris Kristofferson, and Tompall Glaser.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Willie Nelson, *Willie Nelson's Letters to America* (Harper Horizon, 2021), 52-53.

⁷⁸ Dianne Pecknold, *The Selling Sound: The Rise of the Country Music Industry*, (Duke University Press, 2007), 232.

⁷⁹ Jessi Colter and David Ritz, *An Outlaw and a Lady: A Memoir of Music, Life with Waylon, and the Faith That Brought Me Home* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2017), 137.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 139.

Jennings conveyed in his autobiography his opinion of the Country Music Association (CMA). He felt it tried to control and push its own narrative. Jennings stated, “The CMA were always pulling fast ones like that. They were more concerned with their television show than honoring country music.”⁸¹ This sentiment illustrated the anti-establishment stance taken by Jennings was deeper than just artistic freedom. Jennings felt the establishment of the association had neglected country music. Instead, it had focused on the success of the television show. However, this aspect of visual exposure continued to expand the country music genre to mainstream popular culture, including Jennings’ traditional and rugged image.

This outlaw movement equated the ideology of standing up for rights.⁸² Lyrics that included Jennings’ desire for fairness and ideas of the ‘good ole days’ communicated the emotions that many of the listeners agreed. The culture was shifting and the words and sounds of the music expressed the raw emotion as the working class tried to apply the changing societal norms to their own lives. Jennings showed the impact of culture in his song “Good Ol Boys” in the *Dukes of Hazzard*, a television show that encapsulated the good ole boys living on the edge of the law. This show captured the outlaw image in the medium of television. Jennings described the outlaw image with which he was associated in his song. The lyrics of this song echoed the rebel outlaw image by stating:

Just'a good ol' boys
 Never meanin' no harm
 Beats all you never saw
 Been in trouble with the law
 Since the day they was born⁸³

⁸¹ Waylon Jennings, *Waylon: An Autobiography* (USA: Time Warner International, 1997), 270.

⁸² *Ibid*, 278.

⁸³ “AZLyrics,” AZLyrics.com, accessed December 3, 2023, <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/waylonjennings/themefromthedukesofhazzardgoodolboys.html>.

The popularity of *Dukes of Hazzard* created this idea of the country cowboy image and revealed the general public accepted that image. The show aired from 1979 to 1985 and had a 2005 movie with the same theme.⁸⁴ The show visually grasped the desire to hold on to the ideas of the past while moving into the future. The battle with corrupt law enforcement highlights the continued fear of the leadership. The close relationship of the rebel image and storyline became a topic of discussion during modern movements that questioned the use of the confederate flag on the top of the car called the General Lee. The writer and actors from the show adamantly noted the use of the flag and the name General Lee were not connected to use of any type of prejudice.⁸⁵ As an ode to the Confederate General Robert E. Lee, the vehicle became iconic with the series. The use of a 1969 Dodge Charger and the nature of the jumps used in the show caused the producers to purchase as many of the vehicle as possible causing a shortage that year of chargers. Ironically, the show's inspiration came from the 1975 series *Moonrunners* starring Jennings.⁸⁶ The strong southern themes in the show were evident in the storyline.

This theme of pushing against the law was exactly what the artists were fighting in Nashville. Similarly, society was struggling with the political decisions and scandals coming to light. Therefore, this mentality of distrust of the leaders enacting the laws, as depicted in the television show *Dukes of Hazzard*, was being experienced by the American citizens. The Pentagon Papers, the Watergate scandal, and Central Intelligence Agency's debated covert activities globally under the rouse of defending democracy, such as the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion, were some of the scandals that had shaken the American citizens' trust in the

⁸⁴ NBC Universal and Gina Vivinetto, "'Dukes of Hazzard' Stars Respond to Confederate Flag Controversy," Latest News, Videos & Guest Interviews from the Today Show on NBC, August 6, 2020, <https://www.today.com/today/amp/tdna186363>.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ 10 things you didn't know about the Dukes of Hazzard's general Lee, accessed February 5, 2024, <https://www.roadandtrack.com/car-culture/entertainment/g6809/ten-things-you-did-not-know-about-the-dukes-of-hazzards-general-lee/>.

leadership similar to how the artists felt the record labels were handling their art.⁸⁷ Jennings even stated in his autobiography:

Nashville had a definite, set formula for what a country record should sound like. There's more than one kind of country music though---a wide range that takes in everything from bluegrass to western swing. Their country was smooth and pop, one road that led to Nashville Sound. Well, I couldn't do that. I didn't want to do that. I had an energy, it made them afraid. In response, they tried to control me, make me a cog in their machine, and it didn't stop with record production. Everybody got in on it: marketing departments, the promoters, the talent bookers.⁸⁸

Reshen, even though a record producer himself, agreed with the opinion that Jennings had regarding the record executives of Nashville being thieves who lie on the documents and steal the artists' money while maintaining control of them.⁸⁹ The artists, desiring to get away from such tyranny, felt they had to break away from the Nashville machine. Just as the colonists of the Revolutionary War had to become rebellious to break free from Great Britain to ensure freedom, this may be why it resonated with so many Americans to push back against corruption in any form since that was the basis of the foundation of the United States. The fear of change along with witnessing corruption on the front page of newspapers showed the dishonesty in places of power in the United States during this period. The music of the traditional ideology that romanticized the time of the past created an outlet for listeners. The music can impact each person differently depending on the individual's experiences. This allowed music to be such a cultural experience aligning people from different backgrounds with lyrics. Jennings had found his path to reaching those people.

⁸⁷ Thomas Borstelmann. *The 1970s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality*, Princeton University Press, 2011, 19.

⁸⁸ Waylon Jennings and Lenny Kaye, *Waylon: An Autobiography* (New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2012), 174.

⁸⁹ Jessi Colter and David Ritz, *An Outlaw and a Lady: A Memoir of Music, Life with Waylon, and the Faith That Brought Me Home* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2017), 139.

Kris Kristofferson

Kris Kristofferson was similar to the other artists with his being born during the height of the depression in Brownsville, Texas. This location is near the Mexican border, which allowed influences of the Mexican music and customs to be part of his heritage. This would later echo in his lyrics where he expressed his opposition to the intervention of the United States in Central America in 1986.⁹⁰ Even though Kristofferson was a singer and songwriter who most listeners were probably more familiar with the hits he had written for others, he gained the cowboy image on the movie screen. He acted in several movies while writing hits for some of the outlaw musicians, including number one hit “Sunday Morning Coming Down,” recorded by Johnny Cash. He was very much in step with the other outlaw musicians because of his desire for the freedom of writing and using his own lyrics. It was a battle that he had fought and ultimately achieved.⁹¹ This success came after some of his songs were charted by other artists, including Janis Joplin and Johnny Cash. His song “Me and Bobby McGee” talked about freedom by defining it as: “Freedom’s another word for nothing left to lose/Nothin’ ain’t worth nothin, but its free.”⁹² Ironically, it seemed to look at freedom as rock bottom, but later songs echoing the anti-establishment resonated with the outlaw movement and the culture of the era. This song also talked about how ladies loved outlaws and continued to create buzz around the label of outlaw.

Kristofferson had acquired outlaw reputation long before he joined his fellow outlaw artists, Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, and Johnny Cash in 1985 as The Highwaymen group. Kristofferson said of this venture, “We did nothing we didn’t want to do. And we stood up for

⁹⁰ Mary G. Hurd, *Kris Kristofferson: Country Highwayman*, (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Incorporated, 2015), 24.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 31.

⁹² “Personal Struggles Fueled Kristofferson’s Songwriting,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 6, 2001, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2001-feb-06-ca-21580-story.html>.

things we believed in. And it was beautiful that way.”⁹³ This reiterated nothing to lose since at this point in all of their careers they had established themselves and made their own empires. If their message or image was rejected, they could have survived from their royalties and faded from the public eye. However, their success and popularity showcased that the connection of the artists’ message to the listeners continued to align with the culture even in 1985. The term outlaw had resonated with the record producers, who realized the popularity of the music and the marketability that aligned with this music.

Unlike other musicians in the outlaw movement, Kristofferson had other options for professional success outside of a music career but chose to attempt his dream of a musical career. During an interview in 1977, Dan Rather described Kristofferson’s background to the audience and viewers. He highlighted his early years as well as his time as a military child in Texas and his academic successes, including being a Rhodes scholar. Rather noted that Kristofferson had turned down a position to teach at West Point in order to try songwriting in Nashville. However, he had worked as a janitor to pay his rent before finally getting his break with the success of his song “Me and Bobby McGee.” After detailing his background, Rather then asked Kristofferson how he would describe himself. Kristofferson was straight forward with his answer. He said:

Oh, yeah, I know. I try to be straight, very honest. Honesty, I think, is one of the things I have going for me. But as soon as I say that, I feel phony saying it, you know. I don't want to go into my faults,. Because— [laughs] Because we haven't got the time. My faults are probably doing mu—too much to excess of everything⁹⁴

The song “Me and Bobby McGee,” lyrics aligned Kristofferson with the outlaw movement. The song released before the commercialized use of the outlaw movement. Lee Clayton, a fellow

⁹³ Ariel Min, “The Highwaymen: ‘The Mount Rushmore of Country Music,’” PBS, June 7, 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/highwaymen-highwaymen-mount-rushmore-country-music/7289/>.

⁹⁴ “Dan Rather: American Journalist,” Document - “Kris Kristofferson,” Transcript | Dan Rather, accessed September 1, 2023, <https://danratherjournalist.org/interviewer/whos-who/compilation-whos-who-interviews-transcripts/document-kris-kristofferson>.

songwriter, noted that he loved this fresh look and sound. Kristofferson had demonstrated his ability to write amazing lyrical songs.⁹⁵ This became his most coveted skill in Nashville. He never achieved the success of Jennings, Cash, or Nelson with record sales in his own right, but he provided lyrical masterpieces that were successful for multiple artists, including the outlaw musicians.

Jessi Colter

This image of an outsider of the law who pushed the envelope became the main image latched to the outlaw movement in country music. This image was visually reenforced when outlaw musicians like Jennings played in big picture movies and in television shows.⁹⁶ The image within the lyrics helped to embody the American spirit of a traditional American as events in the country began to influence the lyrical expression. Even in the 1970s when a shift in roles in society led by women's rights and gay liberation movements, country music presented a conventional masculine role embodied in the cowboy image. The outlaw image became the 'good ole boy' just trying to do what was right to survive in the changing society. The fear of something different and the skepticism that arose with questionable decisions from those in power from the record executives to the political leaders created an outcry of wanting a sense of normalcy that was found in tradition. The outlaw image and message reached beyond the male singers as even the female singers utilized this image.⁹⁷ As changes in society began to make rumblings, Jennings' wife Jessi Colter presented a fresh female image in the outlaw movement. As with many of the country music outlaw musicians, Colter wrote songs.

⁹⁵ Michael Bane, *The Outlaws: Revolution in Country Music* (New York: Doubleday, 1978), 4.

⁹⁶ Waylon Jennings, *Waylon: An Autobiography* (USA: Time Warner International, 1997), 272.

⁹⁷ Pamela Fox, "Recycled 'Trash': Gender and Authenticity in Country Music Autobiography." *American Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (1998): 244.

Colter was an Arizona native before she left to pursue her dreams of becoming a singer and song writer. The love of music caused the paths of Colter and Jennings to cross professionally in 1964 in Arizona. A few years after meeting Jennings, they married and settled in Nashville.⁹⁸ Colter collaborated with other outlaw artists on the 1976 album *Wanted: The Outlaws*.⁹⁹ She stated how important the writing was to her craft. Her success with her song “I’m Not Lisa,” introduced her as the female in this new progressive outlaw movement music. This song not only became a number one hit on the country music chart but also peaked at number four on the pop chart, making it a success beyond the country music genre. Her destiny as a singer resulted from the goal to avoid a life in part-time secretarial work.¹⁰⁰ As with other artists in Nashville trying to establish their artistic creativity, she experienced similar limitations because the record executives held control. In her autobiography she noted how once Willie Nelson had broken free of Chet Atkins and the strings of RCA records, he had produced the best records, such as *Shotgun Willie*, *Phases and Stages*, and *Red Headed Strangers*. He influenced albums that Jennings wrote after these albums were released.¹⁰¹ Colter also observed that Nelson’s first Fourth of July Picnic event “combined hippies, rednecks, radicals and everyone in-between.”¹⁰² She realized lyrics of the progressive music in the outlaw subgenre shared the raw emotion that helped bring people together. She and Jennings were artists at this inaugural event in 1973.

Colter understood the importance of the words in the lyrics and how it could resonate differently with different people. She also noted that looking back at the music provided a better

⁹⁸ Bruce Sylvester, "Country Junction: 10 Questions for ... Jessi Colter." *Goldmine*, Oct 17, 2003. 30.

⁹⁹ “Country Music,” PBS, accessed October 3, 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/kenburns/country-music/jessi-colter-biography>.

¹⁰⁰ Michael Bane, *The Outlaws: Revolution in Country Music* (New York: Doubleday, 1978), 71.

¹⁰¹ Jessi Colter and David Ritz, *An Outlaw and a Lady: A Memoir of Music, Life with Waylon, and the Faith That Brought Me Home* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2017),141.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

understanding of the significance of the music.¹⁰³ As a wife of a musician and an artist herself, she understood the struggles of artistic freedom and the difficult path it had taken to ensure her art was how she wanted it. She never intended to take on the outlaw image, but her collaboration on the album with outlaw in the name cemented her within the movement. The term outlaw seemed fitting as the lyrics expressed traditional ideology in the quickly changing world. The artists themselves had broken the chains of the establishment in Nashville and inadvertently aligned this mentality in opposition to controlling or corrupt power as a collective message of the outlaw music to push back.

Dolly Parton

A notable one among other female musicians is Dolly Parton, who released music that also pushed the evolving progressive female role during the 1970s. Her lyrics also expressed the culture of society, such as in her song “Nine to Five.” This song expressed the role of the working women who emerged in the 1970s and the need to change the role of women in society.¹⁰⁴ Parton’s song carried the message of inequality in the workplace for women. The message of the song had broader distribution via the popular movie with the same title in which she starred. This song “Nine to Five” transcended mediums by not only being a popular musical tune but also depicting the evolving female role on the movie screen. The lyrics made clear the working environment of women. One verse is:

They just use your mind
And they never give you credit
It's enough to drive you
Crazy if you let it
9 to 5
For service and devotion

¹⁰³ Jessi Colter and David Ritz, *An Outlaw and a Lady: A Memoir of Music, Life with Waylon, and the Faith That Brought Me Home* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2017), 119.

¹⁰⁴ Dolly Parton and Suzanne Sonnier, *Dolly Parton in Her Own Words* (Chicago: B2, 2020), 2.

You would think that I
 Would deserve a fat promotion¹⁰⁵

These lyrics did cause concern among the traditionalists in country music because of its progressive nature, and Parton was crossing over out of the country music genre. Parton responded to these claims by stating, “I would hear some of the old-timers complain that I was ‘leaving country music.’” I would always reply, “I’m not leaving it. I’m taking it with me to new places.”¹⁰⁶ Parton along with others changed country music in the 1970s, and the changes provided the opportunity for songwriters and artists with similar opinions to express their messages in the music. This music ultimately created a cultural impact on history and expressed the mood of a country.

The use of Parton to be representative of an outlaw was not quite accurate. She was not an original or aligned with the core musicians of the movement. However, she did shake up the music industry. She was a master at understanding how country music reflected the culture of the working-class American in the 1970s. Thus, how Parton broke barriers and helped sing the script of a changing role of a woman gave her a place as a female voice in the outlaw movement. The woman’s role had moved from being a homemaker into the working woman role during this period. Women continued to gain rights and the ability to live independently and help make money for the family or themselves. The earlier expectation for women to be only a homemaker had caused struggles for some of the older outlaw musicians in their youth. Haggard experienced the struggles firsthand with a single mother trying to make ends meet in his youth. Their families and mothers lived in a time that it was not common for a woman to work outside of a home. Therefore, they could not contribute to alleviating the financial woes that so many families

¹⁰⁵ “AZLyrics ,” AZLyrics.com, accessed April 3, 2023, <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/dollyparton/9to5.html>.

¹⁰⁶ Dolly Parton and Suzanne Sonnier, *Dolly Parton in Her Own Words* (Chicago: B2, 2020), 72.

experienced. Parton experienced the struggles of financial strains in her own life growing up in the rural mountains of Tennessee. These struggles are heard in her song “Coat of Many Colors,” that detailed the coat made of rags her mother made for her. This song released in 1971 provided the common storyline to depict a memory or lifestyle the singer experienced common among the outlaw musicians. This song was similar to Kristofferson’s songs since it was recorded by other artists when it charted on the *Billboard* Country chart. Parton’s dear friend Porter Wagoner had recorded it in 1969 and Parton sang back up.¹⁰⁷ It was clear her story resonated with listeners with the success seen from Wagoner’s recording of the song. Her skill as a songwriter was the foundation of her career, and many of the stories provided the connection to the audience. As Colter stated, the music can mean something different to each listener. However, the impact was clear when the popularity showed the words and melody as it rose on the charts. Wagoner had hosted a show that Parton had become a guest on for many years. When Parton decided to leave the show to pursue her own career in 1974, this did not sit well with Wagoner. He filed a lawsuit claiming he had made her a star. She noted in her autobiography how this impacted her:

Porter Wagoner filed suit against me for approximately three million dollars, claiming he had made me a star and was entitled to percentage of my career for life. I could have probably won the case in court, but spare Carl and my family the heartache a long bitter court fight would have caused, I agreed to settle out of court for around one million dollars. I should note that as a part of the settlement, we both agreed not to make the amount of the suit of settlement public. But since Porter has already done that in his book, I suppose it’s okay for me to mention it here.¹⁰⁸

Wagoner had presented the same mentality of the record industry by insinuating an artist’s success was the result of his influence. It also presented the common thread of the masculine-filled industry in Nashville. Although Parton had many successes at this time, she did not have

¹⁰⁷ “Coat of Many Colors”—Dolly Parton (1971) - library of Congress, accessed September 4, 2023, https://www.loc.gov/static/programs/national-recording-preservation-board/documents/Coat-of-Many-Colors_Hubbs.pdf.

¹⁰⁸ Dolly Parton, *Dolly: My Life and Other Unfinished Business* (Thorndike, Me.: Thorndike Press, 1995), 134.

millions of dollars. She contemplated filing bankruptcy, which would have voided Wagoner's award of a million dollars. In true Parton fashion, she was determined to pay her debt, and it cost almost everything of hers and her husband's, but she paid the debt.¹⁰⁹

Parton broke barriers and created a path for future female artists in the country music genre. Parton identified herself as a simple country girl, but her rebel actions with her sweet smile helped to give women a voice and to change the face of the industry. The struggle for women's equality has been an ongoing battle in the American society, but Parton became a trailblazer in music to help provide a melody and storyline that resonated not only with country music fans but also with those outside that genre when she had music to crossover to other genres. Her achievement received recognition when the Country Music Association nominated her in 1978 for entertainer of the year and she won. Parton was only the second woman to win it. Loretta Lynn, who was a trailblazer in her own right, was the first woman to win the award of entertainer of the year.¹¹⁰ Parton is one of eight women to have won this coveted award of the country music genre.¹¹¹

Parton and Colter found a spot in this movement and created diversity bringing a female perspective. These ladies among others also broke the barrier that spreading lyrical messages was not limited to males even in the midst of the male-dominated industry of country music. The outlaw movement focused mostly on the men who were associated with the movement, but it

¹⁰⁹ Dolly Parton, *Dolly: My Life and Other Unfinished Business* (Thorndike, Me.: Thorndike Press, 1995), 134.

¹¹⁰ This is since the beginning of the establishment of the Country Music Association award show that is hosted annually in Tennessee. The most recent winner Lainey Wilson in 2023 was the eighth woman to receive this award with the most recent win. The last woman to receive the award was Taylor Swift who had won in 2011 for the second time. Diane J. Cho and Andrea Wurzbarger, "All of the Women Who've Won the CMA Entertainer of the Year Award," *Peplemag*, November 9, 2023, <https://people.com/country/cma-awards-women-who-won-entertainer-of-the-year/>.

¹¹¹ Christinavinson, "Look: Every CMA Awards Entertainer of the Year Winner Ever," *The Boot*, November 3, 2022, <https://theboot.com/cma-awards-entertainer-of-the-year-winners/>.

also shaped the ability of women to have an impact in the country music genre.¹¹² These women who pushed for their own artist's rights during this period and for an expanded role for women in the male-dominated industry were outlaws in their own right. Parton, similar to the other outlaw artists, had the talent of a musician and the background of a working-class American. Having this background gave credibility to the stories shared in the music and this resonated with the working-class of society. Parton went even further by connecting to the women whose role had shifted in the changing society. They had a role model in Parton, who was making her own path as well.

Billy Joe Shaver

Billy Joe Shaver may not be the most well-known outlaw singer but his contributions to the outlaw artists and the movement is undeniable. Shaver's life also seemed plagued with themes that echoed in the lyrics of the music. He married the same woman three times and divorced twice.¹¹³ Shaver born in Corsicana, Texas on August 16, 1939, was raised by his grandmother, Birdie Lee Watson.¹¹⁴ Blanche Williams, the owner of Green Gables honky tonk just outside of Waco, recruited Shaver's mother Tincie in her effort to employ young intelligent ladies to boost business at her bar so she moved away from her mother. Tincie left Billy Joe with her mother who raised him.¹¹⁵ Even before he was born his father accused his mother of cheating on him. She was pregnant with him and his father beat her nearly to death and left her to die until a Mexican gentlemen stumbled upon her beaten body clinging onto life and helped her. Shaver

¹¹² Courtney Campbell, "Country Music's Rebellious Outlaws Back When They First Challenged Nashville," *Wide Open Country*, May 8, 2022, <https://www.wideopencountry.com/outlaw-country-singers/>.

¹¹³ "The Ballad of Billy Joe Shaver; (Page 3): [1]." *Texas Monthly*, Dec 2003, 1.

¹¹⁴ Michael Hall, "The Legend of Billy Joe Shaver." *Texas Monthly*, vol. 48, no. 12, Dec. 2020, 50.

¹¹⁵ Billy Joe Shaver and Brad Reagan, *Honky Tonk Hero* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2020), 2.

claims learning about the story of that night may be the reason he writes country songs.¹¹⁶ Shaver believed God allowed him to survive that night so he could tell stories through music.

One of the best songwriters from Texas, Shaver wrote his truths about his experiences and embodied the outlaw image naturally. After his death in 2020, musician Jason Isbell posted on social media the statement, "Billy Joe Shaver might've been the only true outlaw who ever made his living writing about the inner workings of his heart."¹¹⁷ This statement expressed the impact this outlaw made on the music industry. The powerful lyrics in the outlaw movement have roots in the groundwork Shaver contributed to the genre. Shaver gave his honest expressions and experiences. The Texas background allowed the cowboy image expressed in lyrics and his style to be authentic. It was one that the audience craved. The exploration of everyday issues expressed from a personal experience gave an extra edge to Billy Joe Shaver's music. Although not many of his songs were successful as far as sales, other artists were able to use his music and generate success.

The unpredictable behavior of Shaver through his career and his credit as a songwriter to help form the sound present in the 1970s is his legend¹¹⁸ Waylon Jennings' *Honky Tonk Hereos* album included songs by Shaver, and the title track written by Shaver "Honky Tonk Hereos" defined the music of the 1970s. This song's lyrics defined the working-class individuals that after a hard day sometimes would enjoy a honky tonk bar and had a lifestyle outside of the mainstream society. It also noted the struggles and sacrifices endured by this hard-working class and their resilience to persevere. This anthem set the tone of the music for the 1970s in country

¹¹⁶ Billy Joe Shaver and Brad Reagan, *Honky Tonk Hero* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2020), viii.

¹¹⁷ Michael Hall, "The Legend of Billy Joe Shaver." *Texas Monthly*, vol. 48, no. 12, Dec. 2020, 50.

¹¹⁸ Gianluca Tramontana, "Billy Joe Shaver Good to be Anywhere." *Dirty Linen*, 2005 Feb 01, 12.

music, and it also resonated with the working-class demographic connecting them through the lyrics. Their story is captured in these lyrics:

Lowdown leavin' sun done did everything that needs done
 Woe is me, why can't I see I'd be best leavin' well enough alone
 Aw, them neon lights, couldn't stay out of fights
 They keep a-hauntin' me in memories
 There's one in every crowd for crying out ;oud
 Why was it always turnin' out to be me?
 Where does it go, the Good Lord only knows
 Seems like it was just the other day
 I'z down at Green Gables, a-hawkin'' them tables
 And generally blowin' all my hard earned pay
 Piano rolls blue danced holes in my shoes
 There weren't another other way to be
 For loveable losers, no account boozier
 And honky tonk heroes like me¹¹⁹

The role of country music at the working-class level functioned as a script to guide the listeners through the 1970s and 1980s that revealed the societal shift impacting their lives. Outlaw music forged a relationship with the listeners and caused divisions among artists in the country music genre when defining their image. This showed that music can express the temperament of society in America. It also provided a timeline of the shift in the mentality of the culture and debates in society as expressed by a certain demographic. The complexity in the latter part of the 20th century was evident in the musical dialogue that expressed the emotions that groups collectively followed. The working-class group looked to country music to provide the lyrical message of society. The conservative push in society had brought country music into mainstream. The movies and television shows, such as *Urban Cowboy* and shows like *Dukes of Hazzard*, confirmed the image of a cowboy transcended the musical airways.

Another change in country music was beginning with a rise in patriotism that grew in the 1980s. The relationship between military and the country music genre had always been close. In

¹¹⁹ Billy Joe Shaver and Brad Reagan, *Honky Tonk Hero* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2020), 99.

the 1960s Air Force used of the show *Country Music Time* a public service announcement with musicians used to recruit that played until 1986.¹²⁰ Further, politics made use of the image of hillbilly or country image because it had proved to be a means to connect to the people. Initially, it was used in Jimmy Carter's campaign due to his roots in peanut farming. Bill Clinton also used it in his run for President. The irony of the Clinton's campaign in 1992 was that the Yale Law graduate, who was also a Rhodes scholar, did not fit the typical image of a rural personality. However, being the governor from the state of Arkansas, which had a large population of rural residents, helped sell the image.¹²¹

The cowboy image used in the outlaw movement also bled into other cultural aspects, such as fashion and films, which utilized a storyline that included the cowboy image.¹²² The 1970s had introduced the programs on television that conveyed the cowboy and hillbilly images. *The Beverly Hillbillies* was a show having country folk colliding with the big city. *Bonanza* and *Gunsmoke* focused on the western rural lifestyle.¹²³ These shows had something in common with the outlaw artists. It showed the timeframe and struggles of the rural society in the Great Depression. The storyline backgrounds paralleled those of the artists and were being used in the entertainment industry in television. This was reaching audiences nationwide who could identify with the scenarios. The common thread of this was that society had experienced it, and the younger generations had heard the stories of their parents' and grandparents' experiences and struggles. The shows' popularity highlighted the fascination with the rural lifestyle. The shows

¹²⁰ "Stars, Stripes, and Country Music," PBS, accessed October 4, 2023,

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/stars-stripes-and-country-music/>.

¹²¹ Anthony Harkins. *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*, (Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2005), 214.

¹²² Joe Levy, "40 Years Later, Country Owes a Lot to 'Urban Cowboy': Here's Why," *Billboard*, February 7, 2023, <https://www.billboard.com/music/country/urban-cowboy-soundtrack-40th-anniversary-country-9432879/>.

¹²³ Anthony Harkins. *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2005, 2055.

were in the top listed by Nielsen ratings in published in 1970.¹²⁴ This also gave the music, movies, and television a marketable aspect in the cowboy or hillbilly characteristic that resonated with the working class by romanticizing the past and pushing for rights of the hard workers. The popularity of the shows provided insight of the interest to the lifestyle of previous generations continuing the romanticizing the past as a key element within the culture.

An interesting aspect of the cowboy image is the debate of its authenticity or lack thereof. The style evolved, and the exterior impact of the global events helped the lyrical message of the outlaw movement resonate with the listeners of the outlaw music.¹²⁵ Michael Murphy, a singer and songwriter, introduced the term cosmic cowboy in the title of his second album in 1972. He further established the term visually by wearing a cowboy hat and denim for an album cover. This image continued to be linked to the outlaw movement.¹²⁶ The Austin progressive movement used the cosmic cowboy image in 1975 and introduced the image, including an African American musician, in an article in the *Austin Sun* on Ed Guinn, a local musician in Austin.¹²⁷ Anything different can fall into a progressive theme. However, the outlaw movement was about change by righting the wrongs.¹²⁸ Francesca Royster's book *Black Country Music: Listening for Revolutions* explored the uphill struggle with the black artists and the fans of country music as a black listener. The history of the country music had white male dominance. Royster experienced living in Nashville in the 1970s and described the struggle of the area to embrace the old but also

¹²⁴ *Nielsen Television '70*. A. C. Nielsen Company, 1970.

¹²⁵ Jocelyn R. Neal, *Country Music: A Cultural and Stylistic History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 223.

¹²⁶ Holly Gleason et al., "Mr. Record Man: Cosmic Cowboys & the Austin Sound of the '70s," *Lone Star Music Magazine*, December 5, 2015, <https://lonestarmusicmagazine.com/mr-record-man-cosmic-cowboys-the-austin-sound-of-the-70s/>.

¹²⁷ Jason Mellard, *Progressive Country: How the 1970s Transformed the Texan in Popular Culture*, (University of Texas Press, 2013), 89.

¹²⁸ The topic of race in the country music genre can be further discussion in the dissertation by Christina Michelle Harrison Wilkins in her dissertation. "'A Place to be': The Negotiation of Genre and Identity by Four Black Singer-Songwriters in Nashville.", (Indiana University), 2022.

usher in the new.¹²⁹ This was an enlightening explanation of the struggle of American society to deal with the change during this period. The musical artist also struggled with this. Royster presented iconic Tina Turner as an example of a native Tennessee resident who had to leave to chase her dream of becoming a singer. Turner even had a song called “Nutbush City Limits” that depicted her life in Tennessee.¹³⁰ It showed that even in other genres there was the ability to show a glimpse into the culture of a society.

Geography can create a strong relationship. However, the musical genre and the past practices of society can even leave an imprint on the ease of demographic to follow a genre. The roots of the country music genre having southern roots strived to connect some of the past mentality, including injustices towards different races by letting the African American demographic enter the genre. Although the push for change had occurred slowly, this was a move toward inclusivity in the genre. However, in society for some groups there still exist difficulty to accept change and prejudice. This book provided insight on the continued struggle as the Country Music Association shunned Beyonce’s song “Daddy Issues.” This song had the country sound but the artist who sang it was from the pop music genre.¹³¹ However, it showed similarly that like in the case of the early outlaw musicians presenting something different that the record industry did not conceive on their own, there is not always support. The listeners have the power by purchasing the records. Artists, like Cash who did his own advertisement, also have power to oppose the suppression of the artists’ music. This ties the culture of the listeners to the success of the artists’ music.

¹²⁹ Francesca T. Royster, *Black Country Music: Listening for Revolutions*, (University of Texas Press, 2022), 80.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 31.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 80.

The southern geographic roots typically tied that genre to the stigma that surrounded the South and the Civil War. However, in 2016 the Country Music Awards hosted Beyonce duetting with The Chicks (called The Dixie Chicks at that time before they changed their name in 2020). This continued evolution and collaboration of musical artists from different genres, not only on awards shows but also on the road, showed the reflection of society and country music and how quickly it evolved to change.¹³² The changing society and gaining rights for minorities that occurred in the 1970s as these outlaw musicians pushed for a progressive agenda began to slowly break down barriers. Barriers were not easily removed since change can be difficult for some. However, the country music genre showed that even the most traditional genres can evolve to move beyond the wrongs of the past. Cash was a great example as he admitted that his father was full of racist hatred and a violent man. Cash moved beyond that and showed that a person can grow past the prejudices of the surroundings. Challenging the status quo for either personal reasons or fighting the wrongs resulted in the artist being labeled an outlaw. However, the change did start a revolution within the industry even for women. Tanya Tucker is another example of a women who was able to use parts of the outlaw movement to shape her music and make her place in the world of country music. The women's movement for equality was finally making achievements in the country music genre. This also supported the idea that the narrative of the culture of society reflected in the music and lives of these artists.¹³³ This movement gave artists the ability to push against the societal norms in the musical lyrics.

The collective sentiment detailed in the lyrics of the songs in the country music genre created in itself an instrument for a social movement. It immersed with a storyline of poverty that

¹³² Francesca T. Royster. *Black Country Music: Listening for Revolutions*, (University of Texas Press, 2022), 77.

¹³³ Holly Gleason, *Woman Walk the Line: How the Women in Country Music Changed Our Lives*, (University of Texas Press, 2017), 87-88.

most people in America or someone in their family had experienced during the Great Depression. Dolly Parton's heartwarming story of her coat also showed that even in the darkest hour there can be things to celebrate. The struggles that everyone faced whether it was the artists in their striving for artistic freedom or the workers for proper pay and safety could be used to push forward by holding onto the honor and being grateful. This mindset echoed in the midst of the outlaw movement.

Summary

This outlaw movement blended traditions of the past with sounds of the present. Their individual experiences paralleled with the American culture of the time and evolved with it as the country music genre moved forward to the future. The turmoil present in the country music genre at the inception of the outlaw movement became defined as progressive, and it was a transformation that occurred in the country music genre as the narrative had become more aligned with the songwriters. The use of the term outlaw became the visual concept through the cowboy image for the outlaw movement. Country music became a fusion of the European influences, including French, Welsh, Irish, Scottish English, combined with African influences, and Mexican influences, which made it truly a blend of American culture that continues to evolve. The outlaw artists created a dialogue that helped the lyrics connect to the listeners and evolved as society changed.

The American society had experienced the Great Depression and then watched loved ones go to war continuously until the time of the 1970s. The struggles to make ends meet for families and to understand the continued warfare had imprinted pains onto society with the global conflict. It also produced leadership that abused power, and the newspapers provided the play-by-play of the continued scandals. The struggle to understand the change of roles in society

and to combat the corruption provided the storyline of a rebel to be the melody of the generation. The backgrounds and experiences of these outlaw artists helped to create a collective music that not only defined the period but also provided an outlet in the country music for future artists to challenge the status quo to try to understand the evolving society. The outlaw musicians challenged the establishment in Nashville and created a sub-genre that balanced the political debates faced by society. The outlaw music reflected all the changes that were taking place. The same was occurring with every other genre of music from that period. Music tends to reflect the current environment, whether cultural, political, or social.

The country music genre as a result of the artists and their desire for artistic freedom became a jumping board for artists to expand their audience and cross over. The changes resulting from the outlaw movement impacted future artists and their artistic freedom with their lyrics. Even so, the country music genre still holds true to the tradition when musicians take their sound too far away from the tradition. These new traditionalists who emerged in the 1980s in the country music genre presented a much cleaner cowboy image with the traditional sound, showing the strong relationship with tradition. George Strait, Alan Jackson, Keith Whitley, and Clint Black were among the artists who added a contemporary sound with the traditional roots.¹³⁴ As time moved toward the 1990s, many of the female artists created a more pop sound that allowed a cross over. This was evident with many of artists, such as Shania Twain and Faith Hill, whose sound propelled them onto pop radio.¹³⁵ However, the artists typically do not forget their roots, which allows true fans of the artists to follow them even when they cross over.

¹³⁴ “New Traditionalist Music Style Overview,” AllMusic, accessed September 7, 2023, <https://www.allmusic.com/style/new-traditionalist-ma0000011949>

¹³⁵ Taylor Weatherby, “This One’s for the Girls: How Shania Twain, Faith Hill & Dixie Chicks Led a Late ’90s Female Revolution That Broke Country into the Mainstream,” *Billboard*, October 2, 2023, <https://www.billboard.com/music/country/women-in-country-1998-essay-8458912/>.

The need to find common ground as the dust settled from the turbulent 1960s provided an outlet to merge sounds. Some artists were able to combine fans from several genres that had split due to the dynamic decade experience of protests. An artist who combined the rock and country sounds again was Gram Parsons. His influence on country was that of a duplicitous outlaw that created a sound that blended the fan base from both genres. The sound of the music he created deviated from the norm by creating a southern rock style.¹³⁶ Parsons had lived a short life before the height of the outlaw movement in the 1970s. Even with his unexpected death in 1973, he still left an impact on the country music genre.¹³⁷ Emmylou Harris, taken under the wing of Parsons, became a voice on his albums and continued his influence after his death. The music produced later in her career created a bridge between genres in the 1990s.

The timing of Parsons' life provided a melody that fused country rock music as another subgenre connecting new fans to the country music genre. Parsons continued to provide surprises in modern day. A record store in Los Angeles found a lost recording of Gram Parsons, providing a new era of listeners in 2023.¹³⁸ Because of the influence of rock that he brought to his music, he became the father of country rock music.¹³⁹ This paved the way for mingling the fan base by providing a new blend for the outlaw movement later in the 1970s. This impact on the country music genre, similar to the sounds of Bakersfield, resulted in a blend of country and rock sound. The combination of rock and country can be heard in "A Song for You." This song combined

¹³⁶ Michael Grimshaw, "Redneck Religion and Shitkickin' Saviours?": Gram Parsons, Theology and Country Music." *Popular Music* 21, no. 1 (2002), 95.

¹³⁷ Patrick Sullivan, "Gram Parsons: The Mysterious Death - and Aftermath," *Rolling Stone*, June 25, 2018, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/gram-parsons-the-mysterious-death-and-aftermath-204652/>.

¹³⁸ "How a Beloved L.A. Record Store Unearthed a Long-Lost Gram Parsons Recording," *Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 2023, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/music/story/2023-11-20/gram-parsons-amoeba-music-emmylou-harris>.

¹³⁹ Nancy Walecki, "Sound as Ever," *Harvard Magazine*, February 21, 2024, <https://www.harvardmagazine.com/2023/06/feature-gram-parsons>

emotion with the fiddle solo, giving it the melody of country roots. The lyrics echoed with the conventional storytelling lyrics evident in country music genre. These lyrics state:

So take me down to your dance floor
 And I won't mind people when they stare
 Paint a different color on your front door
 And tomorrow, we will still be there
 Jesus built a ship to sing a song to
 It sails the river, and it sails the tide
 Some of my friends don't know who they belong to
 Some can't get a single thing to work inside¹⁴⁰

Society has had to redefine roles of the working class in the past. The society that followed the Civil War created the need to redefine how the rural South was handled in a post-slavery America. Historian Heather Cox Richardson explored this new working class that emerged at the turn of the century after the Civil War. America was this paradoxical working-class ideology that ended up separating the nation into two different groups. One group, which quickly became mainstream, enthusiastically embraced individualism and believed that everyone who worked hard was offered universal prosperity through what they believed was an even-handed free labor system. The other group, commonly termed as special interests, believed that fundamental flaws existed in American society and advocated for the federal government's intervention. These two groups were at odds with one another, mainly because the first did not trust the second. The working-class ideologists, which consisted of most Americans, turned against special interest legislation because they believed self-made success – which was embodied by the American cowboy – was achievable for all and that government handouts

¹⁴⁰ “Gram Parsons – a Song for You,” Genius, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://genius.com/Gram-parsons-a-song-for-you-lyrics>.

would remove individual incentive. Paradoxically, those same individualists, working-class Americans sought out government support for their own interests and values.¹⁴¹

Record companies are like the government as they provide the resources and ability to produce the music for the artists. Therefore, it is in their best interest for the music to be successful to promote profit to maintain the business. It is similar in society. The government provides services, such as public education, emergency services, and civil order. It does not mean that someone should use the position of power for self-interest. In a perfect world the record industries and government would be void of corruption or benefiting from the people's skills. Unfortunately, as shown by the outlaw musicians' experiences and those of American citizens, sometimes corruption is present, and all those affected must combat it in whatever way they are capable. For musicians it was creating a new sound to include their message at festivals to reach a wider audience beyond the radio. The outlaw artists fought for artistic freedom and in the end created a movement that allowed the country music genre to provide a voice for the working-class Americans, who wanted to maintain their patriotism for their country but stand against corruption. Protests were the means for the citizens to have their voices heard. This merged the ideologies. The result was the listener heard the struggles and how they can be overcome.

The great thing about country music is it has a diverse background that gives it a unique sound, but it also cautiously embraces change that allows the country music genre to be a summary of the culture change in the United States after it has taken hold with the general population. Music can bring people together for a common purpose, resulting in a cultural impact even if it is just coping with the change faced by society. It allows a place to put a collective

¹⁴¹ Heather Cox Richardson, *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America after the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 1-2; 343-346.

message that gives a voice or escape to those who do not have one. It does not mean that the musicians disregard tradition. They just learn how to blend it as is evident in the evolution of lyrics in country music. The lyrics are bound to the storyline of the songwriters who provide the lyrical message. The outlaw music not only opened the door to creative freedom but also made it possible to be viable in a commercial business and still resonate with the listeners. The common background of the artists that aligned with society created that connection of empathy and understanding that had the melody of country music. The power of the outlaws to successfully contribute to change and to present lyrical truths after their initial success provided insight to the culture of society. The path to achieve this level of freedom from the control of record labels did not come easy. Each of the artists faced their own struggles to achieve this, but the marketability of the outlaw image helped propel these artists to achieve this freedom.

In conclusion, the outlaw country music artists were just trying to make a life for themselves by acquiring their artistic freedom in a society that had changed quickly and by connecting with listeners. It created a relationship for country music to identify with the demographic of the working class. The women of the industry presented a parallel to the evolving role of women in the changing society. Dolly Parton, along with trailblazers, such as Loretta Lynn, paving the way, provided an outlet for the women to join the lyrical conversation. The artists experiencing similar backgrounds helped provide honesty to the lyrics and empathy to those in society who experienced the same struggles. Their own geographical diversity broke the chains of the historically southern identification of the genre. This mirrored the shift in American society of moving around in the effort of finding the American dream of success for themselves. The music created an outlet within the lyrics that provided insight to the reaction and endurance of the cultural shift of the period. The power of the music provided the lyrics that consisted of

poetry in a melody as a collective exchange and connection that broke the boundaries of the previous limitation of country music genre widening the appeal of the music. The lyrical shift from anti-establishment in the dawn of the outlaw movement to the patriotic narrative showed the lyrical conversation aligned with the cultural shift. The 1980s witnessed a rise in support of the military and celebration of small-town America. The outlaws also reflected this rise in patriotism when “America” released in 1984 by Waylon Jennings provided this patriotic element within the outlaws. In his autobiography Jennings stated, “It was the time of the U.S. Olympics in 1984. I’ve always thought that Ronald Reagan didn’t do everything right, but he did give some pride back to the country; we were apologizing for being great. I got inspired by that Olympics and wanted to write a patriotic song.”¹⁴² This patriotism also included community philanthropy as seen in the Farm Aid organized by Willie Nelson to help the farmers struggling in the United States.¹⁴³ In 1986, the one hundredth celebration of Lady Liberty in New York Harbor, Waylon Jennings, Jessi Colter, Johnny Cash, and Willie Nelson participated in the liberty celebration at the Statue of Liberty.¹⁴⁴ The artists used their experiences from past and present to provide this interpretation of the culture of the average American. Their message in the music resonated with the listeners on a large scale by connecting the culture of the society to the lyrics of the music.

The outlaw artists, defined by their opposition to the artistic limitation, changed the lyrical freedom forever. This changed the country music genre by providing honest lyrics that connected with the fans. This impacted not only the outlaw artists in the country music genre but also other artists in their reflection of the society. The lyrical shift from anti-establishment at the beginning of the outlaw movement to the patriotic narrative showed the lyrical conversation

¹⁴² Waylon Jennings and Lenny Kaye, *Waylon: An Autobiography* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2012), 307.

¹⁴³ George-Warren, Holly. "Willie Nelson, the People's Champion." *Texas Monthly*, 2020.

¹⁴⁴ “Come to America” *Billboard* Vol.98, No. 27, 8.

aligned with the cultural shift. The individual artist through a desire of artistic expression evolved to develop the relationship between the country music fan and the connection to the lyrics. The long-established control by record executives motivated the push of this rebel image with a traditional spin that resonated with the listeners. However, this cemented the relationship between country music listeners and artists that is still evident in modern day. The turmoil present in the country music genre became defined as progressive, and it was a transformation that occurred in the country genre as the narrative had become more aligned with the songwriters. The use of the term outlaw became a visual concept through the use of the cowboy image for the outlaw movement. This also gave the music a marketable characteristic that resonated with the working class with the idea of romanticizing the past and the pushing for rights of the working class. The collective sentiment detailed in the lyrics of the country music genre created an instrument for a social movement.

Chapter 4 Outlaw Anthems: Analyzing Outlaw Lyrics

Country music lyrics often hit the listener in the gut. There is a reason for that. In the early years of the country music genre, it needed a distinction to come into its own as a genre of music, and a *New York Times* article in 1957 aptly provided that by stating, “But the real heart of the matter in country music is its lyrical content. One expert has recently said the lyrics are written ‘with the writer’s guts.’”¹ The listeners related to the lyrics and responded by supporting the music. The country music fan drives the response to the lyrical message, providing the connection to the culture within the country music genre. When asked in an interview why the country music fans continue to stay loyal to their music, George Jones responded, “I believe it’s simply because Johnny and Willie and myself and [Merle] Haggard have stayed with what I call honest music.”² This honesty connected to the culture of the country music listeners. The outlaw movement took a role in using the artists’ freedom that evolved into progressive lyrics to share a message on struggles or a reflection of society. The musicians used the music for their own rebellion, and the lyrics connected with the culture of the fan base. The stand the outlaw artists took against the record industry establishment created changes in the ability of artists to have more control of the music released on record labels, which resulted in new locations of key country music artists, lyrical change, the presence of political lyrics in country music genre, and the diversity in country music. The outlaw movement became the progressive element of the country music genre and an outlet for the listeners to establish a response to the changing societal

¹ Goddard Liberson, "'Country' Sweeps the Country: Hillbilly Music Makers Leave Parlayed a Blend of Blues, Spirituals and Folk Tunes into a \$50-Million-a-Year Business. 'Country' Sweeps the Country." *New York Times* (1923-), Jul 28, 1957. 153.

² Phil Sweetland, ("The Loyalty of Country Music Fans Knows no Age Limits." *New York Times* (1923-), Jun 03, 2003. 2.

norms. The role of the country music fans in shaping the message and cultural significance within the genre was crucial as their interpretation of the message conveyed in the lyrics and their response to those lyrics drove the connection to the culture. The outlaw movement deepened the relationship of country music with the fan base by providing honest music to the listeners with traditional sounds and storytelling. The lyrical message presented the struggles faced during that period or aligned sentiments of nostalgia of traditions. An analysis of the outlaw movement provided insight into the country music fan and how the lyrics evolved with society. In the outlaw movement, the artists used lyrics reflecting the culture and politics that brought changes in society. The lyrics grabbed the attention of the listeners who related to the truths emitting from this movement because of their own struggles in dealing with the changes.

The ability to reach a larger audience created an expansion in the musical genre in the early years. Artists, such as Charlie Poole, became pioneers of country music before the genre became a defined category. As a result of the sounds streaming from the banjo in Poole's music to the storytelling in the lyrics, his song "Can I Sleep in Your Barn Tonight Mister," became a popular tune in the 1920s as the reach of country music expanded. Even during this period, the wondering soul that parallels the cowboy image echoed in the lyrics. The description of the wondering is as follows:

Now the stranger was fair, tall and handsome
And he looked like a man who had wealth
Said he wanted to stop in a country
Said he wanted to stop for his health³

This showed the deep-rooted tradition that intertwined with the image of the cowboy, which was that of one who was self-reliant. During Poole's life, the traveling of his father for work in mills

³ Charlie Poole, "Can I Sleep in Your Barn Tonight Mister," 1925. Lyrics. Documenting the American South. The North Carolina Experience. University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/barn/barn.html>

influenced his songs, and the sound used was a blend of hillbilly, bluegrass and even influenced by European-born music instructors who moved into the mill towns and provided diversity to the blend of influences.⁴

The country music expansion began to spread with the use of the radio to reach the audiences. A radio station set up in the National Life and Accident Insurance Company building used the call letters WSM as homage to the National Life's motto "We Shield Millions."⁵ WSM in Nashville started the Grand Ole Opry in 1925. WSM further expanded its reach in 1932 with the installation of an additional broadcaster tower, which helped provide nationwide reach for the airways of the radio station. This tower in Tennessee reached such a large distance that for a brief period during World War II the signal provided ship-to-shore communication with submarines. This reach continued to grow in 1939 with a second tower.⁶ The height of the towers provided this expansive reach to new country music listeners and fans. This tower, having a wide range of frequency, is still one of the oldest broadcasting towers in the United States.

The radio, other advancing technology, and live music were the means to get the message to the listeners. Advancements in technology played a critical role in amplifying this voice, allowing for the growth of the music scene and a new narrative to be heard in a larger area. The popularity of the radio in homes continued to grow through the broadcast of Franklin D. Roosevelt's fireside chats. He implemented this direct communication into the homes of American citizens.⁷ The ability to hear shows and music in the home created an opportunity for a

⁴ Mark Rubin, "Charlie Poole: The Man at Country Music's Roots." *Sing Out! the Folk Song Magazine*, Fall, (2005), 18.

⁵ "History," WSM Radio, October 5, 2021, <https://wsradio.com/history/>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The Fireside Chats implemented by Franklin D. Roosevelt, provided an intimate relationship with the listeners using the radio. Further reading on the impact the Roosevelt made on the use of radios in homes can be read in Christopher Brockman, "Building a Coalition by the Fireside: FDR, the American People, and the Radio." Order No. 27957971, (Lehigh University, 2020).

type of communication to be forged between the listeners and the artists. The recollection of such a setting was meaningful to Johnny Cash. He discussed his time listening to the radio shows before he became a country music star. Cash's mom sang in the fields as she worked, and in the evening the family gathered around the radio.⁸ Even his future wife, June Carter, sang on the radio with her family. It was during his youth that he heard Carter and her family sing on the radio. As a child Cash had made a prophetic statement about Carter.

He grew up listening to her on the radio because everybody listened to the Carter Family. And so he heard her as a little girl. ... He said ... as a child, he was gonna to marry her someday. And she'd heard about him from [her friend] Elvis [Presley].⁹

Cash was a country music fan many years before he became an artist and later aligned with the outlaw movement. The radio helped to create a country music fan in him and connected him not only to his future wife but also to the love of music. The music that flowed through the radio was a way for the listeners to connect and endure struggles. The Carter Family not only provided songs to fill the airways, including gospel songs but also were strong influences on the artists who entered the country music scene in the 20th century.¹⁰ Cash's experience highlighted the path of many of the country music stars of his era on their exposure and role as a fan before their stardom. These artists, such as The Carter Family on the radios in the earlier years of country music before it was a defined genre, impacted the future outlaw musicians.

The radio became a connection for listeners to the radio shows early in the 20th century. This connection also created an escape from the daily struggles. The Great Depression affected Americans differently, depending on their geographical location. In some areas of the country,

⁸ Larry Philpot, "Johnny Cash, His Early Years - Legends in Concert," Onstage Magazine.com, May 3, 2017, <https://onstagemagazine.com/jr-cash-early-years-legend/>.

⁹ Amy Ta, "'You Just Cannot Stop Looking at Her': Film Shows June Carter's Spark and Success," *KCRW*, January 22, 2024, <https://www.kcrw.com/news/shows/press-play-with-madeleine-brand/biden-racketeering-asthma-johnny-cash-stanford/june-carter>.

¹⁰ Ed Kahn, "The Carter Family on Border Radio." *American Music* 14, no. 2 (1996): 205.

the city residents struggled since they were unable to grow their own food.¹¹ The importance of the radio and the impact it had on the influence of country music resulted when the sounds of the Grand Ole Opry reached the bustling city of New York. This instrument gave the country music genre the ability to gain fans that otherwise would never have been exposed to the genre. This created a broad spectrum of listeners as this relationship between the fan and the artist grew and affected each other. The radio helped to spread country music by expanding its reach. American Public Media made a statement on the importance of the radio. Ray Suarez, an American Broadcast journalist, stated,

There are more than 10,000 commercial radio stations broadcasting in the United States today. On one out of every five of them, you'll hear something like this. [*contemporary country*] Country music is deeply embedded in American culture, from strip mines in Kentucky to strip malls in Los Angeles. Country music is a quintessentially American style, celebrating the lives of working-class people. Mostly white, working class people. But the story of how country music got its hold on the nation is an unlikely one. When radio dominated American cultural life, back before the 1950s when television swept the country, America tuned in to a much different sound. When you switched on a radio in the 1930s, you heard "respectable" music. High-quality broadcasts with a sophisticated, big-city sound. National networks were taking over radio. Both the federal government and the advertising companies demanded respectable programs. Radio networks hoped to win the ears and minds of the nation. But a lot of Americans didn't want to listen to music dictated by New York's cultural elite.¹²

The radio showed this cultural battlefield, but it also shared different music across the nation.

The working class in the rural pockets of the United States struggling to combat the Great Depression while enduring the Dust Bowl had an outlet. The mixture of the big city sound with the country music stations slowly growing during the period highlighted the blending of society.

¹¹ "The Great Depression Hits Farms and Cities in the 1930s," Iowa PBS, accessed February 14, 2024, <https://www.iowapbs.org/iowapathways/mypath/2591/great-depression-hits-farms-and-cities-1930s#popup-container>.

¹² American Public Media, "Hearing America: A Century of Music on the Radio," American RadioWorks - Hearing America: A century of music on the Radio, accessed February 14, 2024, <https://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/radio/transcript.html>.

The radio helped spread the sounds of Nashville, but the Nashville Music Union controlled and revitalized the record industry. Chet Atkins and Owen Bradley, who were artists, helped organize the growing record industry.¹³ Atkin's job as a producer and RCA record executive was to find artists who would sell records. After recording songs, he would present to New York RCA executives for them to push songs. At times, he would advocate for the artists.¹⁴ Atkins was part of the music machine in Nashville providing RCA with successful artists and songs. Ironically, although he would develop relationships with most of the outlaw artists, it ultimately was this job that caused the rise of the outlaw movement against the record establishment in Nashville that controlled the sounds of the artists. However, before their success as outlaw artists, they worked with Atkins. The period of the 1960s country music genre that led the original outlaw musicians to rebel was due to his part in the rise of the Nashville sound. This polished sound through support of Atkins created a more marketable and pop sounding music out of Nashville in 1960s. This shift away from tradition and towards commercialization is a key element that caused the sounds and lyrics heard with the outlaw movement.¹⁵ Although Atkins pushed for the commercial sound the outlaw artists respected his skills as a guitarist. Nelson wrote a song "Darkness on The Face of the Earth" in 1961 and presented it to Atkins, who had produced many successful albums and stars. Atkins knew Nelson had a skill in writing. At age twenty-eight Nelson played the song and Atkins declared it a sad song. These lyrics, even years before Nelson's involvement in the outlaw movement, carried themes of loss and love.

The morning that you left me was just another day
How could I see the sorrow that had found me
Then you laughed and told me I was in your way

¹³ Travis D. Stimeling, *Nashville Cats: Record Production in Music City*, (Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2020), 55.

¹⁴ Maxine Brown, *Looking Back to See: A Country Music Memoir* (University of Arkansas Press, 2012), 134.

¹⁵ Travis D. Stimeling, *Nashville Cats: Record Production in Music City*, (Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2020), 130.

And I turned and ran as heaven fell around me

I stumbled through the darkness, my footsteps were unsure
 I lived within a world that had no sunshine
 When you left me, darling my world came to an end
 And there was darkness on the face of the earth

The stars fell out of heaven and the moon could not be found
 The sun was in a million pieces scattered all around
 Why did you ever leave me, you knew how it would hurt
 And now there's darkness on the face of the earth¹⁶

Although it had been dressed up with Atkins' commercialized Nashville sound, Nelson did not find success with this song. However, he exhibited the skills of a great songwriter and just needed to find his niche. Nelson was an artist that the Nashville sound mold did not work for his vocal style.

The radio played a crucial role in the quest of country music to reach a wider audience. The radio became a free method to get the message in the lyrics out to the listeners via the music. The radio helped connect the future outlaw artists to the music streaming through the airways. The Cash family sang while working in the fields, and they also gathered around the radio to listen to the music. Cash's later departure from Sun records to Columbia resulted from his desire to release a gospel album and showed the depth of the gospel influence in his youth.¹⁷ Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson also were products of the radio era who listened to the Carter family and other country music stars on the radio before they entered the genre as artists themselves.¹⁸ Listening to the radio as a way to reach the world beyond the rural areas was important.

¹⁶ Willie Nelson et al., *Energy Follows Thought: The Stories behind My Songs* (New York: HarperCollins, 2023), 348.

¹⁷ Robert Burke Warren, *Cash on Cash: Interviews and Encounters with Johnny Cash*, (Chicago Review Press, 2022), 2.

¹⁸ Folder 873: Interviews: Scan 11 in the Archie Green Papers #20002, Southern Folklife Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Jennings' father would use his truck to pull around to connect to the radio to listen to the tunes during this youth.¹⁹ The radio brought families together and the music provided the message.

The foundation to connect to the audience through lyrics that provided an escape from the daily struggles and turbulent society became the tradition of country music. The singers faced their own struggles and used this emotion in the lyrics.²⁰ The radio and the position of the disc jockey provided the listeners with the music using singles. Bob McKenzie, a Tennessee gospel disc jockey, stated, "These are singles which are of extraordinary interest to country people."²¹ These singles mailed to thousands of country disc jockeys included "Good Morning Neighbor," a popular song used by country disc jockeys as their theme song. Other gospel singles included were "Where Did all the Good Folks Go," and "What Will We Tell our Sons?"²² McKenzie's comment made in 1968 highlighted the close relationship between country music and gospel music, which was deeper than the musical influences of the sound coming from the networks. The foundation in country music origins of religious themes provided cultural influences on the music. Gospel music and its influence on country music provided a connection to the demographic of listeners from the early years of country music.

The effect of gospel music remains within the country music genre even though the gospel genre has its own designation. In the 1970s there were some radio stations that had a designated time for country gospel on their shows. Dennis Studer, a disc jockey at KSTN-FM in Stockton, California, noted the Sunday morning designated gospel time on their station.²³ The

¹⁹ Mark Zwonitzer and Charles Hirshberg, *Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone? The Carter Family & Their Legacy in American Music* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 192.

²⁰ Ken Burns, Julie Dunfey, Dayton Duncan, Peter Coyote, Florentine Films, Public Broadcasting Service (U.S.), and WETA-TV (Television station: Washington, D.C.). *Country Music*. Episode 2, Hard Times (1933 –1945). Arlington, VA: Public Broadcasting Service, 2019.

²¹ Gospel Music: Heartwarming Saturates Country DJ's in Drive on Gospel Singles. (1968). *Billboard.*, 80(44), 37.

²² Ibid.

²³ "Letters," *Country Music*, (January 1973): 4

meaning behind the music and the culture of the listeners made a connection as the result of this religious belief undertone in the music. These themes of faith, redemption, forgiveness, gratitude, and resilience provided the strong religious undertone in the music. The gospel element was evident in the outlaw influences with the type of songs released to albums.

The close relationship of the outlaw artists with gospel music provided additional insight into the listeners. The struggle with grasping the changing societal norms conflicted with the traditional roles of the past, resulting in people needing solace. The impact of gospel music on the outlaw artists helped as often the lyrics they sang were self-examining. Although the songs did not pointedly express gospel, the underlying themes of redemption and reflection on struggles point towards a moral foundation. Using lyrics to express these personal struggles was a traditional element and authentic element of country music. The outlaw movement songs reflected the influence of gospel roots in the lyrics by presenting the theme of forgiveness. Willie Nelson's song "Bloody Mary Morning" produced lyrics that expressed the desire of forgiveness for the actions, "All the night life and the parties, and temptation and deceit, the order of the day"²⁴ This expression of regret and hope provided undertones of redemption.

The growth in the use of live performances and expansion of the radio broadcasts to a larger geographical area continued to expand the reach of the lyrical message. The radio had connected the nation almost as quickly as the advancement of technology introduced the television. The introduction of television provided a visual element of music, and Nashville became one of the earliest genres to align this visual element seamlessly with the radio. Nashville's first television station was We Shield Millions Vision (WSMV), which had

²⁴ "Bloody Mary Morning," Willie Nelson - Bloody Mary Morning Lyrics, Lyrics.com, accessed May 17, 2024, <https://www.lyrics.com/lyric/2017194/Bloody+Mary+Morning>.

originally signed on as WSM-TV in 1950.²⁵ The WSMV knew the value of the television in establishing a move to the future of music. This visual aspect also created a deeper connection to the listeners over greater distances.

This new technology allowed country music, as society evolved, to remain a powerful tool for connecting individuals to larger cultural movements and ideologies as the counterculture and civil rights movement began to take center stage in society. The radio was a powerful medium that captured the essence of the cultural and social movements of the era. The early years of country music not only expressed the struggles faced by people enduring the depression but also included hope in the lyrics that held of redemption through faith. The country music tradition included the use of storytelling lyrics and emotional melodies. It was through these elements of tradition that country music served as a voice for the working class and others also experiencing the counterculture of society quickly causing changes.²⁶ The advancing technologies gave country music a growing audience with which to connect. The visual form of technology became an avenue that expanded the lyrical stories of struggles and confusion during times of social unrest. *Hee Haw*, a humorous country music show that started in 1968, provided this visual aspect of rural life. The show based in fictional Kornfield Kounty highlighted sketches with humor on different characters of the town. The show aired on Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) for two years. The executives decided to cancel it due to the rural setting and the common theme among several of the shows on CBS during that time. The program director, Fred Silverman, had elected to cancel the *Hee Haw*. Other programs, such as *Green Acres*, *Beverly Hillbillies*, *Petticoat Junction*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, *Gomer Pyle*,

²⁵ "History," WSM Radio, October 5, 2021, <https://wsradio.com/history/>.

²⁶ Ben Sisario, "Young, Rich and Ruling Radio, Country Walks a Broader Line," *The New York Times*, April 6, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/07/business/media/losing-a-few-hay-bales-country-music-goes-mainstream.html>.

U.S.M.C., also carried the rural theme.²⁷ The popularity of these rural shows did not convince the networks to continue them. Shows, such as *Hee Haw*, found an alternate method to continue airing for many years through syndication with affiliates. However, the switch became beneficial for the producers who advocated for the syndication of the show. This allowed the affiliate local stations to elect to have the show aired on their local channels. This increased the viewing by a third and allowed the royalties to go to the producers versus the network executives.²⁸ Similar to the connection with listeners to music, this fictional rural show resonated with the audience, and the show's continued success was a result of the audience's support.

Unfortunately, the joyfulness of Kornfield Kounty could not overcome the reality of troubled times in the United States. The country faced changing dynamics and ultimately endured a rise in assassinations, increased protests on leadership decisions, political climate shift with global role change, and religious movements. These turbulent societal changes and the reaction to these changes were evident within the music. The music provided an outlet for the listeners to reminisce about the past or better times. This particular style of music also provided a last-ditch effort to hold onto traditions as societal roles continued to evolve. The decade of the 1970s presented political turmoil, increasing the distrust of the leaders. The Pentagon Papers showed how the truth about the expansion of the Vietnam War had been hidden from the public.

²⁷ Lynn Hirschberg, "What's a Network to Do?" *The New York Times Magazine*, September 20, 1998, NA. *Gale In Context: Biography* (accessed May 18, 2024). Lowry, Brian. "The South rises again, but not oaters." *Daily Variety*, June 6, 2012, 4. *Gale Business: Insights* (accessed May 18, 2024).

https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A294895671/GBIB?u=vic_liberty&sid=summon&xid=80855197.

²⁸ Roy Clark, "Almost Everyone Was Wrong about 'Hee Haw,'" *HuffPost*, December 3, 2016, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/almost-everyone-was-wrong_b_8713996.

The Watergate scandal and ultimate resignation and pardon of President Nixon continued to wear down the trust of the leaders in the United States.²⁹ The mistrust of the leaders and the change in laws, which included the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Civil Rights Act of 1968, created a societal shift away from traditional society norms.³⁰ The American citizens and outlaw musicians had experienced these changes during the turbulent decade of the 1960s and 1970s. The outlaw movement addressed the longing for tradition in songs, such as “Luckenback, Texas.” One of the key elements was that the American family began to change during this era. Divorces became a common element to end marriages, and the necessity for women to move into the workplace to support themselves and their children altered their traditional role of homemaker.³¹ Traditions were losing ground to the changes which brought emotional stress to those affected.

During the 20th century, music became a nonviolent way to communicate the emotions that many of the American citizens were experiencing during this period of change. The country music adhered to a conservative and, in some cases, religious background with their lyrics and support. This continued in the 1970s. The outlaw movement had its own protest against the executives of country music. This was not a new use of lyrical conversation. Music had been used throughout history to convey related experiences that the artists and the listeners shared. This included a rejection of liberal policies, a dramatic shift from the segregationist past, and a

²⁹ The Pentagon Papers provided further evidence of the debated argument on the background of the actions taken in Vietnam that had not previously been reported by the media. The Watergate scandal also had to do with information but was in regard to men caught and accused of stealing information from the Democratic National Committee. The Watergate scandal and surrounding investigations of the event led to the resignation of Richard Nixon from his presidency soon after his re-election in 1974.

³⁰ *History and enforcement of the Voting Rights Act of 1965: hearing before the Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties of the Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, One Hundred Sixteenth Congress, first session*, (2020). U.S. Government Publishing Office.

³¹ James R. Wetzel, "American Families:75 Years of Change: MLR." *Monthly Labor Review* 113, no. 3 (03, 1990): 4.

call for less government intervention, except in defense. It was a mix of traditional values and modernity, as well as a new toughness on crime, especially drug-related crimes. The outlaw movement included libertarianism and social conservatism, which also included a Christian evangelical resurgence.³² The outlaw movement became a bridge connecting with their fight for freedom and individualism that aligned with libertarianism, the ideology of tradition rooted in conservatism. American society had their own movements pushing for their rights, including the civil rights movement and women's movement. The outlaw artists were on their own campaign to start a battle for artists' rights.³³ The Christian Right was not a late 20th century phenomenon. The presence of the Christian Right had existed throughout much of the 20th century. It is evident through the music of the country music genre that the Christian influence, termed the "Christian Right," became more of a force during the latter half of the century and was a response to what they believed as the moral decay of the country.³⁴

The backdrop of the rise of the need to preserve tradition and stop the moral decay provided influence for the music outlaw movement. The lyrical content of the outlaw movement music reflected an attempt to understand the changing society and how to adhere to tradition. Johnny Cash's purposeful addition of his song, "What is Truth," at the White House in the 1970s

³² The blend of movements in response to the social movements echoed in the lyrics. The political fine line balance by country music artists, including outlaw artists, discussed in Dayton Duncan and Ken Burns book *Country Music: An Illustrated History*. Dayton Duncan et al., *Country Music: An Illustrated History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019), 341-345. Waylon Jennings would state later in the 1980s that "I'm not a Republican, and I'm not a Democrat," when asked who he would vote for in an election after his song "Yoyos, Bozos, Bimbos and Hereos," in the *Los Angeles Times* article, "Singer Waylon Jennings plays it straight about Yoyos, Bozos, Bimbos, and Hereos." Mike Boehm, "'Singer Waylon Jennings Plays It Straight about Yoyos, Bozos, Bimbos, and Hereos.'" October 22, 1988, 82.

³³ Stephen A. King, "'Between Jennings and Jones: Jamey Johnson, Hardcore Country Music, and Outlaw as Authenticating Strategy.'" *Popular Music and Society* 37, no.1 (2014): 3-4.

³⁴ Historians debate when the movement started the shift to the conservative movement or Christian Right. The fundamentalist movement of the 1920s is one of the earlier origins of this movement in the United States. Additional reading on historians' discussion of the timeline of this movement can be found in Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2010), and Matthew Continetti, *The Right: The Hundred Year War for American Conservatism*, (New York: Basic Books, 2022).

highlighted the ability to question the issues of social justice and inequality.³⁵ The 1970s political climate, Supreme Court decisions, and the culture wars of the 1970s caused a stronger response. Several Supreme Court cases throughout the 1970s impacted the working-class Americans and their political views. The debated topic of abortion became a Supreme Court decision in 1973 that legalized abortion with the passage of Roe versus Wade. This became a topic that split the classes and challenged some of the traditional family values and sexual morality that the working-class held in high regard.³⁶ This decision created division among Americans with mixed views on the topic. The case that brought the Watergate scandal to ultimately caused the release of the tapes from President Nixon leading to his resignation in United States versus Nixon further alienated the faith of Americans with their leaders.³⁷ Individual rights were challenged as the Supreme Court had cases such as Boraas v. Village Belle Terre decided in the favor of control of government to define what a family is and limit land use promoting the ability of the government to utilize police power in land use.³⁸ This was a contrast to the cowboy lifestyle theme expressed in the lyrics of the outlaw movement that valued the individual right and the ability of an individual to use land or property freely. This is another example of the growth of the government to limit individual rights that the working class and artists held tightly onto through the lyrics expressing the yearning for freedom. The withdrawal from the conflict in Vietnam occurred in 1975. The Americans debated the resolution, and it created another element

³⁵ Nan Robertson, Special to *The New York Times*. "Cash and Country Music Take White House Stage." *New York Times* (1923-), Apr 18, 1970. 33.

³⁶ Peter Skerry, "The Class Conflict Over Abortion." (*The Public Interest*, Summer, 1978), 69.

³⁷ William Van Alstyne, "A Political and Constitutional review of 'United States v. Nixon,'" *UCLA Law Review*. 22, no. 1 (1974).

³⁸ "Boraas v. Village of Belle Terre: The New, New Equal Protection." *Michigan Law Review* 72, no. 3 (1974), 508.

of distrust by Americans in the leadership of this conflict.³⁹ The culture wars that resulted from the divided sides on how to handle the changes in society created tensions among different demographic of Americans. These different ideologies created a split of political sides and those trying to adapt to the changes. The working-class Americans during this period which gave rise to the popularity of the outlaw movement that provided nostalgia for those who longed for the past but also the attitude to oppose authority that were enacting these changes and laws.

Conservatives viewed them as an assault on traditional values and the idea of the traditional family. These conservatives exhibited a fear of change and uncertainty from these attacks on tradition. In the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, America seemed unstable with the Vietnam War, the Cold War, dirty politicians, and the civil rights movement. Many Americans feared the new changes that some called progress. Thus, many citizens clung to the idea of a return to the old days of stability. This echoed in the sentiments of the outlaw movement. The outlaw musicians used the lyrics to try to understand the changes which resonated with the listeners who also were ascertaining the changing cultural climate and trying to find their place. The lyrics reflected the reaction to events occurring around them, such as Loretta Lynn “Dear Uncle Sam.”⁴⁰ Merle Haggard had his songs, such as “Okie from Muskogee” and “The Fightin’ Side of Me,” presenting lyrics regarding the events.⁴¹ Willie Nelson wrote a song entitled “Jimmy’s Road,” released in the 1970s but written during the height of the Vietnam War.⁴²

³⁹ Williams Ogden.Maarten Calon.John M. Anspacher.Charles L. Gunn.James K. Morris.Robert Pell.Anita T. Sullivan.Charlotte Melichar.Alan Carroll.James P. Thurber, Jr.D. Francis Sammon.George W. F. Haligartern.Murat W. Williams. “Letters to the Editor: Vietnam: In the Aftermath, A Welcome Contrast, more than an error ‘respected general’ A Day to Remember in the years to come’ A vote of Thanks’ Do the right think could have been worse unconditional amnesty our real enemy of the charity, The lesson don’t repeat history why not recrimination?” *The Washington Post* (1974-), May 06, 1975. 1.

⁴⁰ Bill DeMain, "Loretta Lynn Talking about Her Songs." *The Performing Songwriter* 12 (12, 2004): 55- 57.

⁴¹ Jim Campilongo, "Merle Haggard Okie from Muskogee." *Guitar Player*, (Jan 2017), 19.

⁴² Willie Nelson, David Ritz, and Mickey Raphael, *Energy Follows Thought: The Stories behind My Songs* (New York, NY: William Morrow, an imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers, 2023), 191.

To allay the fears of progress, gospel music in the South became a strong outlet to help overcome the struggles faced by different groups. The origins of country music provided insight to the country music fans demographic as the genre evolved. God and country music went hand in hand along with the audience of the country music. The southern geographic influence on country music provided a background of cultures that built the foundation of the country music genre. The paths of the history of gospel and country music crossed in the fast evolution of the music industry in the 20th century. Each of these genres evolved into subgenres and had similar roots and influences. These influences included African American traditions, European, and folk music that provided unique sounds to these genres. The gospel influence on some of the artists in the country music was evident by the music played on the radio. One example is June Carter Cash, whose background included radio shows with a gospel song in the programming. Hank Williams, a major influence of the outlaw movement, recorded gospel songs before his untimely death.⁴³ These early gospel influences on the artists and the listeners of country music defined the demographics of the fans.⁴⁴ The influences of the sounds and lifestyle presented in gospel music became a deeply rooted part of the country music genre that also influenced country music fans and future artists. The radio era helped to provide the medium to present these country songs that included gospel songs.

The listeners of country music were trying to find a balance of both the conservative revival and progressive politics and how it fit in with their beliefs. The conservative movement gained footing in the working class facing the trials and events of the 1970s. The people complained about the overgrown and bureaucratic government, but they did not stop looking to

⁴³ Marilyn Stasio, "Hank Williams: Lost Highway." *Variety* 390, no. 2 (2003): 60.

⁴⁴ Howard Wight Marshall, "'Keep on the Sunny Side of Life:' Pattern and Religious Expression in Bluegrass Gospel Music." *New York Folklore Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (Mar 01, 1974): 3.

Washington to solve the problems, which had its source in the executive and legislative branches' policies and decisions.⁴⁵ As a result, language and rhetoric for social movements and arguments became singular, taking on a more personal aspect.⁴⁶ The songwriters were struggling with their own grasp of these changes. Listeners tried to find solace in the themes of the music of the outlaw movement that grasped the rural values as well as the patriotic themes in times of uncertainty.

Similarly, the music industry had its own turmoil. A key element the artists of the outlaw movement established was the departure from the produce-controlled music. The outlaw movement gave artistic control to artists on what they were recording and releasing, and they too would become successful.⁴⁷ This element created a strong relationship with the artist and the lyrics released. The lyrics echoed either the desire of remaining the same or a reminiscence of the past. The freedom gained the outlaw musicians the authenticity of country music with the honest lyrics. Ironically, the Nashville sound that caused the artists to push for their own musical freedom created a wider demographic of people in the 1960s.⁴⁸ The record producers wanted to attract the fans from the popular rock and roll genre introduced over the radio. This push of the

⁴⁵James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 8, EBSCO.

⁴⁶Daniel J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 7, Oxford Academic.

⁴⁷Travis Stimeling, "Narrative, Vocal Staging and Masculinity in the 'Outlaw' Country Music of Waylon Jennings." *Popular Music* 32, no. 3 (2013), 344.

⁴⁸Linda Martell, a black female artist of 1970s, defied the race and gender barrier present in the country music genre. Charley Pride, who is sometimes credited with breaking the barrier of race, personally denies that title. Pride and Martell were opposites of the artists opposing the record label control. The ability to do their craft and be recording artists was what they preferred and allowed the record label to present however they chose. Further discussion on the racial struggles can be found in the book, *Country Boys and Redneck Women: New Essays in Gender and Country Music*. Edited by Kristine M. McCusker and Diane Pecknold. Jackson, [Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2016.

Nashville sound intended to grab a much wider demographic of listeners to the country music genre to increase revenue. The result was a revolutionized sound.⁴⁹

However, the outlaw artists kept the relationship between the listeners and their music as they expressed their sentiments. It did not mean the lyrics were not controversial. Billy Joe Shaver, a singer and songwriter within the outlaw movement, described the lyrics as truth. He stated, “It’s truth and saying it in as few words as you possibly can to the point where an idiot like me can understand it. You’ve gotta start at the bottom. When I have trouble with a song, I’ll lay it out on the table and visualize it as a letter to someone I care about. Then I’ll realize what I want to say.”⁵⁰ The backgrounds and struggles of the artists and the fans were alike. These artists and listeners had either experienced the Great Depression, global war, economic ups and downs or the quickly evolving society. The artists had to find their success on a road of obstacles. The lyrical message of the music provided comfort and solace to many trying to hold on to values and traditions treasured.⁵¹

The timing of the movement and the labels aligned in the 1970s. The struggles that the original artists faced with achieving artistic freedom started in the 1960s. The movement resulted after the 1972 successful record entitled “Ladies Love Outlaws” by Waylon Jennings that coined this outlaw movement. The outlaw theme of having lyrics that were controversial or edgy did not remain isolated to the original outlaw musicians. Other artists began to understand the intersected relationship with the country music fan and the message in the music. They gravitated to the outlaw style of music. These artists influenced by the outlaw movement, including David Allen

⁴⁹ “The Nashville Sound,” Country Music Project, accessed February 29, 2024, <https://sites.dwrl.utexas.edu/countrymusic/the-history/the-nashville-sound/>

⁵⁰ Kevin Curtin, “The Unabridged Billy Joe Shaver,” Country outlaw wanted – alive and kickin’ - Music - The Austin Chronicle, accessed March 27, 2024, <https://www.austinchronicle.com/daily/music/2014-08-05/the-unabridged-billy-joe-shaver/>.

⁵¹ “Country Music: Country Fan Clubs to Display at ’72 Fair.” *Billboard*. 83, no. 33 (1971), 24.

Coe, Steve Earle, Johnny Paycheck, Emmylou Harris, and George Jones, were among those who impacted the relationship with the listener as the message carried in the lyrics of their songs resonated with their fans.⁵² The influence started with the beginnings of the outlaw movement in the 1970s and impacted country music forever. David Allen Coe discussed his connection to the outlaw movement of the 1970s stating:

The reason that Nashville called us outlaws was because they had taken Ray Price and added all of these strings to his music. The New York lawyers and publishers had gotten involved and they were lookin' for crossover music to reach a larger audience and make more money. We did not wanna do that. Waylon, and Willie and I all said the same thing, "I can't pay all these guys to go out on the road with me, and it's not fair to somebody that buys my records for me to go out there and not sound like my records." So, we wanted to record with just our bands. I was the first one who ever did that, and then Waylon and Willie also started doing it. They became more famous so quite naturally they got the credit for doing it.⁵³

Similar to Willie Nelson, Coe's early success came from writing songs for other artists, such as Tanya Tucker, early in the 1970s.⁵⁴ Coe had success through Johnny Paycheck's release of his song, "Take This Job and Shove It."⁵⁵ According to the Jennings, Coe after gaining success in Nashville claimed he was the only 'real' outlaw due to his time in prison.⁵⁶ George Jones, another artist associated with the outlaw image, initially had been elected to record the song but did not show up to the recording studio. Paycheck stepped into record. Paycheck had played as a guitarist in Jones' band in the 1960s and was familiar with his style of music. The lyrics

⁵² The original outlaw artists were Willie Nelson, Kristofferson, Johnny Cash, Merle Haggard, and Waylon Jennings. However, they were also songwriters whose music was recorded by other artists that allowed the imprint, and other artists used the movement to expand beyond the original artists even in the early years of the movement.

⁵³ "An Exclusive Interview with: David Allan Coe," review, accessed February 1, 2024, <https://www.review-mag.com/article/an-exclusive-interview-with-david-allan-coe/>.

⁵⁴ Phawker, "Wire from the Bunker: Meet David Allan Coe," PHAWKER.COM – Curated News, Gossip, Concert Reviews, Fearless Political Commentary, Interviews....Plus, the Usual Sex, Drugs and Rock n' Roll, May 11, 2020, <https://phawker.com/2020/05/11/wire-from-the-bunker-meet-david-allan-coe/>.

⁵⁵ Tom Netherland For Tri-Cities Scene, "Records & Roots: David Allan Coe Reigns as the 'Mysterious Rhinestone Cowboy,'" News, September 1, 2023, https://www.timesnews.net/tri-cities-scene/records-roots-david-allan-coe-reigns-as-the-mysterious-rhinestone-cowboy/article_f439bdbe-48f4-11ee-9c9b-2b4cd2914cfd.html.

⁵⁶ Lenny Kaye and Waylon Jennings, *Waylon: An Autobiography* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2014), 268.

presented an element that American workers were experiencing in the turbulent economy of the 1970s. The theme to work a job for a long time and not receive recognition resonated with the country music listeners and American workers of the period. These lyrics stated:

I been working in this factory
 For now on fifteen years
 All this time, I watched my woman
 Drownin' in a pool of tears
 And I've seen alot of good folk die
 Who had a lot of bills to pay
 I'd give the shirt right off of my back
 If I had the guts to say
 Take this job and shove it⁵⁷

The artists who began to personify or release lyrics that aligned them with the outlaw movement created a contemporary element that connected to the country music listeners.

Because the artists themselves had come from backgrounds similar to the listener, their experiences and lyrical expression of tradition and the past resonated with the listeners. This expression of shared experiences, such as day-to-day struggles, love, loss of love, and patriotism, cemented the close-tied relationship with conservative ideals during this period that included anti-government sentiment, traditional values, and security for their families. These conservative ideals created a resistance to the quickly changing societal norms that deserted the traditions tied to these listeners' and the artists' demographic. The politicians realized the connection of country music to listeners of the working-class demographic.⁵⁸ The first politician to use country music in his political platform on a national level was George Wallace, the Democratic governor from Alabama. Wallace ultimately lost his bid for President to Richard Nixon in 1968. He had used

⁵⁷ "Johnny Paycheck – Take This Job and Shove It," Genius, accessed February 4, 2024, <https://genius.com/Johnny-paycheck-take-this-job-and-shove-it-lyrics>.

⁵⁸ Campaign melodies were used since Franklin D. Roosevelt's campaign, utilizing songs to connect to voters. The use of the country music genre was used in the 1960s and 1970s. A breakdown of some of these melodies can be read in the Joseph Wakelee-Lynch "Campaign melodies," *LMU Magazine*, October 31, 2020.

the country music songs to reach the demographic listeners in an attempt to gain their vote. A song used in Wallace's campaign was Tammy Wynette's "Stand By Your Man."⁵⁹ Nixon also realized the value of using the popular country music to resonate with listeners and to appeal to the working class whites of the South in an effort to secure their votes. Nixon's invitation to Haggard to perform at the White House with other country music stars in the 1970s solidified a political connection that created the manifestation of the conservative mentality to the genre of country music.⁶⁰ Haggard's music created a stand towards the counterculture and presented a divide between country music and other genres of the period.

The original outlaws who were members of the Grand Ole Opry were Johnny Cash and Willie Nelson. In true outlaw fashion, Cash had been banned after a performance in the 1970s where he smashed stage lights with the microphone stand. The incident blamed on the mixture of alcohol and drugs in the singer's system at the time. The ban was later lifted, and Cash went on to have other performances at the Grand Ole Opry.⁶¹ Waylon Jennings performed at the Grand Ole Opry in 1978 but never became a member of the Opry. Ironically, Hank Williams lost his membership due to his inconsistency of showing up for his sets.⁶² Although Hank Williams' career was cut short with an untimely death, his actions and substance abuse lingered as an element in country music, including the outlaw artists. Cash and Williams were two of the artists banned from the Opry due to their substance abuse decades apart.

During this period, country music artists, such as Johnny Cash, had personally experienced the struggles of the Great Depression and the post-World War II consumerism. In

⁵⁹ "The Conservative Evolution of Country Music," NPR, February 18, 2007, <https://www.npr.org/2007/02/18/7484160/the-conservative-evolution-of-country-music>.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Tina Benitez-Eves, "5 Country Artists Who Were Banned from the Grand Ole Opry," *American Songwriter*, December 2, 2022, <https://americansongwriter.com/5-country-artists-who-were-banned-from-the-grand-ole-opry/>.

⁶² Cliptak, "6 Stars Banned by the Grand Ole Opry (and Why They Got the Boot)," *Taste of Country*, January 26, 2024, <https://tasteofcountry.com/country-artists-banned-grand-ole-opry/>.

Cash's case, his musical career success allowed him to enjoy the benefits of the prosperity in the United States during the period after the war. He was not the only one to be so fortunate. A poll conducted by the Grand Ole Opry in the 1970s revealed the country music fan and the working class had benefited from this economic boost with a large percentage of the listeners owning their homes and having a higher-than-average income bracket.⁶³ Benefiting from the upward economic trend, the country music listener demographic had changed as society changed. However, the 1970s presented challenges that deepened the uncertainty experienced with the fast change of societal norms and the economic turmoil that brought an end to the economic expansion that had begun after World War II. "High debt, elevated inflation, and peak fiscal positions coincided with the first global wave of debt accumulation in the past half century."⁶⁴ As these conditions rippled across America, the hard-working Americans found an outlet of commonality in the lyrics of the music that expressed the desire of tradition and freedom characterized through the lens of the past. Those who struggled during the Great Depression seemed to forget the hardships but reminisced of the simplicity. Questioning of the truth and clinging to tradition seemed to reign. Early in the 1970s, Johnny Cash expressed the longing for the days of old through the lyrics. His song "What Is Truth" presented this question in the face of the changing society. The lyrics stated:

The old man turned off the radio
Said, "Where did all of the old songs go?"
"Kids sure play funny music these days!"
"They play it in the strangest ways."
Said, "It looks to me like they've all gone wild."
"It was peaceful back when I was a child."

⁶³ Amanda Marie Martinez; "Redneck Chic: Race and the Country Music Industry in the 1970s." *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 1 June 2020; 32 (2): 128–143.

⁶⁴ Lee C. Buchheit Indermit Gill et al., "Today's Global Economy Is Eerily Similar to the 1970s, but Governments Can Still Escape a Stagflation Episode," Brookings, July 1, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/todays-global-economy-is-eerily-similar-to-the-1970s-but-governments-can-still-escape-a-stagflation-episode/#:~:text=In%20the%201970s%20and%20early,in%20the%20past%20half%2Dcentury.>

Well, man could it be that the girls and boys
 Are trying to be heard above your noise?
 And the lonely voice of the youth cries
 "What is truth?"⁶⁵

This reminiscence of the past while trying to understand the changes occurring became a common theme in the country music genre. The outlaw movement took a strong stance by introducing stronger lyrics and presenting an image in a modern context. Willie Nelson did this in the song "My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys," in which he detailed the desire to have a cowboy way of life with the lyrics stating, "I grew up dreamin' of bein' a cowboy and lovin' the cowboy ways."⁶⁶ Coupled with the events of the 1970s and the use of a cowboy image and message in their lyrics, the outlaw musicians created a distinct relationship with the country music fans unique to the genre.

The popularity of the country music genre became evident with the use of the cowboy image and theme on other mediums, such as the television show *Hee Haw*. Buck Owens, one of the founders of Bakersfield sound in country music, began hosting the show in 1968. Owens established this dynamic sound that combined the twang of traditional music with a beat. This particular sound presented in this show had become a visual aspect of the country music and increased the presence of country music on the medium of television.⁶⁷ The growing popularity of country music resulted because of the increasing appreciation by politicians, Hollywood, and the fans who identified with the music much deeper than other genres. To further cement the bond with the fan base, the Country Music Association hosted its inaugural Fan Fair in April

⁶⁵ "Johnny Cash – in Them Old Cotton Fields Back Home," Genius, accessed February 4, 2024, <https://genius.com/Johnny-cash-in-them-old-cotton-fields-back-home-lyrics>.

⁶⁶ "AZLyrics - Request for Access," AZLyrics.com, accessed March 27, 2024, <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/willienelson/myheroeshavealwaysbeencowboys.html>.

⁶⁷ Mark Fenster, "Buck Owens, Country Music, and the Struggle for Discursive Control." *Popular Music* 9, no. 3 (1990): 276.

1972. The relationship of the country music fan and the artists became stronger in the early 1970s with the CMA Music Festival. This Fan Fair, held in Nashville, provided several venues for artists to play for fans. This promoted a personal in-person relationship with fans, fortifying the relationship of fans with the artists in the country music genre.⁶⁸ Ed Benson, the executive director of the Country Music Association, stated, "Accessibility to the artists is a great tradition in country music."⁶⁹ The intent was to continue to spread the popularity and propagate commercial success while exhibiting the memorabilia of the past. This event developed the personal connection of the fans with the artists through their lyrical message that revealed the similarity of backgrounds and struggles.⁷⁰

A reliable way to determine the reaction of fans to an artist is through the success of an album or a single. The genre's evolving nature presented different sounds. Their reaction provides proof of the support of the music. The *Country Music* magazine began releasing articles providing a written responses to the music. It also collected letters from country music fans to provide them an outlet of reflection. A family from Winfield, Missouri, discussed admiration for country music artists, such as Willie Nelson, during this period. They recalled their reaction by writing:

We just finished watching the Country Music Awards show with our 5 year old son Lynn, who has been brought up with Willie records and tapes in the house. When he was nominated along with Waylon for Duo of the Year. we were sad that they didn't get it and Lynn cried, so we told him maybe next time. Well you will never believe the excitement when Willie got Entertainer of the Year. We clapped our hands and stomped our feet and Lynn calmly said " that makes me happy." We had the opportunity to meet Willie at the D.J. Convention in 1975 and he is a warm, wonderful person to talk to and we are truly happy that he is getting the recognition he deserves.⁷¹

⁶⁸ John Gerome The Associated Press, "Fan Fair," *Gainesville Sun*, May 4, 2003, <https://www.gainesville.com/story/news/2003/05/04/fan-fair/31635709007/>.

⁶⁹ Zia Foxhall, "A Dive into the Black History of Country Music: Giving Credit Where It's Due," *The Skidmore News*, February 23, 2022, <http://skidmorenews.com/new-blog/2022/2/23/a-dive-into-the-black-history-of-country-music-giving-credit-where-its-due>.

⁷⁰ "Country Music: Country Fan Clubs to Display at '72 Fair." *Billboard*. 83, no. 33 (1971), 24.

⁷¹ "Letters," *Country Music*, (November 1979): 4.

This Missouri family provided insight into how the fans identified not only with the lyrical aspect of the music but also with the artists themselves.

During this period of time, country music not only focused on the hardships faced but also presented themes of the significance of community or family to face the struggles of life. This outlaw movement through the lyrics of the music used country music to speak to their fans. Cash's song "What is Truth" provided the anxieties of the times and the distrust of the authorities. The decade of the 1970s started with the continued division on the United States' political role in global involvement in the controversial Vietnam War. The Kent State shootings by the National Guard resulted in casualties of students in the United States. However, the working-class Americans found sanctuary in the country music traditions and authenticity. The 1970s in the country music genre became the period to identify and address newfound artistic freedom. The long history of artists' struggles to be fairly compensated became an important element in the fight for artistic freedom and fair royalties for their music.⁷² Through the artist's search to comprehend the quickly changing society, the outlaw movement provided a lyrical message that presented diversity within the genre. The outlaw musicians created the edgy message, and with a rebellious image, they also created an additional element in the country music genre that grabbed the attention of the listeners. The geographical departure of artists from Nashville promoted a distinctive subgenre and attracted listeners from other genres while maintaining lifelong country music fans.

The outlaw movement influenced artists throughout the country music genre to challenge the ordinary. The balance of making great music with a message that resonated with the fans

⁷² "Folder 873: Interviews: Scan 11," April 8, 1958, Archie Green Papers, 1965-1972, coll. no. 20002, Folder 873: Interviews, Scan 11, The Southern Folklife Collection at the Louis Round Wilson Special Collection Library.

became the goal. The artists also had to continue to combat the control of the record label machine while finding the balance between keeping tradition and inspiring the listeners and being commercially successful. The Copyright Act of 1976, which gave “copyright owners exclusive rights of reproduction, adaptation, publication, performance, and display,” addressed some of the issues faced by artists.⁷³ As technology advanced and live shows began to be recorded, the law did not have clear provisions on the rights of the performers.⁷⁴ Some of the artists had long been established in the country music genre, yet they continued on the nonconformist path by providing good music that gave lyrical truths to the fans. The outlaw movement, which resulted in the artistic freedom gained by the original outlaw artists, aligned with the quickly advancing technologies, allowing the ease of listeners to have direct access to the music.

"Me and Bobby McGee" written by Kris Kristofferson and popularized by Johnny Cash singing, “Through all kinds of weather, Lord Through everything I done, Bobby baby kept me from the cold,” contained fundamental themes of loneliness and sadness that not only resonated with the listeners but also presented the influences of traditions of storytelling and themes of redemption of the country music genre.⁷⁵ The lyrics are not intended to be a religious rendering; however, the underlying themes and traditions echoed in the song provided the influence of the traditions of the music. In an examination of the lyrics of the song that changed Kristofferson career, David Daniel stated:

There’s something in the origin of “Me and Bobby McGee” that sounds like a fast forwarded version of the oral tradition as it works to create and refine: a title slightly

⁷³ Committee on the Judiciary of the House of Representatives, Section 1 of Title 17, U.S. Code: Exclusive rights as to copyrighted works § (1972),

[https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=\(title:17%20section:106%20edition:prelim\)#sourcecredit](https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=(title:17%20section:106%20edition:prelim)#sourcecredit).

⁷⁴ Robert A. Gorman, “The Recording Musician and Union Power: A Case Study of the American Federation of Musicians”, 37 SW L.J. 697 (1984), 699.

⁷⁵ “Me and Bobby McGee,” Johnny Cash - Me and Bobby McGee Lyrics, Lyrics.com, accessed May 17, 2024, <https://www.lyrics.com/lyric/32381664/Johnny+Cash/Me+and+Bobby+McGee>.

misremembered, tangled with a traveling circus story from a foreign film that itself echoes King Lear's horrendous and foolish loss; a desperate personal situation, a car, a little rain, an order from a boss— all leading to a kind of mash-up, but one that sits comfortably in a traditional form as old as song itself. And who knows if Kristofferson's version of this creation story, the one I'm retelling, one he told thirty years or more after the fact, is the real story at all— or if I'm getting it and giving it straight right now. It can be hard to tell a recollection from a re-creation. A bunch of accidents, our writing and yakking, that somehow finds a form to hold it and pass it along, at least if it's any good.⁷⁶

The outlaw music was reminiscent of the past and often included lyrics containing the essence of the cowboy life. The outlaw movement created a deeper synergy that reacted to the situation of the listeners and connected with them by means of the lyrical message reflecting the events of the culture. In Austin, Texas, they took the live music scene that promoted a progressive tone and brought the fans along to help guide in the new frontier. These new musical festivals and departure from the Nashville scene became the foundational identity for singers like Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings.⁷⁷ The new frontier broke the geographical barriers of the music industry and provided a new fan base without the strings of Nashville. The interesting aspect of the new subgenres with a progressive sound was it held onto traditional elements as it evolved. These subgenres, such as the outlaw movement, provided a middle ground for the fans who did not completely grasp the counterculture movement that consumed the 1960s but faced the challenge of understanding the changing societal experiences and struggles occurring. People were witnessing protest marches to fight against the injustices to marginalized groups, and the protest brought about real political change. The role of women began to evolve, and the fight for equality without sexual discrimination looming over them arose. These changes created a need for how to adjust to the societal changes. The fear of the unknown was the element of

⁷⁶ David Daniel, *Poetics of American Song Lyrics*, edited by Charlotte Pence, (University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 200.

⁷⁷ John Spong, "That '70s Show," *Texas Monthly*, January 21, 2013, <https://www.texasmonthly.com/arts-entertainment/that-70s-show/>.

change that drove the uncertainty to the change. This fear of change also fueled the realization that to achieve change benefits must be revealed. The artists expressed that in their lyrics and connected to the fan's sentiments. The outlaw musicians had inspiration from the movements of the 1960s and pushed for the change to include their freedom. The lyrics that echoed the truths and desires of the simple freedoms became the foundation of the outlaw movement and forever changed country music.

The songwriters of this period typically did not address race in the country music genre. Ironically, the entertainment scene in Nashville in Ryman Auditorium showcased a diverse group, including black and white performers before the establishment of the Grand Ole Opry.⁷⁸ The image of country music changed during this period, allowing a much wider reach of the music by introducing artists to a different demographic. Women began to become a strong presence. Additionally, artists, such as Charley Pride, an African American artist, challenged the image of the stereotypical standard white cowboy. The post-war American society began to embrace an equality ideology with the rise of global debate on society's superior government formats. This became evident by laws which began to change allowing for the promotion of this equality. The *Brown v. Board of Education* overturned the previous separate but equal decision in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case to end the segregation.⁷⁹ In 1957, Nashville implemented a plan

⁷⁸ The Ryman Auditorium, originally built in 1890, was used for revivals, and after the name change from Tabernacle to Ryman's Auditorium, the use continued to become more diverse until the introduction of the country music genre and use as the Grand Ole Opry until it moved in the 1970s. Further reading on the history of Ryman Auditorium can be found in Martin Rempe, "Entertainment for Everyone: The Nashville Ryman Auditorium before the Advent of Country Music." *Journal of Urban History*. 47, no. 5 (2021), 1116.

⁷⁹ Madison Elkins, "Walking into History: The Beginning of School Desegregation in Nashville," Southern Spaces, accessed February 8, 2024, <https://southernspaces.org/2009/walking-history-beginning-school-desegregation-nashville/>.

and claimed racial moderation in the area and promoted this ‘stair step’ path to integration.⁸⁰ The debate on racial equality in Nashville was an ongoing topic. The country music genre did not address the race demographic following the artistic freedom gained by the outlaw movement of the music. There was almost no representation for this demographic as the singers were typically white male with the rise of white females.⁸¹ There were a few exceptions. Stoney Edwards was one such artist who projected a diverse image within himself in order to project to the fans his diversity. Edwards grew up on a farm in the Midwest where he endured the Great Depression and ultimately his family moved to California in search of work. Ethnically, he described himself as a mixed black, indigenous, Irish man who wrote truth in lyrics.⁸² Although Edwards did not reach huge success compared to other artists in the country music genre, he did provide diversity. His style made it possible for him for acceptance into the folds of country music artists. The demographic element of the musical genre provided an opportunity to understand the country music fan during this period and the fan evolution.

Even so, the roots of country music in the South reenforced its culture in society. The songs often focused on various stereotypes that contributed to the culture of the South. Southerners are known to have beliefs in the Bible. The distinct accent with the twang had a connection to the South and the values expressed in the lyrics aligned with the listeners. The twang sound included the vocals of nasal sound that combined the drawn-out sound that resembled the plucking of the strings used, also heard in folk music, resonated with in the

⁸⁰ The efforts in the Nashville area termed the Nashville Plan to ensure racial equality and the process to end segregation began in the 1950s. For further reading on the debate of the sincerity of the equality, Benjamin Houston's dissertation provides insight discussing Nashville's racial moderation during this period. Benjamin Houston, "The Nashville Way: A *southern City Confronts Racial Change, 1945–1975." Order No. 3229725, University of Florida, 2006. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global

⁸¹ Charles L. Hughes, *Country Soul: Making Music and Making Race in the American South*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 3.

⁸² Hendrik Burfeind, "'Mississippi You're on My Mind': Stoney Edwards and the Complex Interplay of Race and Region in 1970s Country Music." *Southern Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (Spring, 2021), 151.

country music genre. This resonated with the working class due to the influence of folk originating from the working-class demographic.⁸³ They loved country music since it related to their lifestyle. They either lived on a farm or had access to one nearby. They liked to drink beer.⁸⁴ However, in the 1970s this culture began to evolve beyond some of these previous stereotypes as society in the entire country began to change. The South and its culture had years of prejudices that were prevalent after the end of the Civil War.⁸⁵ However, the movement away from rural life also began to create change. The question of authenticity began to rise since the rural lifestyle was slowly vanishing. The migration out of rural areas to find work allowed diversity of different geographical areas to bring their traditions and sounds to a new area. The migratory aspect affected not only the country music genre artists but also the country music fans. The radio reached larger geographical areas, but the movement of people also brought the traditions along to these areas. The exchange of different backgrounds and sounds helped to create the blend of sounds within country music.

Exception to the rules can lay the groundwork for change. That was the case for diversity to eventually make its way into the country music genre. In the 1920s DeFord Bailey, an African American harmonica player and member of the Grand Ole Opry, enjoyed music fans' support even with the limited diversity presented in the artists during that period. Bailey played consistently on the radio with the Grand Ole Opry from 1926-1941.⁸⁶ Finally, the door for

⁸³ Robert Fink, Melinda Latour, and Zachary Wallmark, *The Relentless Pursuit of Tone: Timbre in Popular Music*, edited by Robert Fink, et al., (Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2018), 49.

⁸⁴ Leena Kollar, "11 Stereotypes about the American South That Are Kinda True," Culture Trip, February 22, 2018, <https://theculturetrip.com/north-america/usa/tennessee/articles/11-stereotypes-about-the-american-south-that-are-kind-a-true>.

⁸⁵ A debate to the limit of black artists continues among historians. The origins of the country music genre of being associated with the South provided basis to some historians for some of the prejudices to continue to be exercised within the musical genre, causing the stereotypical white male singer to be the common artist in the country music genre. This is true not only for black artists but also for women who continue to remain a minority in the genre.

⁸⁶ Samuel Parler, "DeFord Bailey in Country Music's Multiracial Canon." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 73, no. 1 (2020), 54.

diversity opened in country music in the 1960s when Charley Pride provided a break to the mold of the stereotypical country music artist of primarily white male representation as a singer with the ethnicity of an African American. A son of a sharecropper farmer, Pride's athletic skill had provided the opportunity for a position as baseball player in the Negro League's Memphis Red Sox. It was his love of music that moved him to Nashville. After playing at local bars there, a local music producer Cowboy Jack Clement took him to a studio to record. Legendary Chet Atkins convinced the label Radio Corporation of America (RCA) to take a chance on him to release the music regardless of racial politics. The original publicity around Pride suppressed his race and shocked crowds when he performed.⁸⁷ However, this allowed the slow acceptance of Pride for his talent regardless of his race. Pride's success occurred in the 1960s during the height of racial tensions. There was a complexity in the diversity in the country music genre and a slow willingness to change. This stemmed from the tradition of the United States of the past with the lack of equality for all citizens. Even so, the country music fans typically are more attached to the musical lyrics of the music.

Another talented artist who provided ethnic diversity to the country music genre was Ray Charles, an African American rhythm and blues singer, brought a diverse exposure of country music to a new audience. His desire to record a country music album not only provided diversity to the country music genre but also presented the country music genre to his own fans. His 1962 album, *Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music*, gave a new spin on country classics. Sid Feller, an American conductor and arranger for Ray Charles, helped coordinate with Nashville record producers to collect hundreds that Feller narrowed down to forty songs. After Charles then narrowed down to twelve, the album was recorded and released. The popularity for this

⁸⁷ Ken Burns, Dayton Duncan, Susanna Steisel, Susan Shumaker, Pam Tubridy Baucom, Emily Mosher, and Maggie Hinders. *Country Music*. First ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019), 289-291.

album resulted from the buzz surrounding the pop sounding music that ultimately became known as Nashville sound.⁸⁸

However, the relationship of the music fan to the music resulted when *Billboard* and *Cash Box* had a marketing strategy geared to specific demographics for musical genres in the 1950s. The promotion of pop music focused on white listeners in urban settings while country music marketing zeroed in on white listeners located in rural areas, and the advertising for rhythm and blues reached out to the African Americans market.⁸⁹ This lyrical dialogue identified the culture not only by communicating collective sentiment but also by categorizing distinct political beliefs as much more divisive. The African American fan was marginalized when the commercialization of country music occurred in the 20th century, causing the country music fan to be identified as white. This led to a lack of representation and recognition of any other race within the genre. However, the diversity of country music and its background included multiple cultures, specifically Native American and African American classified as foundations of the genre.⁹⁰

The artists witnessed the struggles in society at home and abroad. Connecting to fans by supporting an issue facing society became an additional aspect of the interaction between fans and artists. Like in previous decades, the use of live music once again became the way to connect to the fans while taking a stand against an issue returned in the 1980s. Finding common ground to combat an issue became an element of all genres during the period. Collaboration by artists of varying genres came on the music scene. Lionel Richie, a popular R&B and Soul singer,

⁸⁸ Michael Jarrett, *Producing Country: The Inside Story of the Great Recordings*, (Wesleyan University Press, 2014), 107.

⁸⁹ Behind the music: Conservatives and Country Music's complex history, accessed February 8, 2024, <https://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/washington-whispers/2015/04/01/behind-the-music-conservatives-and-country-musics-complex-history>.

⁹⁰ Francesca T. Royster, *Black Country Music: Listening for Revolutions*, (University of Texas Press, 2022), 1.

collaborated with the pop star Michael Jackson to create a collaboration beyond genres with the song “We are the World.” This song included pop icons of the period, country music icons, R&B, and more. Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings, two of the outlaws, were included on this song to raise funds to fight hunger in Africa.⁹¹ The success of connecting the fans to a humanitarian issue became an additional way to connect to fans and to try to make positive change. Outlaw musician Willie Nelson got involved in the Farm Aid to support American Farmers and has continued to support the charity for decades.⁹²

The drive for tradition and sounds became stronger when the original outlaw artists returned to a gospel-themed album during this period. Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings both produced songs and albums with the gospel themes. Waylon Jennings’ album *Turn the Page* in the mid-1980s hosted the theme of faith.⁹³ During the same time of the outlaw movement, Willie Nelson released an album, *The Troublemaker*, which featured gospel songs. Nelson also recorded albums in the 1980s and 1990s that included gospel influenced music.⁹⁴ The 1980s time period saw a continued transformation of country music and the listeners as the pop influences and collaborations became a method for the artists to increase popularity and record sales. The shift into the Urban Cowboy phase of the 1980s continued to extend the reach of the country music genre.⁹⁵ The outlaw musicians continued to maintain their success and had created a path

⁹¹ Olivia B. Waxman, “The History of the We Are the World Song,” *Time*, January 29, 2024, <https://time.com/6588802/netflix-doc-greatest-night-in-pop-we-are-the-world/>.

⁹² “Farm Aid VI sets location, lineup.” *Billboard*, March 13, 1993, 45. *Gale Business: Insights* (accessed March 3, 2024). https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A14038504/GBIB?u=vic_liberty&sid=summon&xid=ee913c5e.

⁹³ Morris, Edward. “Country: Waylon Turns the Page.” *Billboard (Archive: 1963-2000)*, Aug 24, 1985. 43 &46.

⁹⁴ Martha Hume, “The Troublemaker,” *Rolling Stone*, June 25, 2018, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-country/the-troublemaker-106701/>.

⁹⁵ The Urban Cowboy phase followed. It was noted as the end of the outlaw movement period. This period expressed this new phase through the mediums of film and fashion. This brought new fans to the genre and spurred the neo traditional movement during the 1980s to adhere to the traditional sounds through not only the outlaw artist but also newcomers, such as Randy Travis. Chet Flippo, “Country May have Hit a Plateau, But Up-Down Cycles are Nothing New,” *Billboard*, vol. 108 no. 39, 1985, 33.

for other artists to have artistic freedom in their music. The fans still had control of any commercial success of the artists resulting from the fans' purchasing and supporting the artists' tours. However, the spread into pop culture created a phenomenon of supporters in areas not typically in the demographic of country music listeners. Diversity continued slowly to make an appearance, but the majority of country music remained less diversified. Inroads into diversifying country music began to appear via collaborations. Kenny Rogers and Lionel Richie collaborated on "Lady" in the 1980s, jumping on the pop-boosted popularity, resulting from the release of the movie *Urban Cowboy*.⁹⁶ Another example was Willie Nelson collaborating with Julio Iglesias in his 1984 hit "To All the Girls I've Loved Before." This duet hit number one on the country music charts and also introduced the Spanish singing Iglesias to the American audience.⁹⁷ In 2012, Nelson and Kris Kristofferson collaborated with Snoop Dog in a release of the song "Roll Me Up and Smoke Me When I Die." This provided not only diversity but also a crossover of genres with Snoop Dog's background being primarily in the rap genre. The collaborations provided diversity to the stereotypes present in country music, but these examples did not guarantee change and showed the difficulty of change becoming permanent fixtures to be accepted by the country music fans.

However, the change was making rumblings during this time period. The shift in societal norms in equality created the need to redefine the faces of country music. The movements of the 1970s created a culture shift, and women artists found a new place in the growing opportunity that was opening in the country music genre. The voices of women were always there but had

⁹⁶ Matthew Leimkuehler, "For Nearly a Century, These Black Artists Have Shaped Country Music," *USA Today*, February 16, 2021, <https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/entertainment/music/2021/02/16/black-country-music-singers-deford-bailey-mickey-guyton/6747547002/>.

⁹⁷ Courtney Campbell, "'To All the Girls I've Loved before': The Story behind the Classic Duet," *Wide Open Country*, July 11, 2020, <https://www.wideopencountry.com/to-all-the-girls-ive-loved-before/>.

been a smaller presence compared to the men. The women country music artists of the 1980s created an oxymoron by using the rise in equality for women for professional gains within the music industry by pushing the traditional sounds and themes. The outlaw movement had paved the path for change in the country music genre. This echoed the culture of the period of a society trying to find balance in the changing roles in society and the opportunity for these women's own professional success within the genre. This allowed women in country music to gain unprecedented popularity in the 1980s. Bill Malone discussed this stating:

The examples of honesty displayed in some women's country performances should not obscure the fact that "revolutions" proceed slowly in country music. For the most part, women performers still championed traditional male-female relationships and usually endorsed the idea that a man's frailties should be tolerated and his "good woman" should remain faithful to him. Woman's chief domain still seemed to be the home, and her basic roles were presumed to be the preservation of its sanctity and the nurturing of her family. Women could and did admit their need for sexual satisfaction, but implicit in this new honesty was the idea that sexuality was a weapon that a woman should exploit in her relations with men. The presumption of woman as sex object remained largely unchallenged. Women country singers, of course, violated such precepts constantly—they did not "stand by their men" through thick and thin; they did not defer to the leadership of the "stronger sex"; and they certainly did not remain in their homes—but they publicly, and in their songs, generally adhered to the myth of domesticity.⁹⁸

The 1980s presented an increase in consumerism, materialism, and video music to accompany the music being released along with the twenty-four-hour news cycle with networks, such as Headline News.⁹⁹ Barbara Mandrell had a popular song in 1981 entitled "I Was Country When Country Wasn't Cool" that not only celebrated the country music culture but also presented strong traditional themes that Malone discussed. This number one hit touched on the cultural phenomena of the 1980s with the rise in the popularity of country music. Through the lyrics the song expressed the traditions that had become popular trends, including denim and

⁹⁸ Bill C. Malone and Tracey E. W. Laird. *Country Music USA: 50th Anniversary Edition*, (University of Texas Press) 2018, 360-361.

⁹⁹ "Ted Turner: The Man Behind 24/7 News." *Business Strategy Review* 16, no. 3 (2005): 29-30.

plaid-styled clothing.¹⁰⁰ The first stanza started out claiming these fashion items had been around for a while by stating, “I remember wearin' straight leg Levis, Flannel shirts Even when they weren't in style.”¹⁰¹ The stanza continued to discuss singing to the tunes of Roy Rogers, which showed the close relationship of fans to their beloved country music and their tie to the past that included the cowboy image. These singing cowboys gave a visual image to the country music, boosted with romantic themes fulfilling the hero ideology that stuck with the country music image.¹⁰² The cowboy image is the symbol that has endured with the country music. Don Cusic stated in his book *The Cowboy in Country Music: An Historical Survey with Artist Profiles*, “Put a cowboy hat and a guitar and you think ‘country music’”¹⁰³

The culture and the counterculture making use of the opportunity to use new mediums brought the country theme to mainstream. The connection of the country music fans to the lyrics began to break beyond a specific age demographic as a new relationship to this music drifted into pop culture. The lure of the image of the cowboy transcended beyond the country music genre. The use of different mediums for reflection of pop culture allowed for support of the popular cowboy image in fashion and visually in the movies. The foothold into mainstream America continued when country music moved into Hollywood, and the success of the movies showed the popularity of the cowboy image. Fashion trends in the 1980s embraced this emergence of traditional styles reflecting a cowboy image.¹⁰⁴ The outlaw image was used to romanticize this

¹⁰⁰ Grace Lenehan Vaughn, “‘I Was Country When Country Wasn’t Cool’: Behind Barbara Mandrell’s Signature Song,” *Wide Open Country*, August 8, 2021, <https://www.wideopencountry.com/i-was-country-when-country-wasnt-cool/>.

¹⁰¹ “I Was Country When Country Wasn’t Cool,” Barbara Mandrell - I Was Country When Country Wasn’t Cool Lyrics | Lyrics.com, accessed March 2, 2024, <https://www.lyrics.com/lyric/6768832/I+Was+Country+When+Country+Wasn%27t+Cool>.

¹⁰² Don Cusic, *The Cowboy in Country Music: An Historical Survey with Artist Profiles* (Jefferson: Mc Farland & Company, 2011), 39.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 45.

¹⁰⁴ Stephen Prince and Melissa Risely, *American Cinema of the 1980s: Themes and Variations*. New (Brunswick: Rutgers University Press), 2007, 15.

cowboy lifestyle. The ability to live on the edge of the law appeared not only on television but also on the big screen. Country music in movies and the cowboy image in pop culture showed the broadening appeal of the genre. The rise in popularity of the use of the image of the cowboy revealed the American culture's connection to the ideals captured in the cowboy image. The cowboy image showcased the individual who had freedom beyond the leadership. The outlaw image used in marketing became the record executive's way to utilize these artists' popularity. The use of the cowboy image in the country music genre and the move from of AM to FM radio combined the country and western style music.¹⁰⁵ The impact of the cowboy image also was evident in other mediums, such as the movies. The cowboy image appearing in movies, such as *Urban Cowboy* and *Pale Rider*, were popular on the silver screen. The television shows, such as *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, provided television viewers with a weekly visual of the cowboy image.¹⁰⁶ The rise in these other mediums and the influence of the cowboy image on the fashion world contributed to the growth of the fan base as it introduced a wider audience to the music of country music artists that appeared or provided music for these shows and movies.

The country music fans made clear by the mid 1980s their desire to return to the roots of the traditional sounds in country music.¹⁰⁷ The fans demanded the traditional sound as shown in the support of the artists who gave way to the new traditionalist sound that emerged in the mid-1980s.¹⁰⁸ Ricky Skaggs led the way playing the bluegrass sound. The popularity of this sound

¹⁰⁵ Marian J. Morton and William P. Conway. "Cowboy without a Cause: His Image in Today's Popular Music." *The Antioch Review* 35, no. 2/3 (1977), 194.

¹⁰⁶ Rebecca Scofield, "'Chaps and Scowls': Play, Violence, and the Post-1970s Urban Cowboy." *Journal of American Culture* (Malden, Mass.) 40, no. 4 (2017): 325-340.

¹⁰⁷ Stephen Prince and Melissa Risely, *American Cinema of the 1980s: Themes and Variations*. New (Brunswick: Rutgers University Press), 2007, 15.

¹⁰⁸ Jon Pareles, "When Country Music Moves to the Suburbs," *The New York Times*, November 25, 1990, <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/11/25/arts/pop-view-when-country-music-moves-to-the-suburbs.html>.

proved the fans' desire to hear the traditional sounds in country music.¹⁰⁹ The cultural shift led back to a conservative mindset, and country music reflected that pivot. The political ties being used to align the musical genre with the conservative mindset created influence in the genre that began in the 1970s with a performance of "God Bless America" by Richard Nixon at the Grand Ole Opry.¹¹⁰ This close political connection with the country music genre continued into the 1980s. Ronald Regan attended the 25th Annual Country Music Association Event in 1983, where he enjoyed clapping along with the acts. There were politicians from both political sides in attendance, including the Republican Senator Howard Baker and Democratic Senator Robert Byrd. The relationship on different issues and the storytelling style of country music provided the ability of politicians to turn to the country music for the ballad of their campaign. This also created insight into the lyrical connection to the listeners who were ultimately the voters. Thus, both political parties utilized the musical element to connect to the constituents.¹¹¹ The attendance of the politicians continued to show the relationship of the genre to the cultural and political climate of society. This seemed to spark a new dawn on the time-honored tradition of working together with the rendition of "Goin' Down the Road Feeling Bad," with country music artists Bill Monroe and Ricky Skaggs. This musical number had the sounds of blue grass and the melody of a fiddle to provide the traditional sounds for the show.¹¹² The traditional sound during the popular pop sound presented during this period had popular response from the fans. The pop sound, which helped the country music genre go mainstream, had finally reached the goal, but

¹⁰⁹ Robert Silva, "History of Neotraditional Country Music," LiveAbout, March 17, 2017, <https://www.liveabout.com/history-of-neotraditional-country-music-931987>.

¹¹⁰ Staff, *Billboard*. "President Nixon Performs 'god Bless America' at Grand Ole Opry." *Billboard*, March 14, 2014. <https://www.billboard.com/video/president-nixon-performs-god-bless-america-at-grand-ole-opry-5937539/>.

¹¹¹ 1. "A Love Affair: American Politics and Country Music," NPR, December 22, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/1141298735>.

¹¹² "Some of Country Music's Biggest Names and President Reagan... - UPI Archives," UPI, March 16, 1983, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1983/03/16/Some-of-country-musics-biggest-names-and-President-Reagan/1292416638800/>.

the fans had reached a point where they wanted the traditional sound brought back. A *New York Times* article in September of 1985 discussed the downward trend of the country music genre as a result of the shift to the pop sound. Author Robert Palmer wrote of this shift back to the traditional sound stating:

The United States as a whole seems to be in the grip of a new romantic infatuation with the old West and frontier America, a trend that is evident in the recent commercial success of western fiction and Hollywood's rediscovery of the western movie. But Nashville's production-line country music is too slick and pop oriented to appeal to frontier nostalgia.¹¹³

However, there were successes, such as Dolly Parton and Kenny Roger's "Island in a Stream," that brought the mold of the standard country music sound. The collaboration of Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton landed their song "Islands in the Stream," at the top of both the *Billboard* country chart and the adult contemporary chart.¹¹⁴ Parton also reached the feminists with her song "9 to 5." Consequently, the success of Willie Nelson's "Always on my Mind," provided traditional elements in the lyrics expressing regret while being crossover success and reached a wider audience for country music.¹¹⁵ The amendable tone of the lyrics from the outlaw artists into the 1980s continued the balance of adhering to tradition while balancing the need to appease the listeners and create music that was profitable and popular. These songs told stories that related to the times and touched a more far-reaching audience because of the crossovers occurring with artists like Dolly Parton and Kenny Rogers. The song "He Stopped Loving Her Today," recorded by George Jones and released during this time, has been referred to as

¹¹³ Robert Palmer, "Nashville: Sound: Country Music in Decline," *The New York Times*, September 17, 1985, <https://www.nytimes.com/1985/09/17/arts/nashville-sound-country-music-in-decline.html>.

¹¹⁴ Kiiby, Kip. "1985 The year in Music and Video: Talen in Action: Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton." *Billboard*. 97, no. 52 (1985), T-44.

¹¹⁵ Paul Green, "The Long-Playing, hit Studded Record of One of the Prolific and Successful Artists in Music History," *Billboard*, Vol. 98, No.41, October 11, 1986, 50.

probably the best country song of all time. The story telling in the lyrics was at the peak of the country music fan's desire. They hung on every word.

The continued impact of the outlaw movement resonated with other artists beyond the original. Steve Earle is an artist in the 1980s whose image and song also connected him to the outlaw movement. Earle came from humble beginnings, working blue collar jobs before his discovery in the late 1970s. Although he only had one huge commercial success with the song "Copperhead Road," this song would eventually become a state song for Tennessee. The niche for going against the country music norm that outlaw musicians exhibited continued to have an impact on the relationship between the country music genre and listeners. These artists obtained artistic freedom and connected to the listeners who aligned with this rugged grasp on the traditional sound and related to the words of the songs. The strength of the movement was in the lyrical message of the songs that changed the relationship of the listeners with the music by their empathizing or sympathizing with the message. The songwriters were also experiencing the same societal changes as the listeners. The ability to break free from the censorship of record executives provided a clearer perspective within the lyrics that expressed the culture not only of the artists but also of the listeners of the music.

As the love for the traditional sound took hold, the cowboy persona continued into the 1990s and seemed to be a mix of an ode to country music legends and a continued opposition to authority. The image presented in the 1980s was one of a traditional nuclear family with the heterosexual man providing for the family. The connection of this masculinity trait evident in the lyrics remained the same from 1980s through the early 2000s with a shift towards the masculinity of the man to provide a good time or alcohol for the female companion. However, the idea to reminisce on the past was common thread of songs. The Judds released the song

“Grandpa, (Tell Me ‘Bout the Good Old Days)” that questioned the grandfather about things of the past. The Judds’ song provided more of an understanding of how the societal norms had changed and the lines between understanding what is right and wrong had blurred compared to the past. This glamorized view of the past seemed to forget the difficulties faced during those periods and the inequalities that were present. However, Willie Nelson and Toby Keith released a song in 2003 titled “Beer for my Horses,” that also discussed the past and the use of hanging criminals with no trial or judgement from peers.¹¹⁶ This song presented an unglamorized view of the past. Nelson and Keith’s song described visually the criminal hanging in the tree. One stanza vividly stated:

Grandpappy told my pappy, back in my day, son
 A man had to answer for the wicked that he done
 Take all the rope in Texas find a tall oak tree
 Round up all them bad boys, hang them high in the street
 For all the people to see¹¹⁷

The country music genre had constantly tried to balance the traditions of the past as society changed. The 1980s emerged with the American society trying to understand the quickly changing culture. These changes definitely affected music. A summation of the times stated:

The 1980s, often remembered for its materialism and consumerism, also saw the rise of the "yuppie," an explosion of blockbuster movies and the emergence of cable networks like CNN and MTV, which introduced the music video and launched the careers of many iconic artists.¹¹⁸

By the end of the 1980s, country music had become a diverse set of subgenres that included outlaw, country rock, country pop, and neotraditional country which provided elements for a

¹¹⁶ Braden Leap, "A New Type of (White) Provider: Shifting Masculinities in Mainstream Country Music from the 1980s to the 2010s." *Rural Sociology* 85, no. 1 (2020): 168-169.

¹¹⁷ “Toby Keith (Ft. Willie Nelson) – Beer for My Horses,” Genius, accessed March 3, 2024, <https://genius.com/Toby-keith-beer-for-my-horses-lyrics>.

¹¹⁸ “1980s: Fashion, Movies & Politics,” History.com, accessed March 2, 2024, <https://www.history.com/topics/1980s/1980s#>.

wide range of demographics that could be reached via the various media. The commercial success of country music showed its continued reach and popularity to a growing diverse demographic. The artists, such as Alan Jackson, Travis Tritt, and Garth Brooks, helped continue this upward trend in the 1990s. Following the outlaw movement's example of the blend of sounds, artists continued to do this while still using traditional elements. The storytelling style was evident in the lyrics with continued effort to connect to the audience and fans.¹¹⁹ This aligned with the multiculturalism that emerged in the 1990s as the continued growth and rise in popularity of country music provided a growing diverse fan base. The different regional representation by the emerging artists created diversity to present blends from different cultural backgrounds. Historically, the country music genre popularity had remained in the southern geographic area, but in this time period country music continued to grow deeper into the suburban side that had started in the previous years.

The outlaw artists in the country music genre began to use lyrics to approach the change not only for acknowledging the strife of the people but also for enacting these changes for their own economic and creative freedom. This was evident as the lyrical evolution into the 1980s followed the demographic growth of listeners to the country music genre. As the 1980s embraced the conservative political climate, which identified closely with the country music, the artists began to reflect this change. The outlaw movement in the pursuit of artistic freedom provided an outlet to present a collective voice to a generation eager for change. This style of music broke the barrier of age demographics that allowed the country music genre to transcend age gaps through musical connections. The artistic freedom that the outlaw musicians fought and

¹¹⁹ Cindy Watts, "The Class of '89: How Garth Brooks, Alan Jackson, Clint Black, Travis Tritt Changed Country Music," *The Tennessean*, October 6, 2019, <https://www.tennessean.com/story/entertainment/music/2019/08/26/country-music-garth-brooks-alan-jackson-clint-black-travis-tritt-class-of-1989/1781546001/>.

achieved during the movement showcased the parallels to fans. The listeners felt marginalized by the mainstream country music pushing the more commercialized sound instead of adhering to the traditions of sound and message. The outlaw sound set these artists outside of the country music machine of the period and the lyrics connected the struggles of everyday life and hardships with which the listeners identified. The 1970s country music had used this model with the fans constantly to establish a connection to align with the listeners.¹²⁰ Merle Haggard had hits that resonated and expressed the troubles of the working class. An early hit was “Working Man Blues.” The song echoed themes of pride while also acknowledging the struggles faced by the working class. The music even reflected breaks and the demand to return to work in how it is played.¹²¹ “If We Make It Through December” had themes of economic struggles. The lyrics expressed these struggles stating:

Got laid off down at the factory
 And their timing is not the greatest in the world
 Heaven knows I've been working hard
 I wanted Christmas to be right for Daddy's girl
 I don't mean to hate December
 It's meant to be the happy time of year
 But my little girl don't understand
 Why Daddy can't afford no Christmas gear¹²²

The diversity of people in the outlaw movement stemmed from a rebellious attitude in a response not only to the events occurring in the country but also to the expansion and change in country music. Cash’s song “Ragged Ole Flag,” was originally released in 1974 at the conclusion of the Vietnam War. This song showed the connection of patriotism to country music genre.¹²³

¹²⁰ Jon Pareles, “When Country Music Moves to the Suburbs,” *The New York Times*, November 25, 1990, <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/11/25/arts/pop-view-when-country-music-moves-to-the-suburbs.html>.

¹²¹ David Cantwell. *The Running Kind: Listening to Merle Haggard*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2022), 134.

¹²² “Merle Haggard – If We Make It through December,” Genius, accessed August 6, 2024, <https://genius.com/Merle-haggard-if-we-make-it-through-december-lyrics>.

¹²³ Richard Harrington Washington Post Staff Writer. "Back to Basics at the Country Music Awards: Alabama Wins as Top Entertainer for the Third Year." *The Washington Post* (1974-),1984.

The song placed focus on the global role of the United States and military might. Cash released the song with the intention to try to ignite some patriotism in the divided country.¹²⁴ The song was not one of his better hits as it only topped out on the country music chart in spot 31.

However, the background of the song and his conversation with a fan down in Alabama after playing at a private venue was what inspired him to share the conversation through poetic song.¹²⁵ “Ragged Ole Flag” gave a basic history of the wars up to the Vietnam War, but the main thing Cash wove throughout the lyrics was patriotism. Cash wrote:

She waved from our ships upon the Briny foam
 And now they've about quit waving her back here at home
 In her own good land here she's been abused
 She's been burned, dishonored, denied, and refused
 And the government for which she stands
 Is scandalized throughout the land
 And she's getting threadbare and wearing thin
 But she's in good shape for the shape she's in
 'Cause she's been through the fire before
 And I believe she can take a whole lot more
 So we raise her up every morning
 We take her down every night
 We don't let her touch the ground and we fold her up right
 On second thought, I do like to brag
 'Cause I'm mighty proud of that ragged old flag¹²⁶

A shift towards the support of the military, paralleling the patriotic support of the World War II period, began to emerge in the 1980s. The rise in patriotism began to emerge in the music of multiple genres but specifically in country music. Music began to reflect this cultural shift in the popular patriotic songs, such as “God Bless the USA” by Lee Greenwood. It was one of the most successful country music releases of the patriotic tone that became very strong in the 1980s.

¹²⁴ “Johnny Cash Aimed to Revive Patriotism in the Country with ‘Ragged Old Flag,’” Country Thang Daily, August 30, 2020, <https://www.countrythangdaily.com/ragged-old-flag-cash/>.

¹²⁵ Glennpitcher, “Johnny Cash’s ‘ragged Old Flag’ Inspired by Trip to Binghamton [Watch],” 98.1 The Hawk, July 1, 2020, <https://981thehawk.com/did-you-know-trip-to-binghamton-inspired-johnny-cashes-ragged-old-flag-watch/>.

¹²⁶ “Johnny Cash – Ragged Old Flag,” Genius, accessed March 2, 2024, <https://genius.com/Johnny-cash-ragged-old-flag-lyrics>.

Waylon Jennings also released a song entitled “America,” providing his version of the patriotic tune. Willie Nelson’s “The Promiseland,” followed this trend of patriotic songs.¹²⁷ These songs emphasized the trend in society for the support of the American military as they took on global conflicts even as the Cold War was slowly winding down.¹²⁸ The outlaw musicians never strayed far from a patriotic tone, but it began to become an element appearing in the music more in the 1980s.

The theme of patriotism and nationalism had always had a strong foundation in country music. In the face of societal changes, the pace for embracing the change in country music was slower. The slow acceptance in country music showed the apprehension by fans for change, but it was occurring. This did not diminish the value of the need to adhere to traditional sound even with the changing roles in society and continued struggles of different artists trying to be successful in the country music genre. It showed that historically the control of the Country Music Association and record executives made the rules the artists needed to abide by to be successful.¹²⁹ The artistic freedom that the outlaw movement had established provided the ability for women to create a more diverse atmosphere by having a much larger presence in the genre than in the past. Although the opportunity arose, it did not mean they could deviate too much from the traditional sound.

However, the message in country music deviated as the years and society changed, but the sound and image still had to hold true to the traditions to avoid backlash from the fans. The country music fan embraced the traditional sounds in different expressions, but it had to adhere

¹²⁷ Addie Moore, “20 Most Patriotic Country Songs,” *Wide Open Country*, July 3, 2023, <https://www.wideopencountry.com/patriotic-country-songs/>.

¹²⁸ Chen Kertcher, “From Cold War to a System of Peacekeeping Operations: The Discussions on Peacekeeping Operations in the UN During the 1980s up to 1992.” *Journal of Contemporary History* 47, no. 3 (2012): 615.

¹²⁹ Waylon Jennings, *Waylon: An Autobiography* (USA: Time Warner International, 1997), 270.

to the cowboy image. The cowboy image was a strong transcending element of the different subgenres of country music. This showcased the continued component of tradition that was a key part of the country music genre. This was what tied the culture of the listeners and the message together. The reaction of country music fans to the artists and their music was unique to the genre. This unique relationship provided the cultural identity of the American society through the connection to the fans. Country music fans had their opinions on the specific image and how it can change, but some opinions remained the same on the aspect of tradition. The country music genre grew to around ninety-five million fans in 2011 in a study by *Billboard* research on the fan base and has most likely grown since the completion of this study. The study also provided statistics on the diversity of the fans in modern day and put the highest age bracket in the middle age of forty-five to fifty-four age bracket. This group would have just been babies or very young to have experienced the outlaw movement of the 1970s.¹³⁰ The gradual timeline of change in country music provided insight on the climate of society as societal changes occurred. This always a delay of reaction or acceptance to changes in societal norms was typical in the country music genre. The introductions of new sounds and messages were evolving between the ties to traditions either musically or lyrically in the authentic image.¹³¹

Society changed as generations change and evolve. The popularity of country music and its continued growth showed that the enduring tradition transcended generations and evolved with the culture. American country music artists had typically come from the South with some exceptions.¹³² As time went on, unavoidable things changed, such as artists aging or even fans

¹³⁰ Vernell Hackett, "New Statistics about Country Music Fans Revealed at *Billboard* Country Summit," *Billboard*, June 8, 2011, <https://www.billboard.com/music/music-news/new-statistics-about-country-music-fans-revealed-at-billboard-country-1177554/>.

¹³¹ "Country Music Timeline: Articles and Essays: Dolly Parton and The Roots of Country Music : Digital Collections : Library of Congress," The Library of Congress.

¹³² Andrew Van Dam, "The States That Produce the Most Musicians, and More!," *The Washington Post*, September 29, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2023/09/29/states-that-produce-most-musicians-more/>.

aging. These different elements created different reactions than in the past. Thus, the outlaw movement may have not been successful in years prior to its entrance. The fans of country music evolved as times changed, creating opportunities for unprecedented lyrics or sounds to emerge. The challenge is for the artists to be commercially successful with innovative music and at the same time appease the fans. This will always be a delicate balance to maintain. The evolving aspect of country music fans was how the preferences and reactions to the music, message, or image portrayed reflected broader social and cultural changes. Timing in the country music genre had much to do with the success or failure of adjusting to change. The use of music to communicate was a means to provide a message acceptable in the American culture through the music lyrics. As society changed, artists used their music to express their feelings about the situation. In country music the outlaw movement during this period gradually embodied the American spirit of a traditional America even as it was changing.

Conclusion

Music has a way of being a method of creating a bridge. Atkins specifically had to conceal Charley Pride's ethnicity to exhibit his voice and not his skin color when he originally pushed for recording. However, the success of Pride showed his talent with 30 number one hits and over 70 million records sold.¹³³ The individual bigotry did not dissuade his musical talent from success. Atkins provided an opportunity by finding a way to get around the prejudice during that era. Change created fear for some since it was different and the ability to understand how to move with the changes while maintaining tradition provided an unlikely culture connection to the country music through the outlaw artists influence on the genre. The outlaw

¹³³ Emily Fox, Charley Pride – the first Black Country Singer to sign to a major label, accessed May 17, 2024, <https://www.kexp.org/podcasts/sound-vision/2024/2/27/charley-pride-the-first-black-country-singer-to-sign-to-a-major-label/>.

musicians used their lyrics to create a bridge in understanding the changes occurring in society. Country music genre was and remains a blend of cultural backgrounds, including Mexican, indigenous, and rural white Americans to create the sounds heard in the genre.¹³⁴ The outlaw movement slowly helped to spur on pushing back against the norm and gaining independence from the record executive's control.

Tradition must have a strong foundational foothold to rise above the challenges that come along. The geographical element of the southern roots for country music fans began to disappear as jobs drew the people away from the heart of country music and placed them throughout the nation. The move of country music fans to different regions diversified the listeners beyond geographical boundaries. The rise of the radio provided exposure of the artists to listeners who may not have previously had the opportunity to hear them live or have purchased the record yet. The radio allowed the country music genre to go beyond its previous limited regional reach. With the help of radio stations and the introduction of Grand Ole Opry, the country music sound was beginning to reach a wide range of geographical locations.¹³⁵ There was no denying the role of the geographical element of country music and the importance of Nashville to the genre. In the 1970s in the midst of the turmoil and outlaw movement, the Grand Ole Opry provided a place to merge the traditional past with the quickly changing culture. The movement of the Opryland had an important role in the country music genre. Managing the new influences while keeping the traditions helped with the popularity. It also allowed the space for continued growth and a tourist attraction to help connect to the country music fans.¹³⁶ Even after the popular radio

¹³⁴ Taylor Crumpton, "Beyoncé Has Always Been Country," *Time*, February 14, 2024, <https://time.com/6694806/beyonce-country-music/>.

¹³⁵ Morris D. Rosenberg. "Opryland, U.S.A.': Country Music for Fun and Profit a Visit to 'Opryland, U.S.A.'" *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, Jun 11, 1972. 2,

¹³⁶ Dave Paulson, "How the Grand Ole Opry Put Country Music (and Nashville) on the Map," *The Tennessean*, October 6, 2019, <https://www.tennessean.com/story/entertainment/music/2019/08/26/grand-ole-opry-put-nashville-country-music-on-the-map/1672766001/>.

stations established their presence, the emergence of the Mexican border radios in the 1930s provided an even wider reach to listeners. These border stations did not fall under the limitations of the American radio regulations. The stations played a variety of country music, including traditional, honky tonk, and even swing. These stations also played black rhythm and blues and Mexican music to these rural communities. These border radio stations eventually came to an end in 1986 when the United States and Mexico reached an agreement to use each other-frequencies on the airwaves.¹³⁷

The popularity of country music during the 1920s resulted in a strong sales as a result of mass marketing of music during this period that eventually faced an abrupt decline in the Great Depression.¹³⁸ However, as economics and technology changed, the music industry once again thrived. The country music artists had an increased reach with improved technology to connect with the listeners.¹³⁹ As the technology improved with the introduction of vinyl records, eight-track tapes, and cassettes, fans were able to purchase the music and play it at home. This helped two-fold. First, it provided a personal connection for the listeners to elect to purchase their favorite music and play it when they chose. Secondly, this type of technology gave additional revenue for record companies and an opportunity for the artists to spread the music. In the 1970s, the music distribution mostly relied on the purchase of vinyl records. As the time frame moved towards the 1980s, the rise in popularity of the eight track and cassettes provided a new mobile way of listening to music. The introduction of the compact disc in the late 1980s became the leading format of music. In the 21st century, the popularity of streaming and digital purchases

¹³⁷ Yoonji Han, "How Unregulated Radio Stations out of Mexico Fueled the Country Music Boom in America," Business Insider, accessed February 1, 2024, <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-mexicos-border-radio-fueled-americas-country-music-boom-2023-8>.

¹³⁸ Awal, "Decoded: The History of Record Deals," AWAL, December 6, 2022, <https://www.awal.com/blog/history-of-record-deals/>.

¹³⁹ Jon Pareles, "When Country Music Moves to the Suburbs," *The New York Times*, November 25, 1990, <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/11/25/arts/pop-view-when-country-music-moves-to-the-suburbs.html>.

became the new way for the listeners to obtain the music.¹⁴⁰ The advances in technology allowed for different ways for fans to obtain the albums. The soundtrack of *Wanted: The Outlaws*, one of the most popular albums of the outlaw movement, became the first certified platinum album in country music.¹⁴¹ This revealed that the listeners enjoyed this style of music and lyrical message. The sales of the records also provided a way to track the popularity of the music. The use of vinyl records continued to develop and expanded its usefulness after its introduction.¹⁴² The introduction of the cassette tape created an even more mobile way to have music at home or on the go. The true mobility of the cassette came in the 1980s with the introduction of the Walkman, which allowed individual utilization of listening to music anywhere listeners chose.¹⁴³ This further integrated music into the lives of Americans. The music no longer had the limitation of regional influence.

With the regional influences falling to the wayside, the movement and migration of groups of people in the 20th century also provided a blending of cultures and music, allowing for the diverse sounds to merge into country music genre. In his book *Country Music USA*, Malone noted the influences of the South and its important contributions not only to the country music genre but also to all genres. Malone stated:

Southern folk music was touched and energized by the contributions of all these people, and country music still bears the marks of these influences. Of all the southern ethnic groups, none has played a more important role in providing songs and styles for the white country musician than that forced migrant from Africa, the black. Nowhere is the peculiar love-hate relationship that has prevailed among the southern races more evidenced than in country music. Country music— seemingly the most “pure white” of all American musical forms— has borrowed heavily from African Americans. White southerners, many of whom would have been horrified at the idea of mixing socially with blacks, have

¹⁴⁰ “U.S. Music Revenue Database,” RIAA, July 12, 2023, <https://www.riaa.com/u-s-sales-database/>.

¹⁴¹ Pat Nelson, “Nashville Labels Buoyant Over Gold, See Platinum.” *Billboard*. 89, no. 46 (1977), 1.

¹⁴² Awal, “Decoded: The History of Record Deals,” AWAL, December 6, 2022, <https://www.awal.com/blog/history-of-record-deals/>.

¹⁴³ Joe Lynch, “Unwinding the Birth, Rise, Fall and Return of the Cassette Tape,” *Billboard*, June 14, 2023, <https://www.billboard.com/business/tech/cassette-tape-comeback-birth-sales-1235260347/>.

nonetheless enthusiastically accepted their musical offerings: the spirituals, the blues, ragtime, jazz, rhythm-and blues, hip-hop, and a whole host of dance steps, vocal shadings, and instrumental techniques.¹⁴⁴

These musical offerings continued to make their way into the country music genre as the geographical expansion provided not only a location beyond the regional confines of Nashville but also sounds that created a new fan base that gravitated to the progressive sound. However, these new sounds did not totally stray away from traditional sound of country music as a twinge of traditional music came through in the instrumentation. Two locations that contributed to the country music genre with their own unique sound were Austin, Texas, and Bakersfield, California. The introduction of these sounds also played an important role in combating the push for pop sound by still including a traditional sound with these geographical areas that varied from the Nashville sound that the record executives in Tennessee pushed.¹⁴⁵

The country music genre evolved with society. The spread to the geographical origins of the artists and the rise in popularity paralleled the migration of workers in the second half of the 20th century. The country music fan's relationship with the lyrics showed the importance of the outlaw music movement as it had an historical impact by way of recording the struggles in the lyrics that they and the listeners experienced. The lyrics created a conversation with the working-class demographic of society. The outlaw movement pushed for the freedom that ultimately created a genuine story that resonated with the listeners. The expansion of the geographical reach and continued rise in popularity of the country music genre revealed the genre to be beyond the hillbilly locations of its origins. The narrative of the culture presented in

¹⁴⁴ Bill C. Malone and Tracey E. W. Laird. *Country Music USA: 50th Anniversary Edition*, (University of Texas Press, 2018), 5.

¹⁴⁵ The Nashville Sound can be further examined in Joli Kathleen Jenson, dissertation, "Creating the Nashville Sound: A Case Study in the Commercial Culture Production (Tennessee). Order No. 8422090, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1984.

the lyrics revealed the mix of traditions and modernization of the country music genre that society had faced during the period. The music of the 1970s and the 1980s reflected cultural and social movements of the period. The outlaw movement bonded the country music fan to the genre and created an open dialogue with the fans. This continues to be evident with the interaction of country music artists and fans even in modern day.

The technological advancements continue in modern day with social media applications that allow communication between artists and their fans. This has had some controversial interactions but provides a more personal dialogue between artists and the fans. The technological advancements are also attempting to use artificial intelligence to examine the interactions of fans and artists on social media to help predict the success of songs or the success on the chart.¹⁴⁶ This is a constant battle for artists to protect their uniqueness even down to their voice. The recent passage of the Elvis Act in Tennessee, the home of Nashville where several country music record companies are based, provided a victory to artists to protect them from artificial intelligence used to replicate the voice of the artists without consent.¹⁴⁷ As technology advances and societal culture changes, it will reflect in the country music genre. The cultural shift in the United States is seen through the changing sounds and messages of country music. The public uses the economic aspect of purchasing the music and concert tickets to reflect its support. The social media aspect provides not only a connection of the artists to the fan but also a quick reaction time of responding to actions or music released. The fans can debate, accept, or reject.

¹⁴⁶ Jihwan Aum, Jisu Kim, and Eunil Park. "Can we Predict the Billboard Music Chart Winner? Machine Learning Prediction Based on Twitter Artist-Fan Interactions." *Behaviour & Information Technology* 42, no. 6 (2023): 775-788.

¹⁴⁷ Margaret R. Szewczyk and C|EH Lucas Amodio, "Artificial Intelligence and Copyrights: Tennessee's Elvis Act Becomes Law," Armstrong Teasdale LLP, March 27, 2024, <https://www.armstrongteasdale.com/thought-leadership/artificial-intelligence-and-copyrights-tennessees-elvis-act-becomes-law/>.

The continued technological advancements that quickly become available enhance the connection to the fan. The evidence of the change in society is visually seen in the diversity of the musicians. The music trends and support of the music directly relate to the influence of the country music fans. The 1980s presented a stronger presence of female artists that continued to grow as the time passed into the next decade of the 1990s. The race barrier had been broken but still faced the challenge of change in country music. The importance of the country music fan has continued to get stronger, even prior to the fast-paced modern world with the rise of online communication. The uniqueness in country music is the strong influence of the fans to use their support of the albums and public opinion to affect the artists. This is unprecedented in other genres. The fans still find ways to let their voices be heard. The diversity of the elements of gender, race, and geography provides an evolving personality or opinion of the fans. The cultural shifts in society reflect in the ever-changing variety of the country music fan. The relationship of the fan with the music evolves each year. The challenge is to make music to adhere to the fan's requirement of authenticity of the genre by having respect for the tradition of the sound and to bringing a fresh beat with a fan-approved message.

Chapter 5

Lived Experiences: Authenticity and Outlaw Country's Listener Connection

The outlaw movement provided lyrical freedom cementing a connection of the country music genre to the working-class culture of the American society. This movement provided an example of the deep-rooted connection between the working-class and the traditional music of the country music genre as evident in the evolution of outlaw country music artists and their influence on the genre.¹ This resulted from expressing the working-class culture identity within the lyrics of the music. The movement emerged as a response to the mainstream shift in country music and, through the artist's own experiences, provided a voice for the working-class American. The outlaw country music artists gained artistic freedom that impacted the entire genre. An article in 1980 newspaper *The Sentinel* stated, "Country music has unquestionably become as middle-American as the shopping mall."² The outlaw musicians became part of this connection by providing lyrics expressing personal truths and reflecting the diverse experiences of Americans. These lyrics embodied the frustrations brought on by the realities of disillusionment of the American dream and daily struggles. Events, such as the Vietnam War, created the political tension that initiated a response from the music artists. The viewpoint regarding the participation in global issues became a topic in the lyrics. These lyrics communicated the emotions that many of the listeners agreed with regarding the conflict and the United States' involvement. The outlaw musicians experienced this dynamic time and witnessed

¹ Traditional country music still has a place with shows on the Grand Ole Opry and radio stations that still play the older music or reeditions of older music. The streaming revolution impact on music has created a greater reach for the smaller stations to expand the traditional sounds to a younger audience. Further information on the impact of streaming and the radio can be read in Kyra L. Allen Theses, *Radio vs Streaming Services: Exploring How Radio is Facing Competition*, (University of Florida, 2020).

² Rick Mashburn, "Is Country Music Southern?," *The Sentinel*, August 29, 1980, 7.

the impact of the music.³ This movement had specific ties to the working-class demographic. The working-class Americans identified with lyrics that expressed their values and authentic real-life experiences. The themes of the music focused on the hard work and poverty this demographic faced. The rebellion against the Nashville establishment reflected the working-class's frustrations with authority. The themes found in the lyrics and images embodied by the artists promoted the individualism traits valued by the working class. The connection with the music to the working-class demographic helped to be an anthem among the group collectively. This music connected a culture beyond the geographical boundaries with theme of taking chances and pursuing dreams. The stand the outlaw artists took against the record establishment resonated with the listeners' sense of independence and rebellion against authority when they were wrong. The major effect that the outlaw movement had was that the country music genre faced balancing the relationship of adhering to the traditional sound while being involved in the changing society. As the evolution of different sounds resulted, it was up to the artists to provide music engrained in traditional values. Although the intention of the music was to be successful and make money, musicians also needed to be able to balance traditional sounds with the changes that inevitably occur in music. The outlaw artists' rebellious nature against the changes in the country music record industry connected to the working class. The desire was to achieve artistic freedom while maintaining authenticity of the roots of the music through traditional storytelling of the shared experiences and the reverberation of the traditional sounds of the long-established string instruments, such as the banjo and the fiddle, which drew the listeners to this movement. The connection they achieved created a response in the listeners. Even so, the listeners would reject the music when the message in the lyrics went too far from the norm.

³ Warren Goldstein. "Progressive Patriotism." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, (November 28 2008). https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A189708992/GBIB?u=vic_liberty&sid=summon&xid=1cf2b6df.

However, the singers of the early country music genre songs did not record or publish as seen in the music industry in the 20th century. These songs survived in written form with the intention of the music being shared with future generations. The early music before genres became defined provided melodies for the working class. There were songs that echoed the dreams of the Gold Rush and the excitement of settling the West. These songs labeled hillbilly or blues provided insight into these significant periods in the United States. The lyrical impact of the stories within the lyrics was evident in these songs. E. C. Perrow and Howard Odom collected ballads made during the growth of the railroad and published them in 1913 from the area of Mississippi. However, their storytelling was one of the precursors to modern country music and the outlaw movement.⁴ In 1911, Odom published a collection that included this song identifying an engineer Casey Jones and describing a day in this railroad life:

Casey Jones was engineer
 Told his fireman not to fear
 All he wanted was a boiler hot
 Run in Canton 'bout four o'clock
 One Sunday mornin' it was drizzlin' rain
 Looked down road an' saw a train
 Fireman says, "Let's make a jump; Two locomotives an' dey bound to bump"⁵

The song continued to describe the battle Casey Jones endured with a train accident that occurred and ultimately took his life. The words with through the traditional twang became a key element that was popular in the early country music.⁶

Understanding traditional sounds and influences of early country music artists and their connection to folk music provided insight. The beginning years of the country music genre

⁴ Modern country music is being depicted as post 1948 when the genre was defined by *Billboard*, and the production and recording session were maintained specifically for the category labeled as the country music genre.

⁵ Norm Cohen and David Cohen, *Long Steel Rail: The Railroad in American Folksong* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 145.

⁶ Robert Fink, Melinda Latour, and Zachary Wallmark, *The Relentless Pursuit of Tone: Timbre in Popular Music*, edited by Robert Fink, et al., (Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2018), 44.

created its own sound and aligned with the continued growth of the country music genre to different geographical locations. The twang vocals evoking a southern draw accompanied by acoustic instruments became connected to the traditions of country music. The use of the twang sound became an identifier of country music that ultimately created a deeper connection to the working class due to the alienation from the Jazz and classical music associated with the elite American culture.⁷ The migration of the artists and listeners provided a diverse geographical element to country music which continued to closely align with the working class. This movement from rural to urban areas in search of employment helped to bring the musical traditions and influences with them to a whole new audience. After the establishment of the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville in the 1920s, the radio played a major role in providing melody to the airways and reaching a much wider audience than in the past. The migration of people moving in search of employment also contributed to the diversity of the backgrounds of the people who listened to the country music genre. This period of the 1940s was the formative years for not only the country genre but also the rock and roll genre. The 1940s had singers, such as Woodie Guthrie, who established some of the early traditions. Although Guthrie is associated with folk music, his influence on the country music genre was present in the sounds of the music with guitars and string instruments. These traditions formed during this period not only became influential in country music but they also triggered a debate of the authenticity.⁸ In his song, recorded by his cousin Jack Guthrie, "Oklahoma Hills" provided the cowboy imagery in the lyrics years before the outlaw movement. These lyrics of this 1947 song noted the cowboy lifestyle by stating, "Way down yonder in the Indian Nation, Cowboy's life is my occupation, in

⁷ Robert Fink, Melinda Latour, and Zachary Wallmark, *The Relentless Pursuit of Tone: Timbre in Popular Music*, edited by Robert Fink, et al., (Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2018), 49.

⁸ Folder 2747: Silber, Irwin: Scan 8 in the Archie Green Papers #20002, Southern Folklife Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

them Oklahoma Hills where I was born.”⁹ This song brought the story of the cowboy to life through the airwaves. The quick spread and growth of areas considered the Wild West occurred during this period. The areas that contained this cowboy lifestyle with the ranches and farms included states, such as Oklahoma and Texas. The 1940s growth of the television and the radio provided a connection to the urban areas. The emerging smoother sounds became labeled as country music with singers, such as Ernest Tubb, Tex Ritter, the Sons of the Pioneers, and later Hank Williams.¹⁰ *Billboard* magazine labeled this era the ‘Golden Era of Success’ with these artists, and it seemed to have established the authenticity of image and sound that the outlaw artists displayed. A section in the *Billboard* magazine in a 1968 article saluted Tex Ritter by stating:

During this time, where Ritter was recording mostly danceband music and songs of romance, he turned out songs of his most powerful and most memorable hits. Though he laid the foundation for his future success in this realm of music with early Capitol recordings such as “Jingle Jangle Jingle,” “Someone,” “I’ve Done the Best I Could,” and “Have I Stayed Away Too Long,” it was not until 1944 and his release of “I’m Wastin’ My Tears On You” that Tex reached the style of rhythmic tune that would assure his musical stature.¹¹

The period of the 1940s into the 1950s provided the transformation to mainstream country music due to the spread and reach of the music.¹² The blend of styles and artists from different areas of the country provided diversity in the music. The reach of the airways through shows at the Grand Ole Opry connected fans in different areas to the country music.¹³ Acuff-Rose Publishing established Nashville’s first major country music publishing company. Roy Acuff, an established

⁹ Patrick B. Mullen *Right to the Juke Joint: A Personal History of American Music*, (University of Illinois Press, 2018), 10.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 40.

¹¹ “*Billboard* Salutes Tex Ritter: Tex Sets Standards.” *Billboard*, vol. 80, no. 49, 1968, 46.

¹² Folder 5975: Travis, Merle: Scan 84 in the Archie Green Collection #20002, Southern Folklife Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹³ *The Hillbilly Shakespeare (1945–1953)*, in *Country Music, Episode 3*. Directed by Ken Burns. Public Broadcasting Service and *The Sons and Daughters of America (1964–1968)*, in *Country Music, Episode 5*. Directed by Ken Burns. Public Broadcasting Service.

singer and fiddler involved at the Grand Ole Opry shows, created a publishing company with his musician friend Fred Rose.¹⁴ In 1944, in the early days of country music an Arkansas politician, Thomas H. Barton, saw the impact of country music and its connection to the listeners. Barton hired Grand Ole Opry musicians to accompany him on campaign rallies for his campaign.¹⁵ Acuff did not limit his involvement to music and got involved with politics. His intentions were to maintain growth in the Davison County area.¹⁶ The Republican Party had not been a strong presence in the area, and the participation Acuff took in politics challenged the historically Democratic leanings and control in Tennessee. This attention and involvement that Acuff gave to politics remained most of his life.¹⁷ Acuff helped Nashville continue to hold its country music capital title.¹⁸ In 1972, a fan of Acuff wrote a letter to the editor of *The Tennessean* signed as ‘synthetic southerner’ regarding Acuff’s move into politics giving credit to Acuff’s contribution stating:

In cities and small towns and in the country all over the USA, Roy Acuff is known and loved by many as the King of Hillbillies. They listen in Oklahoma City, York, Pa., Peru, Ind., and Albany, Ga., and whether you like him or not, Roy Acuff has done a wonderful job for you, that of selling Nashville, Tennessee as a pretty wonderful place and Tennesseans as being a mighty fine people. Nashville, and Tennessee particularly, should be proud of Roy Acuff. Everywhere he is a symbol of homefolks and their music, regardless of his politics.¹⁹

¹⁴ “Country: Popular Songs of the Day: Musical Styles: Articles and Essays: The Library of Congress Celebrates the Songs of America: Digital Collections: Library of Congress,” The Library of Congress, accessed May 29, 2024, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/songs-of-america/articles-and-essays/musical-styles/popular-songs-of-the-day/country/>.

¹⁵ Peter La Chapelle, *I’d Fight the World: A Political History of Old-Time, Hillbilly, and Country Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 81-82.

¹⁶ “Roy Acuff: The ‘King’ of Country Music Who Offered Many the Gift of a Helping Hand,” *Billboard.*, vol. 84, no. 9, 1972, 18.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ “Roy Acuff Takes Stump,” *The News and Observer*, October 10, 1948, 54.

¹⁹ “Defenders and Detractors of Roy Acuff Wham Away: Letters to The Tennessean,” *The Tennessean*, November 18, 1952, 10.

Acuff was instrumental in the success of artists, such as Tex Ritter, by providing connections to a broader audience. Ritter provided a geographical connection to Texas. As country music artists' success grew during this period, the Texas connection helped to start this fixation of the listeners with the cowboy image and lifestyle. Ritter also provided songs on the silver screen in Hollywood in movies, such as *High Noon*.²⁰ Hank Williams, keeping to the image of the cowboy, was instrumental in connecting this tradition of country music through his honesty about himself with which everyone could empathize. His name appeared in songs by the outlaw musicians as a link to the tradition of country music. Williams established a sound in the early period of the 1950s country music genre after *Billboard* defined its own genre. This early defining was called Juke Box Folk Records that established a chart for measuring the success of the songs through plays on jukeboxes.²¹ Although Nashville is known for country records, it does record about 10 percent of pop music. During this period at Columbia records, there were stars of other genres, such as Connie Francis, Perry Como, and Bob Dylan, who recorded in Nashville.²²

The 1950s was an important decade for the expansion of the country music genre and the rock and roll genre. Waylon Jennings, one of the original outlaws, gained experience with Buddy Holly as his guitarist. Jennings and Holly knew each other from meeting in a Lubbock, Texas, diner in 1953. While Jennings was working as a disc jockey in 1958, Holly came and provided him an electric guitar and instructed him to learn to play it in two weeks in order to join him on the Winter Dance Party Tour.²³ They were on tour in Fargo, North Dakota, when Jennings gave up his seat on a flight to their next show. That night haunted Jennings the rest of his life. The final words he spoken teasingly to Holly had an eerie premonition to it when he stated, "I hope

²⁰ "Billboard Salutes Tex Ritter: Tex Sets Standards." *Billboard*, vol. 80, no. 49, 1968, 46.

²¹ *Billboard*. 1944, 13.

²² Paul Hemphill, *The Nashville Sound: Bright Lights and Country Music*, (University of Georgia Press, 1970), 31.

²³ Barte Haile, "Jennings Gives up Seat on Flight," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, February 6, 2009, 137.

your ol' airplane crashes."²⁴ On February 3, 1959, the plane crash occurring shortly after departure included the deaths of Ritchie Valens, J.P. Richardson (the Big Bopper), and Buddy Holly. One of the ambitions for Holly was to return to Lubbock, where he had met Jennings, to start a recording studio.²⁵ The many what ifs surrounded the tragedy of the loss of these musical legends. However, this event impacted Jennings for the rest of his life, especially because of his last words to Holly. After the plane crash, it took Jennings some time to get back into music. In his autobiography, Jennings revealed the guilt he carried after the loss of Holly in the plane crash:

That took me a lot of years to get over. I was just a kid, barely twenty-one. I was about halfway superstitious, like all Southern people, scared of the devil and scared of God equally. I was afraid somebody was going to find out I said that and blame me. I knew I said that. I remember Buddy laughing and then heading out for the airport after the show. I was certain I caused it.²⁶

The impact that Holly made on Jennings as a mentor and producer of his initial record led to Jennings taking a stand in the outlaw movement. The songs carried a reflection of the listeners themselves.²⁷ The glitz and the glamour of the artists were not what resonated with the fans. Like many of Buddy Holly's fans, the fans enjoyed the similarities of the artists and the relatability of the music.²⁸ However, this tragedy also played a role in shaping the personality of Jennings and the music industry. Once established in the record industry, he was on his path to becoming one of the iconic outlaw musicians that forever changed the country music genre.

²⁴ Desiree Kocis, "The Day the Music Died." *Plane and Pilot*, Jan/Feb 2020,

²⁵ Tim Purtell, "Buddy Holly's Fateful Flight. (Fatal Plane Crash on Feb 3, 1959)." *Entertainment Weekly.*, no. 260, 1995.

²⁶ Waylon Jennings, Shirley Buttsworth, and Lenny Kaye, *Waylon: An Autobiography* (Enfield, N.S.W: Royal Blind Society Student and Special Transcriptions, 1997), 67.

²⁷ R. Serge Denisoff, "Waylon Jennings 'the Last Tour': A New Journalism Approach." *Journal of Popular Culture* 13, no. 4 (Spring 1980): 663.

²⁸ Gary W. Moore, *Hey Buddy: In Pursuit of Buddy Holly, My New Buddy John, and My Lost Decade of Music*, (Savas Beatie, 2011), 204.

The genres of the 1950s strived to identify their own sounds and music. The diversity in music and the blending of elements along with the growth of technology promoted a diverse listener in multiple genres. The rapid revolution of music created cross over hits and the record industry's desire to produce commercialized sounds. As the music industry created defined lines during this period for genres, the commencement of authenticity in country music as a debated topic would forever plague the genre. The plane crash that claimed the life of Buddy Holly occurred just at the beginning of a promising musical career. However, others came on the music scene to fill the gap. Johnny Cash first made his debut in the 1950s as a singer. Similar to Jennings, this decade impacted his future and role as an outlaw. One of Cash's early songs, "Walk the Line," became a number one hit and crossed over to number 17 on the pop charts, providing commercialized success with the theme of the outlaws in the lyrics. Cash's drug addiction and rowdy attitude became well-known in the 1960s. In 1965 when the Grand Ole Opry refused to let him perform, he damaged the lighting around the stage.²⁹ The fans still loved Cash even though he faced struggles and caused destruction. This element of overcoming faults and struggles was a strong theme carried through the lyrics. Trying to adapt to a quickly changing world with items, such as drugs causing addictions and unpredictable behavior, had spread beyond the rich and famous.³⁰ The majority of country music fans provided clemency for the indiscretions of Cash as evident in his continued popularity during the time period prior to the outlaw movement. Just as Cash got inspiration from his life experiences so did the other outlaw musicians. Willie Nelson penned a song in the 1960s with his reflections from the events

²⁹ "Singer's legendary lyrics gave comfort in heartbroken times," *The Daily Journal*. Franklin, Indian. September 22, 2003, 4.

³⁰ The rise in recreational use during this period was due to the availability of drugs caused an increase in addiction and the government trying to establish laws and guidelines for use. Further reading discussing in Matthew Oram, Prohibited or Regulated? LSD Psychotherapy and the United States Food and Drug Administration." *History of Psychiatry*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2016, pp. 290–306.

occurring. A bandmate, David Zettner, served in Vietnam and shared stories of his time there. This inspired Nelson to write “Jimmy’s Road.”³¹ Although this is not one of Nelson’s most popular songs, it highlighted the impact of the events around him during this period that echoed in the lyrics and affected him even though he did not serve. The stories he heard from his friends who served in Vietnam impacted him personally. Although there were those who remained home and did not go fight, the ripple effect of the war carried its way back home and to the mind of Nelson, who put the impact of the war into his songs. Nelson released the song after the war concluded, but he had written it during the period of wartime, capturing the effects of the war on a person. This song expressed the loss and toll of warfare through these lyrics:

This is Jimmy’s road where Jimmy liked to play
 This is Jimmy’s grass where Jimmy like to lay around
 This is Jimmy’s tree where Jimmy liked to climb
 But Jimmy went to war and something changed his mind around
 This is the battleground where Jimmy learned to kill
 Now Jimmy has a trade and Jimmy knows it too well
 This is Jimmy’s grave where Jimmy’s body lies
 And when a soldier falls Jimmy’s body dies and dies
 But this is Jimmy’s road where Jimmy likes to play
 This is Jimmy’s grass where Jimmy likes to lay around³²

Nelson used the song on his 1982 album *Always on My Mind*.³³ The theme of the song presented the cost of the war with the loss of a soldier’s life. During its release in the 1980s, it took on a patriotic tone to echo the pride and gratitude for those willing to give the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

Time marched on and the country music genre continued to expand. The quick growth of technology, including wider range of radio and television, provided platforms for country artists

³¹ Willie Nelson, David Ritz, and Mickey Raphael, *Energy Follows Thought: The Stories behind My Songs* (New York, NY: William Morrow, an imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, 2023), 191.

³² *Ibid*, 190.

³³ Tom Palaima, “Alive and Singing the Truth,” *The Texas Observer*, April 19, 2019. <https://www.texasobserver.org/2665-alive-and-singing-the-truth/>

to showcase their music and connect with fans on a national scale. Roy Acuff, sometimes called the ‘King of Country Music,’ can claim establishing the popularity of the Grand Ole Opry as a premier venue for country music.³⁴ The Grand Ole Opry and television shows promoted country music by presenting its cultural identity. Mediums, such as magazines, television, and fashion, provided influence on a visual scale. These mediums, combined with the major migration of people to different areas nationwide, contributed to the diversification of the music scene, allowing for a narrative to emerge within the lyrics while also providing a visual image, such as the outlaw image with cowboy attire, to be seen and heard by audiences across the nation. A unique element of the outlaw movement resulted in the power to reach beyond its typical demographic because of the message or sentiments expressed in the music. The use of the country cowboy image in different types of mediums helped to promote the popularity and nostalgia of the image. However, the reason the culture is reflected in the lyrics was the artists remember through their own experiences and acknowledged the experiences of the fans. Even so, the artists’ lives became much different than the lives of the working class. In a 1977 *Rolling Stone* article, journalist Martha Hume discussed this change with Loretta Lynn who noted how different her life is from the early songs she wrote by stating:

It’s a strange deal. I’m supposed to be a country singer, writing songs about marriage and family and the way normal folks live. But mostly I’m living in motel rooms and traveling on my special bus ... I don’t even open the shades in my bus anymore. I’ve seen every highway in the United States and they all look alike to me.³⁵

The commercialization of music and the branding of it to country music to differentiate it from folk created an identity crisis. The record executives’ desire to ensure success resulted in

³⁴ Paul Hemphill, *The Nashville Sound: Bright Lights and Country Music*, (University of Georgia Press, 1970), 56.

³⁵ Martha Hume, “‘Women Are Human, Just Exactly like a Man’: The Lost Loretta Lynn Interview,” *Rolling Stone*, October 5, 2022, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/lost-loretta-lynn-interview-1234605404/>.

the formation of the smooth Nashville sound. Although this pop-influenced sound is one of the threads that motivated the onset of the outlaw movement, it was an important element that expanded the reach of the genre. A press release from the Country Music Association during this period stated:

Country music is no longer strictly rural, as the name implies, but has become the folk music of the working classes...in many respects, country music a rightfully claim the distinction of being America's only native art form.³⁶

Country music had evolved alongside American society by reflecting and responding to social changes and movements. The outlaw movement emerged to expand this relationship to the culture of the listeners and to present honest lyrics providing insight on the culture with which the listeners identified. The desire to find the right sound and to gain artistic freedom while being true to the traditions inspired the outlaw movement. The outlaw movement highlighted the connection to the culture as it achieved balancing tradition with the changing society in the 1980s. The sound of country music had early introductions of new innovative ways to use instruments, such as the guitar. Guitarists Merle Travis and Joe Maphis helped to bring the guitar-picking style into the genre in the 1940s and 1950s.³⁷ The style of music during the time of the outlaw movement had additions, such as lead guitars and the popularized use of electric guitars.³⁸ The debate over authenticity of sound was due to the blend of background and the use of innovated sounds early in the genre. However, the evolving sounds and introduction to innovative guitar use that mimicked rock and roll sounds occurred well before the outlaw movement. The sounds in country music accompanied by the artists who welded the lyrical

³⁶ Paul Hemphill, *The Nashville Sound: Bright Lights and Country Music*, (University of Georgia Press, 1970), 55.

³⁷ Darrin Fox, "Merle Travis & Joe Maphis: Country Music's Two Guitar Greats." *Guitar Player* 39, no. 7 (2005): 82.

³⁸ Folder 5975: Travis, Merle: Scan 14 in the Archie Green Collection #20002, Southern Folklife Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

stories had expanded into Carnegie Hall with a show by Merle Travis, showcasing the expansion of music into urban areas.³⁹ The package of the rebellious image and poetic lyrical style set the outlaw movement apart from earlier transitions, and the connection to the listeners forever changed the country music genre. One expression showing that external events impacted music came through Johnny Cash's response to the Vietnam War by recording his song "Singin' in 'Vietnam Talkin' Blues."⁴⁰ Outlaw musicians participated in the cultural climate through the lyrics of their songs.

Loretta Lynn provided rebellious action in her own ways. Although she did not appear in the original outlaw movement that occurred in the 1970s, she was making waves through her music. The song "Don't Come Home a Drinkin' (with Lovin' on Your Mind)" in 1967 became one of her number one hits that she wrote with Peggy Sue Wells and showed it resonated with the listeners since it was a hit. The song had these lyrics:

Well, you thought I'd be waitin' up when you came home last night
 You'd been out with all the boys and you ended up half tight
 Liquor and love, they just don't mix
 Leave that bottle or me behind
 And don't come home a drinkin' with lovin' on your mind
 No, don't come home a drinkin' with lovin' on your mind
 Just stay out there on the town and see what you can find
 'Cause if you want that kind of love, well, you don't need none of mine
 So don't come home a drinkin' with lovin' on your mind⁴¹

Later that same year, Lynn and Wells along with Teddy Wilburn wrote a response, "I Come Home a Drinkin'" that became a hit by Loretta's brother Jay Lee Webb with the lyrics from the male perspective:

I knew you'd be sleeping when I got home last night

³⁹ Folder 5975: Travis, Merle: Scan 1 in the Archie Green Collection #20002, Southern Folklife Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

⁴⁰ Kenneth D. Tunnell and Mark S. Hamm. "Singing across the Scars of Wrong: Johnny Cash and His Struggle for Social Justice." *Crime, Media, Culture.*, (vol. 5, no. 3, 2009), 276,

⁴¹ Loretta Lynn, *Honky Tonk Girl: My Life in Lyrics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 39.

All you ever want to do is eat and sleep and fight
 You say you're always all worn out
 From the work you have to do
 So I come home a' drinkin' to a worn-out wife like you.⁴²

This type of dialogue helped to identify with the listeners of the music. The words certainly made it clear that women would no longer accept the transgressions of the husband and would no longer accept the drinking habits. This also showed a shift of the acceptance of this behavior. Even so, the outlaw music has themes of redemption. Female artists, such as Loretta Lynn, made an effort through their songs to put a stop to these behaviors. Lynn enjoyed pushing the envelope and writing about things she had endured, or her friends and family had endured. The conversation within the lyrics provided a deeper cultural identity of the working class that was evolving as the songwriters were writing songs.

Songwriters wanting to use the music to convey the sentiments in the turbulent time period motivated singers to produce their own songs. The outlaw musicians were not only skilled writers but also singers of songs written by other artists. The experience of the counterculture movement of the 1960s impacted the outlaw artists. The changing society while trying to make their own music with success caused the artists to scramble to find their own voice.⁴³ The struggles the artists faced were similar to the listeners and by expounding on these struggles in their music, they connected with the listener and influenced the entire genre to be a sounding board of the culture of the listeners. The economic crisis of the 1970s created struggles for the working class, and labor shortages further strained the working-class demographic.⁴⁴ The outlaw movement created a space within the country music industry that allowed for honest, raw lyrics

⁴² Loretta Lynn, *Honky Tonk Girl: My Life in Lyrics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 44.

⁴³ Paul Hemphill, *The Nashville Sound: Bright Lights and Country Music*, (University of Georgia Press, 1970), 67.

⁴⁴ Thomas Volscho, "The Revenge of the Capitalist Class: Crisis, the Legitimacy of Capitalism and the Restoration of Finance from the 1970s to Present." *Critical Sociology* 43, no. 2 (2017), 266.

that resonated with the listeners. The impact set ripples through the genre and created the relationship between the artist and the listeners that resulted in the soaring success of the outlaw movement. The American dream thrived through the cowboy image in the country music genre.⁴⁵ The outlaw movement took their music to a rugged edge of walking in the grey area of the rules. The religious aspect of the country music genre echoed in the redemption of the behaviors presented in the outlaw lyrics. This further connected the listeners with similar struggles in life that caused failures to adhere to the preaching of the faith. The experiences of the outlaw artists brought a unique perspective to the lyrics. Due to the dynamic element of the movement to reach the psyche of those who heard the lyrics, it spread beyond just the original artists as those coming after desired success and an opportunity to express their sentiments about society. Ironically, it worked along with the cowboy image that held the ideology of moral obligation of doing what is right even after one's own mistakes.⁴⁶

The country music genre sometimes can be a living museum with older songs brought to life by new artists. This was true for outlaw musicians who used not only their own songs but also songs from great songwriters in the present and the past. A song, originally written in 1940s and recorded by Hank Williams, presented the perspective of looking back and reminiscing over past love and mistakes made. Willie Nelson included this song "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain" on his *Red Headed Stranger* album where it gained popularity. However, it has transcended

⁴⁵ Aaron A. Fox, *Real Country: Music and Language in Working-Class Culture*, (Duke University Press, 2004), 318.

⁴⁶ The United States was originally an agrarian society that turned urban. Jefferson had stated a fear of the United States moving away from the agrarian societies. For further reading on the social theory of the agrarian society Will Wright provides a detailed summary in his *The Wild West the Mythical Cowboy and Social Theory*. 1st ed., SAGE, 2001.

genres after his release when recorded by Olivia Newton-John, Elvis Presley, and later a duet with Nelson and Shania Twain.⁴⁷ The lyrics recall the loss of love:

In the twilight glow I see them
 Blue eyes crying in the rain
 When we kissed goodbye and parted
 I knew we'd never meet again
 In the twilight glow I see them
 Blue eyes crying in the rain
 When we kissed goodbye and parted
 I knew we'd never meet again⁴⁸

The songs in country music have a way of continuing to resonate beyond the time of the original release because the sentiments expressed continue to make a connection with the listeners.

There is a historical significance of the role of music in culture and its impact on society. The cultural atmosphere in the United States following the end of World War II went through many changes and challenges. This century witnessed two major global conflicts among other engagements. At the same time the technology of military and communication was quickly advancing.⁴⁹ The shift in the cultural mindset brought about by the messages in the music reflected the culture of different demographics in their reaction to the political climate. The 1960s became an era that was full of controversial conflicts, including the involvement of the United States in the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, and even religious changes. The music provided a reflection of the cultural change during this time period. As the political unrest developed following the conclusion of World War II, the global divide of ideology that materialized in the Cold War became a reverberation of the division of opinions that would echo

⁴⁷ Alex Hopper, "Behind the Meaning of Willie Nelson's 'Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain,'" *American Songwriter*, October 15, 2022, <https://americansongwriter.com/behind-the-meaning-of-blue-eyes-crying-in-the-rain-by-willie-nelson/>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ "Hanoi Tapes made in U.S.: 'Freedom fighter' prepared anti-war broadcast." *The Baltimore Sun (1837-)*, Feb 09, 1966. 1.

in the music in the 1960s.⁵⁰ The combination of the Vietnam War and political decisions brought about a reaction from songwriters in their music.⁵¹ The music of the era of the 1960s resulted from the division of ideologies. The disgruntled musicians used their music to spread the message. The music of the time in each genre reflected its reaction to changes differently, yet each had a strong opinion expressed through the lyrics. This expression of opinions started early that presented a message of protest on the inequality that continued in the American society.⁵² The impact of using written words to communicate a message remained in the music industry and the culture beyond the turbulent decade of the 1960s.

The result of the shifting role of the United States on a global scale saw the world hierarchy change in the decade of 1960s. The advancement of technology created the ability for marginalized voices to use different mediums to share a message. These viewpoints found a home in the lyrics of the music and ultimately provided a transcript of the evolving American culture. The 1960s created a counterculture that challenged the traditional norms and questioned the political leaders with their decisions.⁵³ The music started to reflect the opinions or sentiment of the specific demographics. In Nashville, the rise of the Nashville sound echoed on the airways. The desire of record executives to achieve commercial success drove the inception of this smoother sound. Chet Atkins contributed to the popular Nashville sound that filled the playlist in the 1960s, crowding out the traditional sounds of country music. The Nashville sound

⁵⁰ Michael Stewart Foley, "A Politics of Empathy: Johnny Cash, the Vietnam War, and the 'Walking Contradiction' Myth Dismantled." *Popular Music and Society* 37, no. 3 (2014), 340.

⁵¹ Lily Rothman, "The Vietnam War: Why That Conflict Produced Iconic Music," *Time* (Time, September 27, 2017), <https://time.com/4949617/music-vietnam-war/>.

⁵² Kesha M. Morant, "Language in Action: Funk Music as the Critical Voice of a Post—Civil Rights Movement Counterculture." *Journal of Black Studies* 42, no. 1 (2011), 75.

⁵³ Mathew Bannister, "'I'm Set Free...': The Velvet Underground, 1960s Counterculture, and Michel Foucault." *Popular Music and Society* 33 2010 (2), 165.

presented a smooth sound that resonated with a wider range of listeners.⁵⁴ This endeavor to achieve commercial success put the country music beyond the rural areas into the cities and suburbs. This identity crisis resulted from efforts to establish a new sound by some while others desired to adhere to the traditions. This created a debate within the country music genre that produced subgenres that led to the outlaw movement. Interestingly, Willie Nelson had success in the 1960s as a song writer during the Nashville sound movement with the song “Crazy” sung by Patsy Cline.⁵⁵ However, Nelson did not find success with his own voice until the outlaw movement in the 1970s.

The musical artists through lyrics exhibited their own reaction to the events occurring in 1960s.⁵⁶ The rise of musical festivals was a method of to gather musical artists and listeners to enjoy the music and the message that it held. These gatherings strived to escape the events going on in the world but did not ignore them in the lyrical message.⁵⁷ This showed how the music captured the shifting culture. The words and sounds of the music expressed the race to understand the changing society and presented the opportunity to oppose leadership. The artists in the country music genre also faced the changes in society and used lyrics to express the message. These country artists started to get involved in the discussion on political debates but struggled with balancing their patriotism with the need to make their sentiments known about the events occurring around them. Because of similar concerns about the war, the message evolved over time. Johnny Cash faced the struggle of balancing how to support the troops while

⁵⁴ Folder 5975: Travis, Merle: Scan 86 in the Archie Green Collection #20002, Southern Folklife Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁵⁵ Travis Stimeling. *Nashville Cats: Record Production in Music City*, (Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2020), 144.

⁵⁶ Steven S. Volk, “A Season of Anger.” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 30, 2015. <https://www.chronicle.com/blogs/conversation/a-season-of-anger>

⁵⁷ Wayne Pernu, “Star Spangled Banner - Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock: The Anthem of a Generation,” The Official Jimi Hendrix Site, August 24, 2021, <https://www.jimihendrix.com/editorial/star-spangled-banner-jimi-hendrix-at-woodstock-the-anthem-of-a-generation/>.

addressing injustices he was passionate about. Cash was able to present music that played an impactful role that aligned with the support of the troops with the war by not only performing for them but also using lyrics to stand in solidarity to the oppressed and marginalized.⁵⁸ Johnny Cash, with strong gospel-based influences and bluegrass influences, had created a sound that blended country with a spin of rock and roll. Cash's music played an effectual role that aligned with the Vietnam War and the political shift of the anti-war movement.⁵⁹

The outlaw movement that occurred in the 1970s used the lyrics to express emotions, connecting it to the culture of the listeners. The music impacted the social environment or culture of the era and the response to the music was evident to this occurrence. The success of the music provided evidence that the temperament of a specific demographic of listeners aligned with the attitude of the music. The lyrical dialogue of the 1960s played a pivotal role in reflecting and fueling the cultural and social movements of the period, providing a platform for social protest of the politics. The outlaw movement within the country music genre took a similar reflection. Analyzing the use of the lyrical message as a form of communication within the turbulent 1960s gave evidence on how lyrics provided a view into the cultural aspect of the listeners of the period. The listeners bought the music as the lyrics expressed their sentiments about the changing cultures that they too were dealing with on a daily basis.

As the new decade of the 1970s emerged, the artists of the outlaw movement began to fall into an image of an outsider of the law that pushed the envelope, eventually becoming the predominant image of the outlaws. The changes in society included many societal shifts, such as women's rights and gay liberation movement. The genre's evolution after the achievements of

⁵⁸ Michael Stewart Foley, "A Politics of Empathy: Johnny Cash, the Vietnam War, and the 'Walking Contradiction' Myth Dismantled." *Popular Music and Society* 37, no. 3 (2014), 340.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

the outlaw movement provided freedom of expression. The outlaw movement in 1970s created a culture that began to evolve beyond previous stereotypes as the artists and society began to find their own voice as the entire country began to change. The outlaw movement created a challenge to the clean-cut image of the country music artist, providing avenues for a diverse image. The outlaw music was an outlet that allowed lyrical discussion on the issues at hand. It became a neutral ground not only to create a discussion and opinion on the divisive issues but also to reflect the dynamic element of how the artists and the audience really felt. These sentiments expressed in the lyrics of the music provided truthful emotions and experiences. The fascination with the success of these rebellious artists created a reaction as noted in the *Billboard* magazine article in 1974 trying to articulate these artists success by stating:

All of these parallels may be found in country music on the whole today, a particularly “progressive country,” a category which encompasses a vast number of artists. Merle Haggard must certainly be considered progressive. He’s crossed into pop, sings songs that are totally realistic (he’s been called the working man’s poet) he’s consistently been innovative (last year he cut a country Dixieland LP), he appeals to the most audiences and he is known to all audiences.⁶⁰

The similarities of the control of the record executives and the political challenges facing the working-class demographic wanting to maintain freedom aligned viewpoints of the listeners and the artists. The discussion of Jennings’ early experience with Buddy Holly as his bandmate before his success in the country music genre showed his diverse appeal to a wider range audience.⁶¹ The author, Bob Kirsch, noted in his “Progressive Country & Soul to Reign” piece the contributions of Kris Kristofferson and Johnny Cash for their endeavors of expanding the country music fan base. The role of honesty in music became the appeal of the contribution of the outlaw musicians. They did not invite this storytelling aspect in lyrics, but they fought to

⁶⁰ Bob Kirsch “Progressive Country & Soul to Reign.” *Billboard.*, Vol. 86, No. 51, 1974, 70.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

keep the ability for artists to have control of this artistic freedom. These truths connected with the working class by further identifying the cultural reflection of the listeners through the lyrics.

Jennings responded on having the label of outlaw by stating:

We weren't just playing bad guys. We took our stand outside the country music's rules, its set ways locking the door on its own jail cell. We looked like tramps, Willie in overalls me with my hair slicked back and levis, fringe sprouting on our cheeks and chins.⁶²

Jennings' appearance, labeled as rugged, resulted from his battle with hepatitis. He admitted he had allowed the facial hair to become a new feature in his appearance.⁶³ The personal drive to achieve the ability to sing personally selected songs and produce preferred material earned Jennings and others the rebellious label of 'outlaw'. The unintended result created a personalized connection to the listeners through using authentic music. This honest transparent method to display the singers' art in their own way resulted in a movement that forever changed the country music genre. Jennings went further to state how the magazines, radio, television viewed this outlaw movement that he was a leading participant in by stating:

Outlaw music became the byword for a county music underground. A movement grows because there's a need out in the wilds of society asking for a certain type of individual insight, or emotion. People liked what we are saying.⁶⁴

Jim Morris a listener from Chapel Hill, North Carolina, wrote in to applaud the skill of some of the outlaw artists, specifically, Willie Nelson. In a letter to *Country Music* magazine, he stated:

Willie Nelson's " phases and stages" were elucidated nicely by apperceptive Patrick Carr in the February issue. Recognition of this red-headed stranger has been a long time coming. Brand Willie, Waylon, Tompall, and Jerry, Jeff, renegades, gypsies, or outlaws but nevertheless brand them intellectually superior to their peers.⁶⁵

⁶² Waylon Jennings, Shirley Buttsworth, and Lenny Kaye, *Waylon: An Autobiography* (Enfield, N.S.W: Royal Blind Society Student and Special Transcriptions, 1997), 221.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 228.

⁶⁵ "Letters" *Country Music*, May 1976, 3.

Bruce Tomlin noted the significance of the country music genre to the working class, noted as the middle class. He stated:

Why do we, the solid, middle class and staunch backbone of citizenry have to put up with the moral decay of our beloved type of music? Here is what we need: Censorship by each publisher and recording company. Legislation against immoral lyrics. Encouragement of writers like myself who still have some principles and patriotism and the fear of Almighty God in them.⁶⁶

The moral and patriotic vein was surviving through the efforts of the outlaw artists. The continued use of festival or shows to support groups or an issue was evident in Nelson's popular Farm Aid.⁶⁷ This support of the local farmers provided a continued connection and fight for the rural past of the country music genre. The struggles of the farmers during this period resulted from political entanglements in the regulations harming these farmers. The lingering economic impacts of the 1970s continued into the 1980s with the farmers being hit very hard. The value of land hurt the collateral needed for small farms to leverage their debts for harvest. The market deficit due to the lack of demand for exports of farming items also hit the rural farms hard.⁶⁸ Nelson's organizing the support through Farm Aid also connected the patriotic support of farmers. This supporting of this aspect of the American society went back to the roots since the society's roots were primarily agrarian, and the agriculture aspect was an important element on society's ability to thrive.

The impact of the outlaw movement and the lyrical relationship with the country music genre continued into the 1980s as country music continued to blend the sounds of traditional and honky tonk. The need to connect to the desires of the audience of maintaining the traditions

⁶⁶ "Letters" *Country Music*, May 1976, 3.

⁶⁷ Farm Aid 1986. *Billboard*. Vol. 98 Issue 24, June 14, 1986.

⁶⁸ Ann Schottman Knol, "Crops Grew but Market Wilted in '82," *Southern Illinoisan*, January 2, 1983, 2.

remained. The outlaw movement utilized the impact of the culture of the listeners, unlike other genres which provided entertainment with slight elements of social messages. The country music artists needed to carefully adapt to the changes seen through the lens of the working-class society. New artists, such as Randy Travis, emerged to provide this new blended sound and lyrical message of tradition.⁶⁹ The outlaw movement imprinted a lasting impact on the lyrics that connected the music by putting emphasis on authenticity, using storytelling in lyrics, and the exhibition of the raw emotion in the lyrics that had become the basis of the outlaw music. This blend continued to resonate with audiences, inspiring new artists to embrace similar sounds so they could form a relationship to the culture of the listener reflected in the music.

The 1980s continued to create a stronger connection to the listeners and the evolving public opinion and artists development. Waylon Jennings had found and enjoyed success throughout the peak of the outlaw movement. In 1984, his release of the patriotic song 'America.' provided a fresh perspective with the revival of the patriotic pride that Jennings associated with President Ronald Reagan. However, Jennings supported Reagan's ability to rejuvenate the patriotic tone.⁷⁰ The decision to remain with RCA provided him with his artistic freedom. However, Jennings' success at RCA seemed to be coming to an end as the record company began searching for a new talent. The sober road that Jennings had taken also shifted his music. This put him on a search for new record label to provide the same artistic freedom, which he found in his move to MCA. Support from a friend from Jennings's early days in Texas came from Jimmy Bowen, who asked about the record contract and stated, "Are you kidding? Give him what he wants. He'll just take it anyway."⁷¹ The outlaw persona cemented his ability to

⁶⁹ *Don't Get Above Your Raisin'* (1984–1996), in *Country Music, Episode 8* 2019.

⁷⁰ Waylon Jennings, Shirley Buttsworth, and Lenny Kaye, *Waylon: An Autobiography* (Enfield, N.S.W: Royal Blind Society Student and Special Transcriptions, 1997), 293.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 294.

take artistic freedom to the next record company. The 1980s and changes not only with his new drug-free lifestyle but also with balancing music as society changed resulted in this reflection from Jennings:

When I stopped playing rhythm guitar on my tracks, even though I'm not a great guitar player, it was like I had suddenly started to worry whether I was good enough to be part of my own sound. If you stop believing in yourself, your songs stop caring about you as well. I didn't realize at the time that the thing that had made me my own man was my inner confidence, the faith and courage that allows you to get up before a group of strangers and articulate their hopes and fears. To take the guitar out of my hands was like trying to sing without opening my mouth. I didn't make the tempo mine, or the words more than sentiment. The feel. Sometimes you can't see or hear it, but you always know when it's there. Or not.⁷²

The importance of connecting to the audience and conveying the tradition with even the instrument, such as the guitar, played a role in the connection. However, the message of the song was either there or not. This ability to connect to these fans through the music provided the connection to society due to the evolving nature of the element. This reflection upon the past also resonated with the rise in patriotic pride and support of the hard-working people of the working class.

Merle Haggard had always maintained a strong attachment to music that reflected a strong respect to traditional American values. The 1981 success of Haggard's, "Are the Good Times Really Over (I Wish a Buck Was Still Silver)," presented the nostalgia that resonated with the listeners' surge to patriotic pride. The lyrics stated:

I wish a buck was still silver, it was back when the country was strong
 Back before Elvis and the Vietnam war came along
 Before The Beatles and 'Yesterday'
 And a man could still work and still would
 Is the best of the free life behind us now
 Are the good times really over for good?
 Are we rolling down hill like a snowball headed for hell?
 With no kinda chance for the flag or the Liberty Bell

⁷² Waylon Jennings, Shirley Buttsworth, and Lenny Kaye, *Waylon: An Autobiography* (Enfield, N.S.W: Royal Blind Society Student and Special Transcriptions, 1997), 297.

Wish a Ford and a Chevy could still last ten years like they should
 Is the best of the free life behind us now
 Are the good times really over for good?
 I wish Coke was still Cola and a joint was a bad place to be
 Back before Nixon lied to us all on TV
 Before microwave ovens and a girl could still cook and still would
 Is the best of the free life behind us now
 Are the good times really over for good?
 Are we rolling down hill like a snowball headed for hell?
 With no kinda chance for the flag or the Liberty Bell
 Wish a Ford and a Chevy could still last twenty years like they should
 Is the best of the free life behind us now
 Are the good times really over for good?⁷³

Haggard had carried a strong personal affection for patriotic pride before it became popular as an event in his songs regarding the Vietnam War. Ronald Reagan, while California governor, pardoned Haggard unconditionally for his crimes committed.⁷⁴ Reagan later invited Haggard to support him, and Haggard obliged and made the statement, “A lot of Democrats didn’t think that someone who sang for a workingman’s rights, as I had, should try to help a Republican win office.”⁷⁵ The support of Reagan resulted from the friendship made while he was governor of California, resulting in the pardon that allowed Haggard to move on from his past crimes. The connection of country music artists to politics did not result from specific intentions by the artist as Haggard expressed. However, the ability to present the workingman’s struggles to those in politics helped to promote the issue. In the 1980s the issues of the working class evolved as the economic changes shifted struggles to the farmers. Haggard’s song "The Farmer's Daughter," released in 1981, provided the message describing how the farmer was hesitant to give away his daughter to the boy from the city.⁷⁶ This song painted the picture of the continued

⁷³ “AZLyrics - Request for Access,” AZLyrics.com, accessed May 21, 2024, <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/steelwoods/arethegoodtimesreallyoveriwishabuckwasstillsilver.html>.

⁷⁴ Merle Haggard and Tom Carter, *My House of Memories: An Autobiography* (New York: It Books, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2011), 192.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ David Cantwell, *The Running Kind: Listening to Merle Haggard*, (University of Texas Press, 2022), 170.

societal move away from the rural farm life to the urban setting. Along with patriotic pride connected to the nostalgia of the past. The 1980s presented this connection through the impact of the outlaw movement that evolved into the patriotic tone. Society, reflected in the lyrics and the impact and connection made through the outlaw movement, carried over into the 1980s. Even in this new decade of the 1980s, the battle for establishing how to maintain the tradition continued. This evolved into a patriotic tone with the outlaw artists. The edge and rebellious aspect of challenging authority was still present in the image. However, the lyrics and the humanitarian efforts began to reflect patriotic pride and support of the foundation of society, the farmers. Haggard supported Farm Aid along with other outlaw musicians, including Cash, Jennings, and Nelson. At the September 1985 Farm Aid festival, Haggard presented a new song entitled “Amber Waves of Grain,” which echoed this patriotic tone.⁷⁷

The patriotic tone came from layers of expressing the American experience through the lyrics. Although there were songs with direct lyrics regarding patriotic verbiage, the personal stories of triumph and tragedy in the 1980s showed the alignment within the lyrics with the changes in society. Johnny Cash's "Ragged Old Flag" was a lyrical reflection symbolizing resilience of the United States. This song contributed to the patriotic tone during the 1980s, Cash continued to establish the patriotic tone. At an event in the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, with his performance that included the song “Remember the Alamo” along with the stage dressed in the patriotic theme.⁷⁸ Another outlaw, Willie Nelson, presented a song in the 1980s entitled "Living in the Promiseland," that reflected similar themes of the struggles and aspirations of the American Dream. This song reflected themes and traditions from past country

⁷⁷ “Farm Aid” *The Tampa Tribune*, September 23, 1985, 8-D.

⁷⁸ Owen McNalley, “Johnny Cash Unfurls Song Prasing Flag,” *Hartford Courant*, August 30, 1982, 18.

songs, such as Woody Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land."⁷⁹ This popular song has remained a song used in America to express patriotic pride and hope.⁸⁰ In their pursuit of artistic freedom the outlaw artists questioned the record executives and their methods and control. Their actions reflected the spirit of the America reminiscent of the radical opposition to authority that gave birth to America. In 1981, in a *Wichita Falls Times* article, Merle Haggard reflected on the rise of patriotism by stating:

I think we're experiencing a feeling of patriotism that hasn't surfaced in a long time, and I'm glad to see it. We had dipped to an all-time low on the other side not too long ago. But you have to remember that it's happened before. Every time patriotism comes to the surface, you'll find country music, cowboys and so on becoming popular.⁸¹

The reflection of the rise in patriotism in the lyrics revealed the magnitude of the relationship of the outlaw artists and the fans that impacted the entire genre. This also provided a traditional element of influences of traditions in country music by folk music. The roots of country music always had a sense of patriotism. The lyrics of Woody Guthrie's "This Land Is Your Land" not only expressed the love for the country but also provided lyrics of struggles. This song was originally called "God Blessed America" the line 'God blessed America for me' was at the end of each stanza on the original copy of the song.⁸² The change to the ending of the stanza is not reflected on the original copy. Children often sing an adjusted version in schools across the country. These original lyrics showed the adoration of the beauty of the American nation:

This land is your land, this land is my land
From California to the New York Island
From the Redwood Forest to the gulf stream waters
God blessed America for me.⁸³

⁷⁹ Woody Guthrie is considered a folk artist. However, the strong influence of folk in country music provides some of the key traditional elements that artists strive to achieve with their authenticity in country music.

⁸⁰ "Seven Ways to Say I Love the USA," *The Bangor Daily News*, June 28, 1986, 5.

⁸¹ Robert Palmer, "Country Music, Patriotism, Becoming Popular Again," *Wichita Falls Times*, June 3, 1981, 20.

⁸² Kenneth J. Meier, "Looking for Meaning in all the Wrong Places: Country Music and the Politics of Identity." *Social Science Quarterly* 100, no. 1 (2019), 91.

⁸³ Mark Allan Jackson, *Prophet Singer: The Voice and Vision of Woody Guthrie*, (University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 21.

However, some of the original lyrics are not common in the updated version. These lyrics from the original discuss the hardships faced by Americans and the economic struggles. The song written in 1940 on the heels of the Great Depression showed these conditions in the lyrics:

Was a big high wall that tried to stop me
A sign was painted said: Private Property, But
on the back side it didn't say nothing— God blessed America for me.

One bright sunny morning in the shadow of the steeple
By the relief office I saw my people—
As they stood hungry, I stood there wondering if God Blessed America for me.⁸⁴

This stanza highlighted the key element of storytelling present in the origins of country and folk musical genres by noting the cultural aspect of the economic struggles faced during this period. The timing of when this song was written followed the several years of economic hardships from the Great Depression when unemployment was rampant. This tradition of expression through lyrics became an element utilized by the outlaw artists and songwriters. The changing society provided the narrative to create discussion on changes and remembrance of the past. The connection to these events created an opportunity for reflection in the listeners that the artists could tap into via the lyrics of the music. The outlaw musicians witnessed these struggles and changes in society throughout their careers. The music not only defined the era but also revealed the stand the outlaw musicians took to push the record executives to honor the artistic freedom that eventually transformed the music industry. It also provided musical lyrics to raise questions about the societal turmoil during this period. They not only used music to convey a message but also to group similar opinions even if the fans had different backgrounds from a New Yorker businessman to rural disc jockeys.⁸⁵ This period continued to be unique in the ability for

⁸⁴ Mark Allan Jackson, *Prophet Singer: The Voice and Vision of Woody Guthrie*, (University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 22.

⁸⁵ Dave Hickey, "In Defense of the Telecaster Cowboy Outlaws," *Country Music* (January 1974), 94.

musicians to overcome the obstacles faced and be successful in spreading their message. The use of mediums, such as movies and television, boosted the reach of the cowboy image beyond the country music listeners. This widened the appeal of the music and the cowboy image to a broader audience.

The 1990s still hosted the outlaw attitude of questioning the leadership, with the traditional gospel influence remaining a strong factor. Willie Nelson created a song that blended the gospel theme along with the questions of the struggles faced in society as well as redemption common in outlaw musicians' songs. He made his plea in these lyrics:

Come on back Jesus
 And pick up John Wayne on the way
 The world's done gone crazy
 And it seems to get worse everyday
 So come on back Jesus
 And pick up John Wayne on the way
 Time to take off the glove
 They just don't respect peace anymore
 But if we have old John Wayne
 We know he can swing from the floor
 While he kicks their butt
 We'll just stand there and watch him and pray⁸⁶

The outlaw movement characterized the rejection of the mainstream sound the record executives had created and coined Nashville sound. The Nashville sound represented the opposite of the outlaw artists' music. This new record executive-polished sound departed from the traditional honky-tonk style. The outlaw movement fought for artistic freedom to return to the genre's historical embrace of a more raw and traditional authentic style of music. The artists who began to personify or release lyrics that aligned them with the outlaw movement created a contemporary element that connected to the country music listeners.

⁸⁶ Willie Nelson, David Ritz, and Mickey Raphael, *Energy Follows Thought: The Stories behind My Songs* (New York, NY: William Morrow, an imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, 2023), 36.

The emotional connection to the cultural shift was found in the lyrics of the music, and a dialogue emerged.⁸⁷ The use of music to express the events occurring at that time provided an outlet to the listeners.⁸⁸ The country music artists had their own opinions on the events occurring while also facing their own battles with the leadership in the record industry. As the country music industry faced the need to try to find its own sound as well as remain marketable, the result was a debate on authenticity and tradition that culminated in the outlaw movement. The outlaw movement created an honest reflection of the culture of the listeners. The artists of the outlaw movement inadvertently created a connection with the listeners of music that impacted the country music genre permanently. During this period country music produced some artists who spilled over into other genres as the message in the lyrics was resonating with other demographics of other genres.

This image of an outsider of the law who pushed the envelope became the predominant image as the traditional societal norms were changing. The outlaw movement's connection to the listeners to the country music genre created a commentary that provided context to the culture. Although Jessi Colter is the only woman identified with the original outlaws, the impact for women to use this outlaw attitude benefitted other artists. Dolly Parton is one of the most well-known who took the outlaw attitude of doing business her own way. Tanya Tucker is another example of a woman who was able to use parts of the outlaw movement to shape her music and make her place in the world of country music. Holly Gleason interviewed her and stated:

Her kind of country was ballsy and honest. She'd seen life, refused to be hard, and regretted nothing— and she brought it all into the vocal booth. When I interviewed her in a cookie-cutter hotel room after her show at a South Florida fair, she was fulltilt and

⁸⁷ Steven S. Volk, "A Season of Anger." *Chronicle of Higher Education*, (January 30, 2015) <https://www.chronicle.com/blogs/conversation/a-season-of-anger>

⁸⁸ Wayne Pernu, "Star Spangled Banner - Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock: The Anthem of a Generation," The Official Jimi Hendrix Site, August 24, 2021, <https://www.jimihendrix.com/editorial/star-spangled-banner-jimi-hendrix-at-woodstock-the-anthem-of-a-generation/>.

straight-on, asking as many questions about me as she answered about herself— and preaching a gospel of how to live it to tell it.⁸⁹

The honesty in the music presented captured the listeners. They found solace in the ability to sympathize and empathize with the words of the music. The outlaw movement in the country music genre continued to be unique in the ability to overcome the obstacles faced by musicians to be successful in the spread of their message. The artist holds a delicate balance between understanding the listeners of the music by not making comments or music that offends the listeners. The popularity of country music has continued to rise, and the testing of the cultural change is evident in award shows and lyrics mimicking the outlaw movement.

The characteristic of the outlaw movement to push back continued. Various artists came to the defense of George Jones as a result of how he had been treated by the Country Music Association. George Jones was a country musician who early on showed the ability to have outlaw traits without the outlaw image that some of the other artists embodied. Jones maintained his traditional attire and used his lyrics to express the truth he believed. Alan Jackson was not only a fan himself of George Jones but also acted in a passive aggressive protest for the treatment of George Jones by the American Country Music Awards by singing Jones' song "Choices" during his slot to sing on the show in 1999.⁹⁰ The song took some time for Jones to finally record, and it became successful. Even with this success he was slighted when the Country Music Association asked him to perform a shortened version of the song while giving less prominent singers full time slots. The influence of the outlaw echoed in the solidarity of the response by Alan Jackson. The organization's decision to limit the time of the Jones' musical

⁸⁹ Holly Gleason, editor. *Woman Walk the Line: How the Women in Country Music Changed Our Lives*. (University of Texas Press, 2017), 92.

⁹⁰ Wes Langelier, "CMA Awards 1999: Alan Jackson Gets a Standing Ovation for Protest Performance of George Jones' 'Choices,'" *Whiskey Riff*, October 21, 1999, <https://www.whiskeyriff.com/2023/10/21/cma-awards-1999-alan-jackson-gets-a-standing-ovation-for-protest-performance-of-george-jones-choices/>.

number caused Jackson to choose to sing his song in his own timeslot.⁹¹ This action showed the fans' support of this by their providing a standing ovation at the end of Jackson's performance. Jackson had a history of rebellious behavior in order to voice his opinion on injustices of falsehood at previous award shows as early as 1992. A simple act of Jackson's changing into a shirt of Hank Williams Senior during a 1994 performance of "Gone Country" at an award show was a rebellious act. In this time period formal attire, such as a suit, was more common for performances at award shows.⁹² Another act of rebellion occurred when he had his drummer play with no sticks since the award show required him to use recorded version of his song instead of singing live for the performance. This revealed his objection to the controls of the executive.⁹³ Blake Shelton also expressed his distaste with the award shows and highlighted the importance of the fans by stating:

First of all, thank you to all the fans...and I really do believe these awards shows are beginning to lose credibility over the last few years and fan-voted awards, to me, are really the only stand-up awards shows left in our industry it feels like sometimes. Because you guys are the ones that buy the records, you come to the shows, and vote on these things.⁹⁴

Shelton in his acceptance speech of the award voted on by fans presented the rebellious attitude towards the legitimacy of the other awards controlled by record or award executives.

Similarly, the fans would quickly let the artist know if the artist's opinion crossed the line or if they extended forgiveness through support of the music in light of the record executives' response. The fans quickly let any of the artists know if they supported or disagreed with the message presented either lyrically or personally. Toby Keith's response to the September 11th

⁹¹ Grace Lenchan Vaughn, "Remember Alan Jackson's ACM and CMA Award Protests?" *Wide Open Country*, November 14, 2021, <https://www.wideopencountry.com/alan-jackson-choices/>.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Wes Langelier, "CMT Awards 2020: Blake Shelton Says Awards Shows Are 'Beginning to Lose Credibility' during His Acceptance Speech," *Whiskey Riff*, April 7, 2020, <https://www.whiskeyriff.com/2024/04/07/cmt-awards-2020-blake-shelton-says-awards-shows-are-beginning-to-lose-credibility-during-his-acceptance-speech/>.

attacks on the United States made known his opinion on that event in his song “Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue.” This song had backlash from the news outlets. The *Chicago Tribune* published an article in 2002 titled, “Toby Keith out of tune with reality,” stating, “The song does little more than echo the sentiments of the terrorists who perpetrated the terrible crimes of the September 11.”⁹⁵ However, this song reached the number one spot of the *Billboard* charts in the summer of 2002.⁹⁶ The success of the song in sales showed support by the fans in their agreement with the message. The lyrics stated:

Oh, and justice will be served and the battle will rage
 This big dog will fight when you rattle his cage
 And you'll be sorry that you messed with
 The U.S. of A.
 'Cause we'll put a boot in your ass
 It's the American way⁹⁷

This ability to have freedom of expression for these later artists resulted from the outlaw artists’ fight for this freedom of expression. Although there can often be a push against traditions or an effort to find change, the faithful country music fans consistently find comfort in hearing some tradition in the music. The country music genre’s background had influences from gospel, bluegrass and rock and roll. The reason the outlaw movement occurred was in response to the Nashville sound movement in the record industry in the country music genre that had strayed from the traditional sound. There may still be some influence from politicians, but the majority of the political power has been removed. The ability to find balance within tradition was the struggle that the outlaw musicians faced but overcame. Their connection to the fan base allowed

⁹⁵ Staff Reports, “Toby Keith out of tune with reality,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 20, 2021, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/2002/07/21/toby-keith-out-of-tune-with-reality/>.

⁹⁶ Gayle-Thompson, “19 Years Ago: Toby Keith Hits No. 1 with ‘Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue,’” *The Boot*, July 20, 2021, <https://theboot.com/toby-keith-no-1-courtesy-of-the-red-white-and-blue/>.

⁹⁷ “AZLyrics - Request for Access,” AZLyrics.com, accessed March 18, 2024, <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/tobykeith/courtesyoftheredwhiteandbluethangryamerican.html>.

this discussion to be seen through the lyrics. The support of the artists and their music determined that their fight had achieved their goal of artistic freedom and success. The outlaw country music artists did not set out to become a movement or to become a reflection of the listeners. This unintended path to artistic freedom and balance of honoring traditions led to the support of the listeners. The emotions and experiences expressed through the lyrics provided solace for the listeners and forever connected the country music to the pulse of the listening demographic. However, the demographic of the country music genre evolves as time passes and understanding how to align with the listeners can change.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: The Outlaw Imprint

The country music genre was never the same after the rise of the outlaw movement in the 1970s. The outlaw artists through unintended consequences on their path to their own artists' experience garnered a relationship with the listeners of the music that forever changed the relationship between the country music genre and the audience. The authenticity reflected by the songwriters and artists created a unique bond between the artist and the listener, allowing for a deeper level of emotional connection. Outlaw musicians and the blend of elements with the honest lyrics provided a sense of nostalgia and comfort for listeners, offering a way to connect with the past and reflect experiences faced in society. The following decades showed the influence of the outlaw music on the country music genre and its connection to the fans. The desire to obtain artistic freedom and the use of lyrics to share their experiences provided a cultural connection to the music in the genre. The entire society grappled to adjust to the quickly changing society, and the music provided not only an outlet but also a balance to discuss the changes and reminisce over the past. In the face of changes and controls of the record executives, the outlaws championed to keep the raw honesty and sincerity of country music lyrics through their campaign to achieve artistic freedom. Changes in society caused a reaction from artists and fans and a need to understand these changes. The lyrical communication used with the counterculture in the 1960s set the stage as a means to maintain the tradition in country music. The alignment with the fans created a dialogue as the popularity of the country music grew, and it remained closely tied to the culture of the working-class American. The outlaw movement revolutionized the country music genre by using honest lyrics, maintaining authentic tributes to country music traditions, and providing a diverse perspective to emerge in the country music

genre. The outlaw movement influenced a conversation between the artists and the listeners through the lyrics addressing everyday struggles and societal change.

The cultural influence in the country music genre had to catch up to the changing societal norms at the end of the 20th century. The impact of the outlaw movement in the 1970s facilitated the connection to these changes. The truths expressed by the outlaw artists via the traditional sounds resulted in the formation of a strong relationship with the country music fan base. These struggles were in the lyrics of the music that also provided the opportunity for redemption. One of the struggles was the introduction and availability of drugs used recreationally in the 20th century, causing substance abuse and addiction that plagued not only some of artists but also some of the listeners. Through the original outlaw musicians' fight for artistic freedom, their honest lyrics and nod to tradition connected the country music genre to the listeners. The changing society and evolving opinions created a interaction between the listeners and the music. It spread to other artists who found their own path to lyrical freedom. This raw honesty present in the storytelling created an outlet for the listeners to reminisce on the past while coming to terms with societal changes. Initially, the artists just wanted to create music that was popular using the experiences and cultures of the songwriters. The relationship became reciprocal when the working-class Americans resonated with the message within the music. The amenability showed the complexity of society and the constant change present. The outlaw music movement provided an avenue for the country music genre to include reflection and discussion of societal issues. It also provided comfort in providing an outlet through the lyrics to transport listeners to another time even if it was experienced by their ancestors. This connection to the listeners, along with the outlaws' own conviction to redefine what country music represented, influenced the

entire genre.¹ Their contribution created an honest exchange to provide insight into the culture of the listeners, resulting in a demographic of society forever changing the country music genre. This legacy continues in the country music genre through artists who push boundaries and challenge the status quo. The battle the outlaw artists took against the record establishment provided an avenue to combat the Country Music Association's control over the message released.² Although they started the battle to allow artistic freedom for the artists, it is an ongoing balance for established country music artists to maintain their freedom and to adhere to the preference and message of the listeners that evolves with society. The buying power of the fans determined the direction of the genre. That was proven when the outlaw album *Wanted! The Outlaws* became the first country music album to receive platinum certification.³

The fans also keep the balance by providing feedback when the artist push boundaries too far. The country music genre provided the connection and nostalgia to this mindset. The popularity of the cowboy image and the outlaw moniker became popular in the 1970s. This connection to independence coupled with the image of the cowboy lifestyle resonated with society. The outlaw musicians also had a connection to the freedom that resembled the cowboy lifestyle. The freedom they sought in their own artistic form created change in the country music

¹ Peter Christenson, Donald F. Roberts, and Nicholas Bjork, "Booze, Drugs, and Pop Music: Trends in Substance Portrayals in the *Billboard* Top 100—1968–2008," *Substance Use & Misuse* 47, no. 2 (January 2, 2012): 121–29, <https://doi.org/10.3109/10826084.2012.637433>, 122.

² The Country Music Association provides award shows established since 1958. The members collaborate to promote country music. The basis of the institution to move the genre more mainstream is a key element that propelled the outlaw movement. This organization is still influential in country music in modern-day. Additional reading on the current branding with artists and products is noted in this article, Malika Tour, "Changing the tune of Country; The Country Music Association works to attract brands and alter the advertising industry's perceptions of its fans." *Advertising Age*, December 8, 2014, 0040. *Gale Business: Insights* (accessed June 25, 2024). https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A393110688/GBIB?u=vic_liberty&sid=summon&xid=bcee8a61.

³ Stephen L. Betts, "Flashback: Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson Make Music History: In 1976, 'Wanted! The Outlaws' became the first country album ever to reach platinum status." *Rolling Stone*, November 24, 2020. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-country/flashback-waylon-jennings-and-willie-nelson-make-music-history-68742/>

genre. It was through lyrics the outlaw musicians expressed struggles that the listeners were also experiencing, including heartbreak and love. They also presented the image of the nostalgia with elements of forgiveness, freedom, and individuality. The outlaw musicians ironically connected to a wider range of listeners, achieving the Nashville sound's purpose to expand the audience. The working-class demographic responded more slowly to external changes, such as the rise in the counterculture occurring at a fast pace in this period. The outlaw movement connected the rendering of the culture through the musical lyrics and authentic sound.

The Nashville sound established the record control of the music being produced in Nashville and moved away from the traditional sound of country music. This control by the record producers created an element of the country music genre that strived towards the commercialized success by seeking an audience beyond the country music faithful. The outlaw artists promoted a more faithful approach by preserving traditions. The move by the outlaw musicians to gain artistic freedom did not set out as a crusade to preserve country music but as a desire to have artistic control for the music they released. The music and message they created when they received this freedom reflected the spirit of a society in which the people were trying to adapt to the changes while clinging to tradition. Ironically, the outlaw artists' choice in music and style mirrored the same sentiments within the country music genre.

The challenge to produce music that appealed to the listeners while also providing the desired raw, authentic traditions the listener craved provided the opportunity to connect to the music.⁴ The presence of gospel, blues, and rock influences along with the traditional country sound provided an element not only to create authentic sounding music but also to provide commercial success as witnessed with the outlaw album reaching platinum status. The

⁴ Jeremy Hill, *Country Comes to Town: The Music Industry and the Transformation of Nashville*, (University of Massachusetts Press, 2015), 88.

combination of the geographical spread and reach of country music contributed to this blend. The outlaw artists brought the sounds from Texas, Arkansas, California, Oklahoma, and other regions to the music.⁵ The changing geographical influences among country music to include diversity in the artists' background created a blend within the artists. The outlaw artists with their diverse geographical backgrounds also showed similarities in the demographics from different geographic locations. The working-class society was diverse and was scattered across the nation, yet it found similarities within the lyrics of country music.

This connection to the tradition theme was an important element within country music. The outlaw movement was a reaction of the artists to the Nashville sound and the desire not only to keep authentic traditions in the music but also to create commercially successful music. The counterculture of the 1960s that spilled over into the 1970s had shifted societal norms of equality, racial disparity, and patriotism. These new norms differed from the tradition. When the outlaw movement attached to the marriage of tradition and freedom, it naturally complimented the response to the counterculture trying to establish the balance to maintain tradition while embracing changes.⁶ The outlaw movement created not only a table for conversation through the lyrics but also maintained the traditional element of honesty in the songs. The deepened relationship of the artists with the audience resulted from the lyrics discussing the struggles and experiences. The cultural shift of the 1960s into the 1970s and the change in societal norms provided the songwriters similar experiences to the listeners of their music. The outlaw movement slowly faded as the artists shifted into their own reflection of the listeners, but it had

⁵ Tianyu.Li, "Modeling the Local Geography of Country Music Concerts in U.S. Urban Areas: Insights from Big Data Analysis of Live Music Events." *Urban Informatics*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2023, 3.

⁶ Travis Stimeling. *Nashville Cats: Record Production in Music City*, (Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2020), 144.

provided the inspiration to other artists to achieve their own artistic freedom and provide that honesty to connect to the listeners.

The music inadvertently had placed focus on the to working-class struggles that echoed in the lyrics and evolved together into the patriotic theme as the artists' personal focus aligned with the rise in patriotism in the United States during the 1980s. This continued connection impacted the country music genre for future artists. The outlaw artists return to a patriotic theme emphasized the connection to the working-class cultural shift. The continued use of outlaw practices and themes revealed an understanding of the societal changes resulting from Supreme Court decisions and political event among some of the things impacting Americans and artists' struggles in the record industry. The songwriters challenged the status quo of country music for the period and not only became successful in their endeavor but also created marketable music that became timeless in the country music genre.⁷ The inspiration and honesty connected through the music provided a common thread to the listeners. The changing societal norms and the continued struggle with the record companies to find equal ground created great music. The country music fans provided their own feedback on the message as their level of acceptance. However, the change was evident in the music because of the constant evolving nature and the need to balance how to have traditional elements while producing great music with lyrics that aligned to the fan base.

During the 1980s the country music genre continued the challenge of honoring the past traditions while embracing the changing society. The progressive movement in country music became a quest of how to maintain the authentic traditions of the genre while adapting to advancing music by the blending of the different influences. The geographical boundaries of the

⁷ James C. Cobb, "Rednecks, White Socks, and Piña Coladas? Country Music Ain't What It Used to Be... And It Really Never Was." *Southern Cultures* 5, no. 4 (1999): 43.

genre, removed by means of advancements in technology, generated a wide range of listeners from different areas. The increase of fans due to the utilization of the cowboy theme in multiple mediums beyond the musical genre continued the growth of the audience.⁸

The outlaw musicians established a standard not only to obtain their artistic rights but also to use the gained stardom for the better good of the country. The image of the rugged outlaw cowboy evolved into a patriotic theme in the country music genre. Even if the long hair and rugged appearance remained, it was evident through the lyrics and humanitarian actions that there was an underlying patriotic theme. The evolving nature of the genre created a musical reflection of society. The outlaw musicians presented their own niche, and due to the longevity of the artists, it changed with the times. The blend of music to express honest lyrics provided not only a connection to the listeners but also insight into the culture of the artists and listeners. The outlaw musicians and songwriters helped to continue the tradition of the country music genre through its relatable lyrics and authentic sound by creating a sense of community with the listeners and promoting a shared experience and sense of belonging.

The reach of country music during the 1980s provided continued growth of the connection between the fans and the artists. The expansion provided diversity to the fan base. This expansion into other mediums, such as movies, provided a visual element of the music. It also represented the diversity in the genre with the messages. The 1980 country songs nominated for an Oscar in the song category for film were “9-5” by Dolly Parton and “On the Road Again”

⁸ The image of a cowboy has been used historically in country music. The original Roy Rogers and the singing cowboy was used in the marketing. This is connected to the traditional aspect of the image and the nostalgia used. This also identified the geographical locations of some of the singers and listeners. It became a strong identifier to the country music genre with the use of cowboy hats, plaid shirts, and boots. This was used in television and movies along with the music to identify the persona attached to the genre. Additional scholarly information on the history of the cowboy image: Peter Stanfield, *Horse Opera: The Strange History of the 1930s Singing Cowboy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002). Bill C. Malone, *Don't Get Above Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), David M. Wrobel, “Western Themes in Contemporary Rock Music, 1970-2000: A Lyric Analysis,” *American Music Research Center Journal* 10 (2000): 83-100.

by Willie Nelson.⁹ Dolly Parton was an artist who, although not considered an outlaw artist with the impact of the outlaw combating the record industry, provided an example for other artists to achieve their artistic freedom. This song represented Parton's promotion of the changing role of females in the working world. In a different way, the music of Nelson's song captured the sense of freedom on the road of touring for music. The outlaw artist Nelson continued to have success into the 1980s as his humanitarian support of farmers, a showing patriotic tone, offered evidence of the connection to the fans. However, some of the other outlaw artists had not continued the success obtained by Nelson. However, through the friendship forged in the earlier years, a collaboration emerged during this period. When Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson, Kris Kristofferson, and Waylon Jennings came together on the album *Highwayman*. The popularity of the album was evident in securing the number one album for twenty weeks, and later receiving a Grammy, and also getting the certification of platinum.¹⁰ This showed the continued desire for these honest truths with the outlaw artists' sound. This collaboration garnered tours and music together throughout the next decade. The song by the same name, written by Jimmy Webb, provided lyrics that presented the story of four men in pursuit of their passions and overcoming death.¹¹ Ironically, this timeless life beyond death mimics that of a musician with the ability to record music that goes on after the death of the singer, creating an immortal way for the music to survive. These fictional stories are split into stanzas with each stanza sung by one of the artists in the order of Willie Nelson, Kris Kristofferson, Waylon Jennings, and Johnny Cash. The lyrics are:

I was a highwayman, along the coach roads I did ride
With sword and pistol by my side

⁹ "Chart Beat: The Long-Playing, Hit-Studded Record of One of the Most Prolific And Successful Artist in Music History," *Billboard.*, vol. 80, no. 31, 1980, w-14.

¹⁰ Wade Jesson, "Country Corner," *Billboard.* Vol. 107, No. 20, 1995, 28.

¹¹ "'Highwayman' Born Again: Stars Give New Life to Webb Song," *Billboard.* Vol. 97, No. 19, (1985), 48.

Many a young maid lost her baubles to my trade
 Many a soldier shed his life blood on my blade
 The bastards hung me in the spring of '25
 But I am still alive

I was a sailor, I was born upon the tide
 And with the sea I did abide
 I sailed a schooner 'round the horn to Mexico
 I went aloft to furl the mainsail in a blow
 And when the yards broke off, they said that I got killed
 But I am living still

I was a dam builder across the river deep and wide
 Where steel and water did collide
 A place called Boulder on the wild Colorado
 I slipped and fell into the wet concrete below
 They buried me in that gray tomb that knows no sound
 But I am still around

I'll always be around and around and around
 And around and around and around
 I'll fly a star ship across the universe divide
 And when I reach the other side
 I'll find a place to rest my spirit if I can
 Perhaps I may become a highwayman again
 Or I may simply be a single drop of rain
 But I will remain
 And I'll be back again and again and again
 And again and again and again¹²

This collaboration also highlighted the need for label cooperation due to the artists contracted at different record labels. Although the achievement for artistic freedom had resulted from their opposition to the record executives in the 1970s, the need to collaborate created the situation that required negotiations for the artists. Kris Kristofferson in a *Billboard* interview laughed off the question to him for label collaboration stating, “It was no problem at all. I haven’t been working for an active label in 10 years.”¹³

¹² Willie Nelson and Turk Pipkin, *Willie Nelson’s Letters to America* (United States: Harper Horizon, 2021), 161-162.

¹³ “The Four Star ‘Highway’ Cash, Kristofferson Discuss Project,” *Billboard.*, vol. 97, no. 32, 1985, 39.

Country Music magazine provided feedback of this album from dialogue between two of the editors, Michael Bane and Patrick Carr, who discussed the *Highwayman* album and the artists. Banes stated in their discussion the following:

And they're what built America. They reminded me, in a bizarre way, of the Americana Museum, the Lewis and Clark Museum under the Arch in St. Louis. You could take this album and play it throughout that museum. They got sodbusters, they got cowboys, they got outlaws. It's very similar to that.¹⁴

They continued in the review to discuss the impact of the album and the individual artists. Each of the artists had decades of music experience at this point in their career. The opinion indicated that this album was a closer for the outlaw movement with its reminiscent lyrics. However, the longevity of the artists beyond the outlaw movement showed the connectivity these artists had with the fans. The lasting impact of the outlaw movement was that it challenged the record industry and provided a creative outlet for the artists resonated with the fans and connected the culture to music. This is how country music was initially intended with the stories that were expressed through the early folk music and early country describing society. Utilizing this characteristic of the roots of their genre, the outlaw artists connected to their fans and created a relationship to identify through their art with the fans. Beyond the words were the actions that cemented the relationship. Willie Nelson made a commitment to supporting the farmers whom he felt the government had ignored. This support of the farmers showed the shift to the patriotic support beyond the music. Nelson gathered artists to put on a Fourth of July show in Austin, Texas, in 1985. Although this event labeled a picnic started in 1972, it had not been consecutive but had grown to over 30,000 attendees in the previous year's event.¹⁵ The lineup included Kris Kristofferson, Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings, and several other artists. Rick Blackburn, record

¹⁴ "Record Review" *Country Music*, (July-August 1985), 49.

¹⁵ Gary Soulsman, "Willie Nelson Plans Texas Size Fourth of July," *The Morning News*, July 4, 1985, 35.

producer, made the observation of the relationship of Nelson with the fans by stating, “He has always managed to stay close to his fan base; he has cultured it and nurtured it. He has a love affair with his fans, and it shows. I’ve seen him sit on the edge of the stage after a show and sign every last autograph and do anything he can to satisfy everyone.”¹⁶ Al Teller, president of CBS records division, remarked, “Willie Nelson has managed to make the transition from ‘outlaw’ country artist to crossover superstar without sacrificing any of the elements that made him a star in the first place”¹⁷ The desire for artistic freedom that prompted the outlaw movement did not remove the need to challenge authority when needed. This ideology connected to the fans by taking a stand to preserve traditions and expressing the listeners’ sentiments. The stand they took against the record executives in the 1970s established a framework for all country music artists to claim their own artistic freedom.

The struggle faced by the control of the record industry and the battle to overcome it resulted in success by the artists. However, the new battle was with the country radio stations that controlled what aired on the radio. The program directors neglected these artists for playtime.¹⁸ The outlaws answered this struggle with their collaboration and tour with the *Highwayman* album. However, this struggle continued to be an element for future artists on their venture to commercial success. The balance of trying to establish independence from the control of the record industry while achieving success due to limitation of radio airtime continued into the 1990s and beyond with other country music artists.

¹⁶ Gerry Wood, “The CBS Story- Flowing with the Changing currents of Brilliance,” *Billboard.*, vol. 80, no. 31, 1980, w-14.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Jay McDowell, “The Mount Rushmore of Outlaw Country: The Story behind ‘Highwayman’ by the Highwaymen,” *American Songwriter*, March 21, 2024, <https://americansongwriter.com/the-mount-rushmore-of-outlaw-country-the-story-behind-highwayman-by-the-highwaymen/#:~:text=When%20asked%20about%20being%20offered,did%20offer%20me%20a%20part.%E2%80%9D>.

The impact of the outlaw movement continued to spread to other artists beyond many years beyond the outlaw movement. Garth Brooks was a nod to the artistic freedom acquired by the outlaw artists. In the 1990s, Brooks was among other new artists who balanced the need to appease the listeners with the traditions but who also used innovation that transcended genres and reached a wider range of demographics. Brooks took country music to another level with his blend of traditional sound with rock and pop influences in his music. The influence of the outlaw was evident in Brooks' move away from the Nashville sound and his blending genres in his early albums. Although not typically labeled an outlaw, Brooks did push boundaries in the country music genre with his lively performances and music.¹⁹ He had obtained some of the greatest commercial success in the 1990s in country music as was evident in the measuring system used to measure data on popularity of music on multiple platforms. The ability to track more efficiently on the popularity of records provided new insight on the fan base of the country music genre.²⁰ In the 1990s there was a spike in the popularity of country music. Soundscan, introduced in 1991, created a monitoring system recording data on music sales across different formats. Therefore, the popularity created by the outlaw movement in 1970s and even the success in the 1980s had limited representation on the scale applied with this new system that provided more precise data to measure popularity and sales.²¹ This changed how the music charts were compiled. The change in *Billboard* charts resulted from obtaining data from SoundScan that received music data from stores that represented about 85% of the music retail.²² This new,

¹⁹ Don Cusic, *Discovering Country Music*, (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2008), 129.

²⁰ "New Age, World Music Charts Benefit from SoundScan Data. (*Billboard* Magazine's Top New Age Albums and Top World Music Charts)." *Billboard* (Cincinnati, Ohio. 1963) 106, no. 50 (1994): 12.

²¹ Don Cusic, *Discovering Country Music*, 129.

²² "New Age, World Music Charts Benefit from SoundScan Data. (*Billboard* Magazine's Top New Age Albums and Top World Music Charts)." *Billboard* (Cincinnati, Ohio. 1963) 106, no. 50 (1994): 12.

more efficient way to collect data for the charts in *Billboard* magazine aimed to be the most accurate ever for the sales and popularity of music.

The continued advancement of technology in the 1990s provided different ways for the country music stars to reach their fans and to make new fans. In 1992, Garth Brooks aired a special on NBC, highlighting his live performance with a wireless microphone that allowed freedom to move on the stage. This television concert brought the music into the homes of fans nationwide. To have risen to this level Brooks appreciatively credits some rock artists, such as Billy Joel who wrote his famous hit "Shameless," for his success. Brooks also noted other influences within the country music genre, including his admiration for George Strait and Merle Haggard.²³ However, towards the end of this decade, Brooks tried to break away from the cowboy image with the attempt of his album under his alter ego of Chris Gaines. The unsuccessful aspect of this venture showed the fans do not take to major change with musical artists. This attempt to cross over to the pop rock side ultimately was unsuccessful even after the producers and team worked to create this new image. The Chris Gaines persona essentially was a fictitious pop rock version of a rebel persona that achieved success, overcame addiction, and became a version of this artist who had overcome obstacles. This fabricated tale included television shows, including a NBC special and *VHI Behind the Music* detailing this Gaines story.²⁴ The desire to re-invent oneself as an artist must also include connecting to the fans to ensure success of a venture away from the norm. Authenticity matter to fans. Brooks learned this in his venture to create a fictional alter-ego. This rebellious move and the lack of support at the

²³ Mike Hughes, "Rockin' Country: Garth Brooks Lets Loose on Prime-Time Friday Night," *Hattiesburg American*, January 16, 1992, 15.

²⁴ Elina Shatkin, "The Strange Case of Chris Gaines and Garth Brooks." *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 25, no. 3 (2013), 390-391.

height of his popularity provided insight to the connection to the fans for the country music genre when artists deviated too far from the traditions their rebellion was not accepted.

The record industry's move to achieve a more commercialized sound naturally stepped away from some of the traditional elements. In the effort to be profitable, this was a successful move in the Nashville sound produced in the 1960s. The record industry promoted this type of sound that naturally moves away from the traditional sound. However, that move away from traditional sound prompted the outlaw movement. The country music fans and listeners are the ultimate judge as whether to go along with a shift or not. Historically, the fans are acceptant of the change which is evident in the popularity of the Nashville sound still heard in the country music genre today. However, if the music or artist's public opinion deviated outside the comfort zone for the fans, the support declined or, in later years with the advancement of technology, the fans reacted to opinion expressed on different internet platforms or even have record-destroying gatherings.²⁵ This amendable aspect allowed the country music genre to change with society. Haggard discussed how a road sign with the town Muskogee inspired his well-known and controversial song "Okie from Muskogee." The song written in response to the counterculture movement expounded on his feelings that protestors did not appreciate the freedom they had. He stated years after its release, "The funniest thing that's happened over the years is that everybody who was against the song has come over to my side thinking about it. They understand it now."²⁶ This mindset shift showed music can continue to have a cultural effect beyond its release, and listeners can understand the meaning differently as the culture changes. The shift to a more

²⁵ The introduction of social media has provided a direct line of communication between the fans and the music. However, the fans still found ways beyond support of an album to address their opinion of artists' actions. The Dixie Chicks group faced backlash after stating an insult regarding President Bush. A group was noted in Louisiana that crushed the Compact Discs by the Dixie Chicks with a tractor as reported in the newspaper article Argus Hamilton, "The Lighter Side," *Albuquerque Journal*, March 19, 2003, 2.

²⁶ Jimmy Tramel, "Merle Haggard Lived and Interesting Life," *Tulsa World*, April 7, 2016, 30.

patriotic tone in the 1980s reflected the artists' need for the new material to align with the cultural shift. The change in country music may be more delayed for changes in societal norms because of the deep-rooted element in traditions of the past. Through all of the changes, it was the lyrics of the outlaw musicians that provided insight into the culture of the working-class American.²⁷

The outlaw movement arose in the country music genre to push for change to reflect the quickly evolving society. Change continued to occur in the genre when crossover pop phenomenon occurred later in the 1990s for a few female country music stars who created a sound that aligned more closely to the pop sound. Shania Twain and Faith Hill were two of the early country music stars who took the opportunity to cross genres with a more pop sound that moved their records out of the country music genre charts. However, even in the midst of the crossovers, the path forged by the outlaw movement for the artists to push back against their label for artist rights continued. LeAnn Rimes, a young artist, continued the fight for her artist's rights when she filed suit against her label. The contract her parents signed for her 1995 when she was twelve years old required twenty-one albums for Rimes to record and release per the contract. This reflected a much higher number than industry standards, which during the period of the suit averaged around eight albums required for a record deal.²⁸ Rimes stated in the article, "[An] objective of mine was to have a record contract that would be fair both to me and to the record company."²⁹ The continued struggle for an artist remained an issue but the stand the outlaw movement took against the record establishment provided commonality of this fight for individual freedom. This period also provided continued expansion of the genre through the

²⁷ Fox, Aaron A. *Real Country: Music and Language in Working-Class Culture*, (Duke University Press, 2004), 318.

²⁸ Phyllis Stark, "Rimes' Label-Contract Fight Continues," *Billboard.*, vol. 113, no. 7, 2001, 3

²⁹ *Ibid.*

artists' crossover to other genres. The female country music stars of the 1990s, including Faith Hill, Carrie Underwood, and Shania Twain, through their music experienced a crossover phenomenon. Taylor Swift achieved this in 2009 with her hit "You Belong with Me." This continued growth of the country music genre contributed to expanding the demographics. *The Billboard Hot 100s* has become the gauge for crossover hits. This exhibited the close exchange in the growing fan base of country music genre but did not detract from the strong connection to the listeners the outlaw movement had imprinted on the genre. In 2003, the Dixie Chicks learned this lesson of how country music fans will react to statements or opinion of artist. They witnessed backlash occurring from those fans from a statement they made regarding George Bush. The country music fans took offense to the Dixie Chicks' comment.³⁰ Although their music was never considered controversial or even resembled the outlaw image of rebellion, the negative, off-the-cuff comment regarding the sitting President while they were playing a live show enraged the country music audience. Radio stations pulled their music and even hosted parties to destroy their records and concert tickets. The comment made in London at a concert brought the consequence of rejection caused by words said by the Dixie Chicks. The listeners of country music abandoned them.³¹ In 2020, Maren Morris achieved this crossover success with her song "The Bones."³² Morris also realized the unique connection to country music fans and the balance they hold towards controlling a country music star's public opinion. She stated in the *Los Angeles Times* her choice to leave country:

³⁰ In 2020, the Dixie Chicks rebranded themselves as 'The Chicks' due to the term Dixie being associated to the South during the Confederate era. Additional information on the decision behind this change can be found in the NPR article. Anastasia Tsioulcas, "Dixie Chicks Change Band Name to the Chicks," NPR, June 25, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/sections/live-updates-protests-for-racial-justice/2020/06/25/883328370/dixie-chicks-change-band-name-to-the-chicks>.

³¹ Steve Knopper, "An Oral History of the Chicks' Seismic 2003 Controversy from the Industry Execs Who Lived It," *Billboard*, June 15, 2022, <https://www.billboard.com/music/country/chicks-radio-banned-george-bush-oral-history-1235087442/>.

³² Gary Trust, "Good 'Bones': Maren Morris Earns Rare Crossover Success." *Billboard* 132, no. 4 (2020 Feb 15, 1.

It just revealed who people really were and that they were proud to be misogynistic and racist and homophobic and transphobic. All these things were being celebrated, and it was weirdly dovetailing with this hyper-masculine branch of country music. I call it butt rock.³³

It showcased the power of words and how delicate the relationship between the artist is with the listeners.

In 2016 the Country Music Awards hosted Beyonce in a duet with The Chicks.³⁴ This continued evolution and collaboration of musical artists from different genres, not only on awards shows but also on the road, showed the reflection of society and country music and how it evolved to change.³⁵ This collaboration also sparked conflict not only among fans but also among artists at the award show. An article in *The Washington Post* noted the changing sound of country and stated the song “Daddy Lessons” provided a sound evident in the genre for that period noting the song adhered to the current genre-less style of country music by stating:

It begins with a brass band tooting away, the kind you might find at a New Orleans second-line, before slipping into a more countrypolitan singalong a la Dolly Parton. It even contains a hip-hop element called “chopped-and-screwed,” which refers to cutting a song into discordant parts, popularized by DJ Screw in Beyoncé’s home town of Houston. All to say, the song seems genre-less, which is arguably a current trend in country.³⁶

The place of expression and sound of country music continued to be a debated topic with discussion on issues occurring in society in the lyrics and among artists. This dialogue occurred between the artists Maren Morris and Jason Aldean on public opinions regarding gender affirming care for children. This debate became a publicly discussed item that fans chose sides,

³³ Mikael Wood, “Maren Morris Is Getting the Hell out of Country Music: ‘I’ve Said Everything I Can Say,’” *Los Angeles Times*, September 15, 2023, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/music/story/2023-09-15/maren-morris-the-bridge-nashville-country-music-leaving>.

³⁴ The Chicks were formerly called The Dixie Chicks before they changed their name in 2020.

³⁵ Francesca T. Royster. *Black Country Music: Listening for Revolutions*, (University of Texas Press, 2022), 77,

³⁶ Travis M. Andrews, “Think Beyonce ‘doesn’t’ belong at the CMAs? then you don’t know country.” *The Washington Post* accessed June 26, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/11/03/think-beyonce-doesnt-belong-at-the-cmas-you-dont-know-country/>.

and the song “Try That in a Small Town,” exploring some of the debated issues, had a controversial response.³⁷ The continued need to appease the fans aligned with what the outlaw musicians started in the movement in the 1970s by creating this dialogue with the fans. This unique relationship constantly evolves as the culture evolves. The test of what is accepted by the fans historically notes the change in cultural norms in society and happens over time as evident in the country music fans’ representation of the working class. The ability to track the demographic of country music has become more precise in modern age.³⁸ New stars, such as Morgan Wallen, provide a younger demographic. His traditional twang has provided cross over hits into the *Billboard Hot 100*.³⁹ The popularity of this traditional sound has continued with a constant battle within country music to keep tradition while producing hits that are popular among the listeners. However, being popular does not insulate an artist from the wrath of the fans. This was evident in the performance of Kelsea Ballerini in the 2023 at the CMT awards show. She incurred backlash with her inclusion of drags in her performance of “If you Go Down (I’m Goin’ Down Too)”⁴⁰ The fans do listen to the words and react to the performances. That reaction can be a boost to the artist, or it can have a detrimental effect on the popularity of the artist resulting in diminished success.

³⁷ Mikael Wood, “Maren Morris Is Getting the Hell out of Country Music: ‘I’ve Said Everything I Can Say,’” *Los Angeles Times*, September 15, 2023, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/music/story/2023-09-15/maren-morris-the-bridge-nashville-country-music-leaving>.

³⁸ DiMA is a company that tracks streaming statistics for genres. The most recent report available from 2020 includes analysis from streaming services, including Pandora, Apple, Amazon, Spotify and Youtube. The company’s goals is to provide research for artists, record companies, and consumers are represented fairly by the statistical information. In 2020, it listed country music fans as mostly female in its report. Detailed reports can be found on its website <https://dima.org>.

³⁹ “Thanks to Morgan Wallen, Country music’s Popularity has Surged.” *The Economist (Online)*, Sep 01, 2023. <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/thanks-morgan-wallen-country-music-s-popularity/docview/2859727855/se-2>.

⁴⁰ “Kelsea Ballerini Catches Heat for ‘woke’ CMT Awards Performance with Drag Queens,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 3, 2023, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/music/story/2023-04-03/kelsea-ballerini-drag-queens-2023-cmt-awards-drag-race-stars>.

Lyrics still have the power to cause controversy and discussion as was evident in the release of the 2023 Jason Aldean song, “Try This in a Small Town.” This song took a more traditional view on the theme of the rural small town. It received a different reaction not only to the lyrics but also to the visual presentation. One reaction from the listeners was to agree with the lyrics, but the opposing response claimed the music video was racist because the courthouse where the video was filmed had lynching on the premises in the past.⁴¹ This type of reaction revealed the continued relationship with not only the lyrics in country music songs to express a view but also the use of images or events to reflect the political and cultural themes in society during that period. This was unique to the country music genre due to its close ties to the rural South.

The timing of and association with certain country music artists coming on the scene can provide insight on the deep connection the country music fan base has to an artist and how those fans respond to the actions or words of a particular artist. Beyonce, primarily known as a pop and R&B artist, is an artist who pushes boundaries and stereotypes. Beyonce appeared with the Dixie Chicks in 2016 that caused a reaction from country music fans. The majority of the feedback still echoed the distaste of the actions of the Dixie Chicks that occurred all the way back to early 2000s in their making a negative comment towards the then President George W. Bush. One fan stated, “Figures they would pair up. One who has no respect for the American military and another who has no respect for the American law enforcement. Ashamed they would continue to

⁴¹ “The Outrage over Jason Aldean’s ‘try That in a Small Town,’ Explained,” *The Washington Post*, July 26, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/music/2023/07/20/jason-aldean-song-video-pulled-cmt-controversy/>.

be allowed to perform at the CMAs at all.”⁴² Time passed. Yet, the country music fans still held tight to the image and traditional sounds.

The cowboy image is a strong transcending element of the different subgenres of country music. This showcases the continued component of tradition that is still a key part of the country music genre. The country music fan embraces the traditional sounds in different expressions, but the cowboy image theme within the music is a common thread. The authenticity attached to it makes it a sought after traditional element that even expands beyond the country music genre. The use of it outside the musical elements highlights the connected nostalgia to the image within the American tradition. As the years go by, the message evolves and society changes, but the sound and image must hold true to the traditions before backlash from the fans. This is what ties the culture of the listeners and the message together. Country music fans have their opinions on the specific image and how it can change, but somehow opinions remain the same. The reaction of country music fans to the artists and their music is unique to the genre. This unique relationship provides the cultural identity of the American society through the connection to the fans. The image of the cowboy connected to the American mindset has been a part of the country music culture and its relationship with the fans. Because of timing with societal elements and the cultural situation of the fans, the outlaw movement may have not been successful in years prior to its entrance.

This element of authenticity conveys the tradition of country music an aspect that country music artists align themselves. The outlaw artists used elements of the cowboy image and imagery in their music and lyrics within the movement and throughout their careers. Today’s

⁴² “Conservative Country Music Fans Lash out at CMA Performance by Beyoncé and the Dixie Chicks,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 4, 2016, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/music/la-et-ms-conservative-cma-beyonce-dixie-chicks-20161103-htmstory.html>.

country music artists strive to connect to this authentic image of country music to remain valid to the listeners. An example of the continued use of this imagery was used when Beyonce decided to give the country music genre another try. Beyonce, pairing her style with that of her native Texas cowboy attire, projected the image that fit in the country music genre. The collaboration with established country music artists, such as Dolly Parton, promoted a traditional nod on her album. Help with narration from outlaw artist Willie Nelson continued this relationship with identifying with the authentic aspect of the country music genre. Although Willie Nelson, an original outlaw had previously opposed the pop sound, he had become not only a contributor to her album but also supporter of the pop star's country album endeavor. While commercially the album was a success, it did not receive positive commentary from some fans opposing this innovative sound by a pop and rhythm and blue genre artist.⁴³ The anger directed at this album was ironic since there are artists who move from the country music genre to other genres. Faith Hill, Shania Twain, and Taylor Swift were three artists who have enjoyed successful transition of songs in the pop music genre. Their movement between genres did not generate much backlash. Regardless of the motivation for the backlash of Beyonce's move to make a country album, it provided insight into the quick reaction of fans expressing their opinion regarding the traditions in music. The irony is that the outlaw movement arose to preserve tradition and seemed to have permanently left its mark.

Beyonce, in an interview with *The Tennessean*, spoke about the time it took to make the album following the initial attempt to cross over into the country music genre in 2016 with a collaboration with The Chicks on her song "Daddy Lessons" at the County Music Association

⁴³ "Rock this Country." *USA Today* (New York, N.Y.) 146, no. 2868 (2017): 58.

Award show. That attempt received backlash and mixed reviews.⁴⁴ A post on social media shared through the newspaper *The Tennessean* showed a reflection from Beyonce on her move to country music after her 2016 experience she aimed to adhere to the traditions stated:

But, because of that experience, I did a deeper dive into the history of Country music and studied our rich musical archive. The criticisms I faced when I first entered this genre forced me to propel past the limitations that were put on me. Act ii is a result of challenging myself and taking my time to bend and blend genres together to create this body of work.⁴⁵

In 2024, Beyonce attended the Grammy event in a cowboy-style outfit and later that week announced the release of a country album. The first two singles generated success by leading the charts and crowning her the first black female artist to have a number one hit on the *Billboard Hot Country Songs* chart.⁴⁶ The success of her country music singles also proved that if the music and message are packaged with the traditional cowboy image and sounds, the fans' opinions can change. Beyonce's newfound success was an outlaw achievement to combat the stereotypes associated with country music. Fans from other genres can push to the top artists trying the waters of another genre. Her fans followed her to the country music genre. William Nash, Professor of American Studies and Literature, hoped her newfound success would bring awareness to the connection of black musicians' influence on the country music genre and remove the stereotypical whiteness associated with the genre.⁴⁷ Initially, radio stations presented resistance to airing the music on country music stations, but the popularity of the song with some

⁴⁴ Marcus K Dowling and Caché McClay, "All the Reasons It Makes Perfect Sense for Willie Nelson to Narrate a Beyoncé Album," *Nashville Tennessean*, March 29, 2024.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Brooke Kato, "Beyonce's Country Music Spurs Western Style Takeover: 'We're in Our Country Era,'" *New York Post*, February 21, 2024, <https://nypost.com/2024/02/21/lifestyle/beyonces-country-music-spurs-western-style-takeover-were-in-our-country-era/>.

⁴⁷ William Nash, "With Beyoncé's Foray into Country Music, the Genre May Finally Break Free from the Stereotypes That Have Long Dogged It," *The Conversation*, February 22, 2024, <https://theconversation.com/with-beyonces-foray-into-country-music-the-genre-may-finally-break-free-from-the-stereotypes-that-have-long-dogged-it-223831>.

fans demanding air time changed the radio protest against playing the country music by Beyonce.⁴⁸ The reaction to her performance and the difficulty for uncharacteristic artists to break into the genre revealed that there are the stereotypes still surrounding the genre. Beyonce achieved this demand by presenting the cowboy image and including the banjo and fiddle in creating the sound in her country music album release. The reaction made it possible for artists like Beyonce to test the waters and strive to reach the fan base of country music and bring along her fans to the country music genre. The outlaw movement made the impact on fans in the country music genre that has allowed new artists to step into the country music genre. The one thing that fans insist on is the tradition of country music must remain. The fans of country music slowly evolve as societal changes happen creating opportunities for unprecedented lyrics or sounds to emerge. The need to be commercially successful with innovative music and to appease the fans will always be a delicate balance to define. The evolving aspect of country music fans is how they respond to broader social and culture changes with their preferences and reactions to the music's message or image portrayed. Timing in the country music genre has much to do with the success or failure of change.

The outlaw sound and image resurfacing in some artists are stronger than in others. Sturgill Simpson is one example of the continued influence of outlaw style in country music artists who follows the outlaw tradition of storytelling lyrics while maintaining the tradition. However, the power of the record institution of Nashville still welds much control. Simpson obtained a Grammy for his country album but did not receive any nominations from the Country Music Awards.⁴⁹ His music not only portrays the religious element of forgiveness as seen in the

⁴⁸ Emily Schmall, "Beyoncé Fan's Radio Request Reignites Country Music Debate," *The New York Times*, February 14, 2024.

⁴⁹ John Christman, "Cuttin' Grass - VOL. 1 Sturgill Simpson (High Top Mountain Records, 2020)." *U.S. Catholic*, February 2021, 38.

lyrics of the original outlaws but also portrayed the rebellion in lyrics such as, “I thank God for this here life of sin.”⁵⁰ Simpson also produced "Country Squire" by Tyler Childers, an artist's carrying on the outlaw image. This 2012 album echoed with traditional elements of banjo and fiddle along with the emotion evoking lyrics giving outlaw vibes. The bridge between genres is another element the outlaw musicians nurtured with their successes. Willie Nelson collaborates with artists of all genres. His collaboration with Billy Strings in 2023 shows the continued modern-day impact in his long career. Strings utilizes the same elements with combining traditional bluegrass elements with a modern perspective. Strings and Nelson on "California Sober" address social themes including marijuana regulation and his sold-out shows highlight a continued following to traditional sounds.⁵¹ This follows the footsteps of Nelson and the other original outlaws in their efforts to express their artistic freedom while adjusting to the changing society.

Many musicians have struggled with understanding the ownership of music and royalties from record sales and the quickly evolving technology used to distribute the music. The fight against the record establishment did not remain just with the outlaw musicians. Taylor Swift, who started her recording career in Nashville, is presently battling the record executive teams by re-recording her music to take over ownership. This has created its own battle with record executives who are now having new artists sign away rights to re-record music for a set time.⁵² This shows the continued fight of the artists for artistic freedom and ownership. It is a battle that the outlaw musicians did not totally change in the record industry even with the progress they

⁵⁰ John Christman, "Cuttin' Grass - VOL. 1 Sturqill Simpson (High Top Mountain Records, 2020)." *U.S. Catholic*, February 2021, 38.

⁵¹ Melonee Hurt, "Strings offers more than bluegrass to sold out crowd at Bridgestone Arena," *The Tennessean*, February 25, 2004, A2.

⁵² Raisa Bruner, "Why Is Taylor Swift Re-Rerecording Her Old Albums?," *Time*, October 27, 2023, <https://time.com/5949979/why-taylor-swift-is-rerecording-old-albums/>.

made for artistic freedom. This power struggle mimics society as well. The scandals are still present in society. As corruption or greed in leadership continues today, the rebellious behavior to defeat the leaders who benefit from stealing from success of others resonates deeply in American society and is still evident in the music industry when artists as renowned as Swift must fight to retain what is theirs.⁵³

The outlaw movement influenced the entire country music genre with the stand against the record industry and continues to be a beacon of influence for other artists in their fight for artists' independence. The outlaws achieved the ability to have artistic freedom, which created rippling effects throughout the country music industry that led to artists not even labeled outlaws to have more freedom in their artistic choices. The record industry did not relinquish all of its control. This struggle in balancing the record executive's role while achieving artistic freedom continues to challenge new artists trying to establish their name in the industry. Consequently, there remains debates on the role of the executives and even ownership of the material created by artists. However, this ability to produce lyrics that express honesty connected the fans to the artists, resulting in a unique relationship between the country music listener and the genre. This also created a rise in diversity of dialogue in country music that faced balancing the changing society while appeasing the growing diverse demographic of country music listeners.

The defining of the genres that occurred mid-century allowed for blends of backgrounds to influence the different genres. The difference between the genres lies within the listeners who support the music. Country music fans have a deeper connection through the music as a result of

⁵³ Taylor Swift, an artist who started out in the country music genre, has made her own 'outlaw' move to the record company by re-recording albums that she was unable to buy the masters of the music she wrote. Swift along with other artists continue to battle the control of the record industry similar to how the original outlaws. The lyrics of the music continue to resonate with the fans. Additional details on Swift's re-recording can be found in the newspaper article, Maria Sherman, "Speak Now(Taylor's Version)' is here, Here's how to reconsider Taylor Swift transformation album." *Sun Journal*, Saturday, July 8, 2023, C9.

the lyrics telling the story of their circumstances and an expectation for how the artists conduct themselves. However, there are times when the listeners have allowed redemption in situations, such as when Morgan Wallen used a derogatory word. In some cases forgiveness is not that forthcoming from the fans as was evident in the back lash of the Chicks who have not obtained the success achieved in the years prior to the comment that caused outrage from the country music fans.⁵⁴ This happened in 2021 when a video surfaced of Morgan Wallen using a racial word, causing his label to briefly remove him, but the response to this action from the fans resulted in an increase in sales. *Billboard* noted the increase as a response to curiosity of the scandal and also backlash of removing the artist from the radio.⁵⁵ However, this element to forgive a lapse in judgement is common in the outlaw movement and country music culture. This was evident in Cash's and other artists' support and concerts in prisons to reach those with past indiscretions. In an interview, Wallen discussed the ignorance of the word and the regret of the use of it.⁵⁶ Country music musicians must retain a higher standard than other genre musicians due to their connection to the fan base. Conversely, the outlaw artists wrote but also used substances, such as alcohol. Randy Travis faced some negative publicity for his arrest after a public intoxication charge in 2012.⁵⁷ However, his career did not suffer much negative feedback. Travis' situation presented the connection of the fans and their ability to display forgiveness quickly for mistakes similar to his arrest. The varying reactions showed the fluctuating response from the country music fan, depending on the occurrence and verbiage used. This response evolved as society's culture evolved. The expectation to appeal to the ideals of the fan base is

⁵⁴ Randy Adams "Let's Talk about 'The Morgan Wallen Thing,'" *New Music Weekly*, February 9, 2021, <https://newmusicweekly.com/lets-talk-about-the-morgan-wallen-thing/>.

⁵⁵ "Album Sales Surge for Morgan Wallen after Racist Comment," *AP News*, April 30, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/morgan-wallen-album-sales-surge-3641ae1b0ac656e4af6445f226ffc8eb>.

⁵⁶ Meredith Nardino, "Biggest Country Music Controversies through the Years," *Us Weekly*, July 19, 2023, <https://www.usmagazine.com/celebrity-news/pictures/biggest-country-music-controversies-through-the-years/>.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

evident in the reaction towards some artists beyond their music. Society adheres to the desire to follow tradition, but it does eventually include change to weave into the tapestry.

At the turn of the century, country music lost some of the outlaw artists. Waylon Jennings' death in 2002 was the first of the original outlaws.⁵⁸ In 2003, Johnny Cash died. In that year, a song released by Cash had received six nominations for the MTV music awards, including video of the year. It weaved images of him as the Man in Black as not to forget his role as an outlaw musician. Due to his health ailments, he was unable to attend the award show. Justin Timberlake, who received the award in the male music video category, stated in his acceptance speech, "My grandfather raised me on Johnny Cash. I'm from Tennessee and I think he deserves this more than any of us. So, I guess in some cool way I share this award with him. He deserves a round of applause."⁵⁹ The following month in a battle with his failing health in a hospital, Cash took his final breath.⁶⁰ The remaining outlaws continued to release music and even put on shows. In 2014, Merle Haggard did finally join in to collaborate with The Highwayman group for a performance at the Grammys. Blake Shelton also joined in on the performance, continuing the groups' number at four due to Jennings' and Cash's deaths.⁶¹ The continued tradition of past groups and ideology reflected through artists showed the continued theme of tradition as an accepted element even within the modern fan base.

The outlaw movement connected back to the roots of country music. The truths expressed in the lyrics told the story of the working-class American. This also provided an outlet to entrust the artists to provide consolation to changes and mistakes made in their lives. The continued

⁵⁸ David. Browne, "Legacy Waylon Jennings 1937-2002." *Entertainment Weekly*, no. 642 (March) 2002), 44.

⁵⁹ Robert Hilburn. *Johnny Cash: The Life*. Vol. First edition. (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2013), 625.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 627.

⁶¹ Edna Gundersen, "Four 'Grammy Moments' You Won't Want to Miss," *USA Today*, January 25, 2014, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/music/2014/01/23/four-performances-to-watch-for-on-sunday-grammy-awards/4791003/>.

struggle on how to balance the tradition while adapting to new material and societal changes remains a constant battle. However, the progress continues. The popular country music song by Luke Combs “Fast Car,” originally released in 1988 in the pop genre, brought the songwriter Tracy Chapman the coveted Song of the Year award, and she became the first black songwriter to receive that honor at the 2024 Country Music Award.⁶² In 2024, Nelson is still relevant and challenges the norm. Active in the musical field, he recently became the narrator for artist Beyonce, on her newly released album with a country music tone. Nelson continues to challenge limitation enacted by record executives and support artists outside of the Nashville standards.⁶³

The blend of sounds used in the outlaw movement and lyrics developed from the influences of the artists’ lives has continued as an element in the country music genre. There has been a return to revivalist country music in order to continue to maintain the traditions and reflect the societal issues faced. This is evident in the rise of popularity of new artists, such as Oliver Anthony. The breakaway hit “Rich Men North of Richmond,” discussing political issues, is still prevalent in the country music genre. The comparison to the outlaw song, “Take This Job and Shove It,” has been pointed out and the song points out the struggles of taxes and economic strife faced by the working class.⁶⁴ Anthony credits hearing Waylon Jennings on *The Dukes of Hazzard* for inspiring him to pick up the guitar.⁶⁵ At the GOP presidential debate, the song

⁶² Jessica Nicholson, "What Unconventional Wins Taught Us About The Future Of Country Music." *Billboard*, December 9, 2023, 44.

⁶³ Sadie Bell, “Tracy Chapman Wins Song of the Year at the 2023 CMA Awards for ‘Fast Car’: ‘It’s Truly an Honor,’” *People*, November 9, 2023, <https://people.com/tracy-chapman-fast-car-song-of-the-year-luke-combs-2023-cma-awards-8399828>.

⁶⁴ Victor Davis Hanson, "Popular song as populist revolt." *New Criterion*, November 2023, 12+. *Gale In Context: Biography* (accessed June 15, 2024).

https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A771950638/BIC?u=vic_liberty&sid=summon&xid=9a8fb860.

⁶⁵ "The Improbable Rise and Uncertain Future of Oliver Anthony." *Rolling Stone*, December 2023, 26. *Gale In Context: Biography* (accessed June 15, 2024).

https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A778639228/BIC?u=vic_liberty&sid=summon&xid=69f2f800.

received a nod during the Presidential debate in August 2023. The Fox News moderator Martha MacCallum stated:

As we sit here tonight, the number one song on the *Billboard* chart is called ‘Rich Man North of Richmond.’ It is by a singer from Farmville, Virginia named Oliver Anthony. His lyrics speak of alienation, of deep frustration with the state of government and of this country. Washington, D.C. is about 100 miles north of Richmond.⁶⁶

Jason Aldean also has faced backlash and support due to the political elements not only in his songs but also in his statements made at concerts. His popularity and support showed alignment with his political patriotic message. After the success of his song “Try That In a Small Town” becoming a number one hit on the *Billboard 100*, Aldean noted at a concert at a state fair, “You can’t do anything these days without offending somebody.”⁶⁷ The outlaw movement helped propel this conversation with the fans through lyrics years before the introduction of communication elements, such as social media. The music in the midst of the advent of these new platforms for communication is still used to express a sentiment through the lyrics. The reflection of the listeners continues to influence or cancel artists who shift too much.

The outlaw musicians were in accord with the listeners’ viewpoint. However, the artists who challenged the viewpoints of the listeners created backlash. The change and connection of listeners continued to be evident in modern day. The Dixie Chicks, Morgan Wallen, Jason Aldean, and others have garnered a dialogue of either support or dismay. The evolving support while still connected to traditions remains a strong element of the country music genre. The outlaw movement provided this aspect, ironically through the self-interest of artistic freedom yet connected to the audience. The outlaw music movement challenged mainstream conventions and

⁶⁶ First Question of GOP Debates Was about “*Rich Man North of Richmond*,” *Nelson County Times*, August 31, 2023, A6.

⁶⁷ “Jason Aldean addresses ‘Small Town’ controversy at State Fair. (Iowa City Press-Citizen, Jan 01, 2024) A3.

provided a platform for marginalized voices. The outlaw artists connected to the listeners through establishing the struggles and the difficulties of facing adversity. The ability to present genuine emotions and experiences resonated with the listeners.

The outlaw movement created a connection to align honesty and communication between the country music listener and the artist. This unique aspect provided a reflection of the culture within the music. The unpredictable aspect of culture and societal changes is evident in the use of traditional sounds while including the evolution and progression within the message of changing societal norms. The continued struggle of balancing innovative material while adhering to the demands of the country music fans remains. A masked country music artist who conceals his identity and goes by the stage name, Orville Peck, presents a diverse aspect with his being a homosexual music artist. Peck discussed the influence in an interview in 2019 of the outlaw artists stating:

As I got older, I started listening to a lot more of the outlaw classics, like Merle Haggard, Johnny Cash, and Willie Nelson. The first time I heard Johnny Cash was when I picked up the *At Folsom Prison* album at a thrift store, and I just remember thinking that it was the craziest thing I've ever heard. Here was this guy singing about shooting people dead while playing in a prison, and all the inmates were just cheering that on. I thought it was the most badass thing I've ever heard.⁶⁸

In 2024, Peck sang a duet with Nelson on the song, "Cowboys Are Frequently Secretly Fond of Each Other." The song used the traditional cowboy imagery with a message of homosexuality.

Outlaw artist, Willie Nelson recorded the song in 2006, and it debuted at number 52. This became Nelson's highest solo chart since his "Let It Be Me" debuted at 40 in 1982.⁶⁹ The impact

⁶⁸ Stewart Wiseman, "Interview with Orville Peck," Stewart Wiseman, May 7, 2019, <http://stewartwiseman.com/interviews/2019/5/7/interview-with-orville-peck>.

⁶⁹ Silvio Pietroluongo, "Willie's 'secret' spreads quickly." *Billboard*, March 4, 2006, 50. *Gale in Context: Biography* (accessed June 26, 2024). https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A142788271/BIC?u=vic_liberty&sid=summon&xid=2dc636dc.

of the outlaw movement for artists is that country music continues to evolve with society.⁷⁰ The country music fan base helps provide the feedback as the country music genre adjusts to the societal changes.

The nostalgia from traditional sounds and music that resonates with the listener provide an anchor in the culture of the listener of country music. The outlaw movement created a connection that bridged blended sounds by honoring the traditional sounds. Following the artists through their career provided insight into how society's culture molded even these rebellious artists whose intentions were to just make good music and find artistic freedom. Similar to a cowboy, they faced a turbulent changing society that influenced them to make their own path in the music industry. The stand they took ultimately changed the country music genre forever, establishing the need for artists to balance the authenticity and tradition while making new popular music reflecting the changing societal norms. The music artists and the songwriters who continue to write their truths and reflections provide a revelation of the culture. The outlaw movement provided an outlet for the listeners to connect. The impact of the outlaw movement remains a major influence on the country music genre. As the backgrounds of new artists of country music continue to provide diversified elements with a mix of urban and the diminishing rural societies, the lyrics and the culture of the music transform with the artists through their artistic freedom and the support of the fan base. The transformation from generation to generation creates the evolving nature of the lyrical message. The ability to stay true to country music traditions as the culture changes remains. However, the outlaw movement in the effort to obtain artistic freedom created an imprint on the genre. These core outlaw artists provided music with raw honest lyrics and blended elements of traditional country music sounds. This forever connected the country

⁷⁰ Wade Jessen, "One Piece at a Time." *Billboard*, vol. 112, no. 45, 4 Nov. 2000, p. 39.

music fan to the genre providing a unique aspect to understanding the culture of the demographic of the fan base.

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