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**In process date:** 20170901

**Journal Title:** Country boys and redneck women :  
new essays in gender and country music

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**Maxcost:** 20.00IFM

**Volume:** Issue:

**Month/Year:** Pages:

3-25

**Shipping Address:**

Interlibrary Loan Department  
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Birmingham, Alabama 35254  
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**Article Author:** Pecknold, Diane; McCusker,  
Kristine M

**Article Title:** Only need chapter: Why 'ladies love  
country boys': gender, class and economics in  
contemporary country music.

**Fax:** 205-226-4743

**Ariel:** EMAIL:libinter@bsc.edu

**Imprint:** Jackson : University Press of Mississippi,  
2016.

**ILL Number:** 181813325





## Why “Ladies Love Country Boys”: Gender, Class, and Economics in Contemporary Country Music

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“Red-red-red-red-red-red-red-redneck!” The speakers blare that chant as Blake Shelton cruises down the street in his jacked-up, tricked-out, bright red monster truck, unabashedly owning the moniker in the music video for his fourteenth #1 *Billboard* country hit, “Boys ’Round Here,” released in 2013. The boys—significantly, the lyrics use that term instead of men or guys—drink their beer ice cold, chew tobacco, and kick up a little dust on a dirt road. To avoid any risk of genre ambiguity, the video includes a cameo appearance by a pig, a chicken, and a celebrity cow, which gets petted by the crowd on the porch. *This* is country music. More accurately, this is representative of a large swath of mainstream commercial country music that was popular during the half-decade from 2008 to 2013, a product of the Nashville music industry identified by the genre label “country” on radio, on the Internet, and in the minds of millions of devoted fans. And in this musical landscape, the good ol’ boy character, personified in this instance by Blake Shelton, was a pervasive figure, his redneck nature loudly and proudly holding sway over the genre.<sup>1</sup>

Starting around 2008, the good ol’ boy, boastful of his stereotypical redneck persona, invaded and nearly took over country music. Journalists, critics, and fans alike voiced their puzzlement over the trend in many different forums, wondering what it meant. Was it all just drivel, an ultimately shallow fad that undermined the social significance of country music? Or was there something deeper in those songs that revealed the pulse of the country music audience of a particular time and circumstance?

I suggest that the dominant trends in country music, most notably the spate of good ol’ boy songs about trucks and dirt roads were, in fact, part of a larger process of cultural expression, an outcry of sociopolitical and economic commentary from a large, diverse, and heterogeneous country audience. To understand this perspective, we must consider not only the good ol’ boy songs, but also the accompanying dearth of female artists on the top of the charts, the demographics of country’s audiences, and the socioeconomic context in which those audiences found themselves at a particular moment in history. More

specifically, a significant subset of these good ol' boy songs employs a stock narrative—a single story that shows up over and over—that draws on heavily gendered roles and offers a focused point of interpretation for the general trend in country music. Analysis of this narrative reveals how country music culture is intrinsically performed through the identity of working-class masculinity, and how the music expresses a perceived power differential between the country music audience and the mainstream population in recent years.

This essay first explores the pervasive presence of the good ol' boy character in country songs and the resultant musical landscape in which female soloists are almost completely absent from country radio. It then follows the good ol' boy into a common song narrative, identified as the redneck-blue-blood narrative, that brings one particular stock female character into the lyrics through a romance between a good ol' boy and a sophisticated woman. It considers the ways that the narrative metaphorically relates to the performers' expression of identity, their audiences' reception of the music, and ultimately, the listeners' perspectives on their own lives. This narrative is situated in the economic context of a particular time and place—the financial crisis and subsequent recession that emerged in 2008—and shaped by the economic downturn that disproportionately affected the people, both male and female, represented by the good ol' boy character. Through this reading, the songs' deeper meaning emerges as an expressive and defiant response to those circumstances. Finally, a close analysis of Justin Moore's "Bait a Hook" recording and accompanying music video tests the limits of this interpretation but ultimately reinforces it.

### Dirt Roads, Fishin' Songs, and Missing Women

Renowned journalist Chet Flippo commented on the near saturation of country music with the good ol' boy character—and the correlating dearth of women on country radio—in a *Nashville Skyline* essay in 2011, in which he described the state of country music at that time.

Let's look at that recent Top 30 song lineup. It reads like a series of mini-scripts for manly TV commercials about pickup trucks and drinking beer and driving back road dirt streets looking for fishing holes. It's mainly a bunch of songs about boys acting up. It is, in the main, nostalgia for suburban wannabe country boys who have never seen and never will see a dusty back road or a bucolic fishing hole. It's a boys' club, with a race to out-macho the next guy. If you're country, then I'm 10 times as country as you. Oh, yeah? Well, I'll kick your ass.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1.1** A brief sampler of songs that emphasized a male, good ol' boy persona and themes of drinking, fishing, dirt roads, and related topics.

ARTIST	SONG	DATE
Lost Trailers	"Holler Back"	2008
Currington, Billy	"That's How Country Boys Roll"	2009
Moore, Justin	"Backwoods"	2010
Shelton, Blake	"Kiss My Country Ass"	2010
Shelton, Blake, with Trace Adkins	"Hillbilly Bone"	2010
Aldean, Jason	"Dirt Road Anthem"	2011
Atkins, Rodney	"Take a Back Road"	2011
Bryan, Luke	"Country Girl (Shake It for Me)"	2011
Campbell, Craig	"Fish"	2011
Owen, Jake	"Barefoot Blue Jean Night"	2011
Abbott, Josh	"I'll Sing About Mine"	2012
Aldean, Jason, with Luke Bryan and Eric Church	"The Only Way I Know"	2012
Bentley, Dierks	"Tip It On Back"	2012
Bryan, Luke	"Drunk on You"	2012

In the years leading up to Flippo's outburst, country radio was indeed overrun with such songs (see Table 1.1). The topics and images that Flippo enumerated were nothing new to country music—they consist mainly of stock country music references, present in some form or other since the earliest days of the genre. Over the years their usage has risen and fallen in cycles, sometimes nearly disappearing, but only occasionally dominating the genre. Flippo's observations pertained not to the images or topics, but rather to their pervasive presence at the expense of most other themes and topics.

A corollary to this phenomenon, and the observation that first prompted Chet Flippo to write his essay, was the media's apparently sudden realization in 2011 that, for a brief period, there were no female solo artists on the *Billboard* Top 30 country chart. Like so many other characteristics of country music, the near absence of female artists on country radio was, in fact, neither new nor temporary.<sup>3</sup> Flippo ventured an explanation for the gender disparity: "Radio and record labels essentially have little place for women and never have—except as customers. It's not been so long ago that female country artists were called 'girl singers' and were treated as girls, not as women."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, women have never had an equal presence on the country charts as artists, and, as with the

popularity of various themes and topics for songs, the number of women has cycled up and down over the years, the obvious low being none to an occasional high of around 25 percent.<sup>5</sup> These statistics often catch fans off guard because the few female artists who defy those odds—notably Miranda Lambert, Carrie Underwood, and Taylor Swift during the era in question—have an enormous media presence and wield tremendous star power. But the gender disparity is most striking not among the few voices of the superstars, but rather in the ranks of moderately successful singers with a few records and a handful of hits, where the men outpace the women in staggering numbers.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the dominant voice of commercial country music as a whole is unarguably male, and during the half-decade in question, it was even more so than usual.

In spite of the rarity of female singers on the charts, female characters were not absent from the stories told in the songs. One particular female character who appeared regularly in lyrics of the last five years stands out, both for showing up with surprising frequency and for the way she relates in the stories to the male characters: she is a high-class, sophisticated woman who wants to be with the country boy, is the central focus of his fantasies, and is the prize that he hopes to obtain. In what I identify as the redneck-blueblood narrative, a good ol' boy sings about a "lady," a female character who transcends the limitations of class and region, yet who turns to a down-home, grounded, country boy for romantic satisfaction. The narrative underpins songs such as Trace Adkins's "Ladies Love Country Boys," Phil Vassar's "Carlene," and Billy Currington's "Good Directions," to name just a few examples. And at the same time that the dirt-roads-and-fishin' songs dominated the airwaves, this particular narrative, with its set of stock characters, took hold tenaciously in song after song.

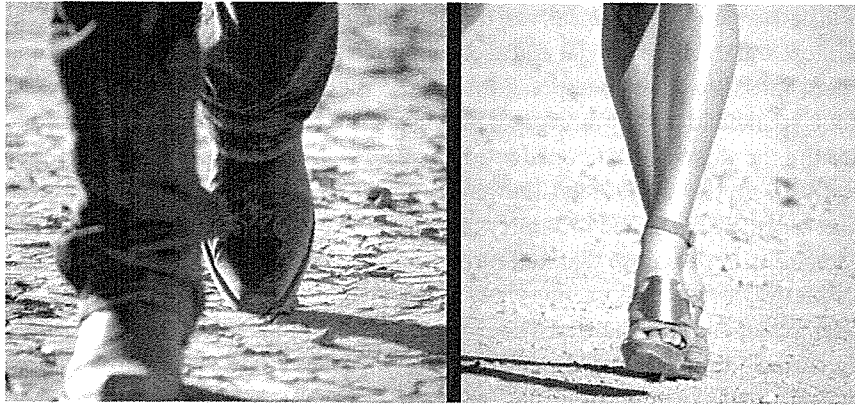
How and why this narrative and these strongly gendered characters took over much of country music from 2008 to 2013 speaks to the meaning of country music in the larger social, economic, and political climate. Issues of class, gender, and race—albeit implicitly in these particular instances—come together in a compelling story in which country music's entire cultural identity is embedded in and expressed through a stereotypically masculine good ol' boy character. In this interpretation, the song narrative in which the sophisticated woman finds satisfaction with the good ol' boy functions as a cultural metaphor for the relationship between society at large—specifically the urban and cosmopolitan world that is noticeably distinct from country music culture—and country music's home base, a predominantly (although not exclusively) middle- and working-class, white, heterosexual, young-to-middle-aged slice of Middle America. In a time of increasing globalization, technological innovation, and an economic context that had pummeled middle- and working-class men disproportionately to the rest of society, this interpretation suggests that the songs have much to tell us about the people with whom they resonate, their fans.

The narrative's relevance was directly related to the immediate historical context and the larger social and economic worldview from which country fans heard those songs. A widespread financial crisis struck in the United States in 2008, sparked in part by mortgage lending practices. It affected financial markets around the globe and ballooned into a recession whose effects lingered for about five years. In the midst of it, a journalist with the British Broadcasting Corporation called me and asked if country music was addressing the "current economic climate," using a phrase that had turned into a cliché almost as soon as the crisis hit. In the subsequent interview, we touched on songs that addressed high unemployment and the transfer of manufacturing jobs beyond national borders—including Ronnie Dunn's "Cost of Livin'" and John Rich's "Shuttin' Detroit Down"—and expanded to include songs with a political endorsement of "Made in America" manufacturing policies. We spoke of other songs that addressed lost work opportunities and the crushing weight of unpaid bills, including the Pistol Anniés' "Housewife's Prayer," Craig Campbell's "Family Man," Justin Moore's "Good Ole American Way," and Dierks Bentley's video for "Tip It On Back." But the question that loomed largest was about the rest of current commercial country music, those very songs that Chet Flippo had been lambasting: were all these fishin' and back roads songs, in the words of so many critics, just "drivel"?<sup>7</sup> The answer, I suggest, is an emphatic no: far from drivel, these songs, most significantly the subset of them that employ the redneck-blueblood narrative, can readily be interpreted as pointed sociopolitical and economic commentary from a large, diverse, and heterogeneous country music community. That interpretation draws together the gender and class elements of the narrative, the performance of the narrative in country culture, and the historical role of both the South and country music culture within the fabric of American society.

### Gender and Class Differentiation: Redneck-Blueblood Love Stories

Not too long ago, I looked down while standing in a mash of bodies in a Raleigh honky-tonk and saw, repeated many times over, dusty, road-worn boots, next to strappy, high-heeled designer sandals. The boots were, in most cases, on the feet of a bona fide country boy (or at least a fan embodying that role in that particular venue), the sandals on the feet of a glamorous and, by appearances, sophisticated woman who projected few, if any, visual markers of country culture, even while standing in its space. They danced together in a duet that spoke volumes: that scene, enacted night after night in honky-tonks and music venues, replicated what was happening during the years in question in song lyrics, music videos, and even the way commercial country stars presented themselves publicly (see Figure 1.1).





**Figure 1.1** Dusty boots and designer sandals worn respectively by Brad Paisley and Carrie Underwood in the music video for “Remind Me” (Deaton-Flanigen Productions, 2011).

These boots and designer sandals extend metaphorically into the gender and class roles in the redneck-blueblood narrative, in which we encounter a romance between a working-class male character and a female character who has obtained a higher social status. Most commonly, the female character is a country girl who has transcended the limitations of her socio-cultural roots, but occasionally she is a “lady” (the term often employed in the song lyrics) from outside country culture who is drawn to it. The narrative involves upward class mobility for women, and yet even while the female characters defy the class-imposed limitations of the stereotypical country identity, they retain a grounded connection to country music and country identity, usually through a relationship with a man. In these songs, the male character—still squarely residing in country music culture—represents in some abstraction the values of truth, reality, authenticity, and an old-fashioned American way, all of which are entangled within his identity. In other words, even as the female characters move up and away, such that they have the chance to inhabit a social space far from country’s roots, they keep coming back to the country and their country boys, the designer sandals in the video for “Remind Me” walking across the parched lake bed of time and space toward those dusty boots. In the songs’ lyrics, the male characters make these women offers such as, “I can see you’re used to champagne, but I’ll buy you a beer,” or, would you like to go “bouncin’ around in a beat-up truck?”<sup>8</sup> The female characters in the song lyrics inevitably answer yes. In search of happiness, the women in these songs drive back to the country in their Mercedes and limousines to find satisfaction or perhaps even true love in the arms of a pickup truck-driving, self-proclaimed good ol’ country boy or redneck.<sup>9</sup>

The theme of choice is significant in these narratives: “country” affiliation is something the woman embraces willingly and actively, not a limiting and

Table 1.2 Material indications of social class in Nic Cowan’s “Wrong Side” (2011)		
	<i>He</i>	<i>She</i>
Drives:	“broke-down” Buick LeSabre	brand-new Mercedes
Travels to:	(nowhere mentioned)	Spain, China
Wears:	Wal-mart V-neck tees	Prada heels
Dines on:	paper plates	fine china
Earned:	a “Ph.D. in Corona”	a straight-A college diploma

disempowering constraint imposed upon her by birth or subsuming her by circumstance. As recounted in various songs, this female character variously wears pearls and designer fashions, has a college education, a PhD or a law degree, drives a luxury or sports car, and has traveled internationally. And yet in the song lyrics, she appears in the performative act of being a country fan: riding shotgun in the pickup truck or staying out late to dance and sing along to Charlie Daniels songs. The narrative thrives both on and off country radio, in commercial hits and in the tangential indie singer-songwriter scene. One particularly striking instance that illustrates the full scope of the narrative comes from Nic Cowan, a singer-songwriter who straddles the roots-rock and country worlds, co-writes with members of the Zac Brown Band, and has opened for them in concert. In “Wrong Side,” he juxtaposes the material manifestations of class in his descriptions of himself—summarized as happily residing in a double-wide trailer in the “bad part of town” and embracing a working-class existence—and his lover, a woman from the better side of the tracks who is magnetically drawn to Cowan (see Table 1.2). He confidently announces that if anyone is looking for the woman, she “keeps on comin’ around,” and “she ain’t never gone too long ’til she ride on back.”<sup>10</sup> There is no small hint of swagger in the telling of the tale.

Another compelling example of this narrative, Trace Adkins’s hit song “Ladies Love Country Boys,” highlights both the gendered differentiation between the characters’ maturity levels and the role of the performer. One of the most significant points of Adkins’s performance is found in the song’s title, which juxtaposes the terms “boys” and “ladies.” Songs employing this narrative frequently invoke the term “boys” to add a devil-may-care, reckless, and youthful element to the male characters, while the female characters are described with a term that indicates adult status and maturity, and simultaneously hints at a slightly archaic or stilted quality. The men have not grown up yet, still residing in a country boy’s playground; the women have worldly insight and wisdom but packaged in a term that suggests aloofness, all of which makes their choice to come back to the country boy even more significant.

Adkins's performance of the song is a key part of the expression of the narrative as well. The song's lyrics are cast in the third person, with Adkins serving as narrator who recounts a tale about two other unnamed people, one of them a "princess [who] falls for some camouflage britches and a southern-boy drawl." The main characters' identities are reinforced by a video that shows a cosmopolitan, suit-wearing attorney flying south and jumping into the arms of a good ol' boy driving a beat-up truck. The complete music video, however, denies the song's characters the most prominent roles in the story: instead, Adkins himself steals the spotlight and relegates the attorney and truck owner to cameo roles. Adkins, sporting a cowboy hat and broken-in but well-shined boots, emerges dramatically from a Chevy truck with a closeup of his boot, a synecdoche for his whole being. He announces in a voice-over that "this is for all you sophisticated ladies out there," then struts down an urban street as eye-candy, singing with a Louisiana twang in his deep, rolling baritone voice. His presence draws a crowd of cosmopolitan women who, upon catching sight of Adkins, drop whatever they are doing, squeal, and chase him.<sup>11</sup> By the time the song is over, Adkins himself has literally become the character in the song, a pied piper country icon trailed by a bevy of cosmopolitan sophisticates.

While the overt invitation to watch and desire Adkins is extended to female viewers (his voice-over comment at the start of the video makes this explicit), male viewers are enticed not only to identify with Adkins but also to admire him. The piecemeal presentation of him via his truck, then boot, with subsequent closeups of his jewelry, ponytail, and hat, mirror the way that photography of female fashion is explicitly designed to appeal to the opposite sex, but even more importantly to the same sex: female viewers gaze at the model and not only desire to be that model but also desire the model.<sup>12</sup> In this instance, Adkins's hypermasculinity and country-boy status appeal to the video's straight male viewers in a way that very subtly invites a similar gaze of desire, even in a culture where anything more overt would be explicitly forbidden by societal norms. In other words, the viewers both project themselves onto Adkins's character in the video and fantasize about him: for the male viewer, this readily takes the form of the suburban country-boy wannabe (to return to the critics' choice of vocabulary) laying claim to being a good ol' boy country hero.

Indeed, the redneck-blueblood narrative relies heavily on masculine, testosterone-fueled performances, where the male voice of the singer fuses with the good ol' boy character of the protagonist and creates the persona with whom the audience obsessively identifies. The country good ol' boy character is elaborated in the lyrics, the performance, and the visual elements and, ultimately, becomes all-consuming of the song itself. Similar instances of this narrative thrive in the performances of a host of male artists, past and present: Conway Twitty's "Tight Fittin' Jeans," Travis Tritt's "Country Club," Billy Currington's "Good Directions,"

Phil Vassar's "Carlene," Ricochet's "Daddy's Money," and Randy Houser's video for "How Country Feels."

Women occasionally chime in with the redneck-blueblood narrative, and have been doing so for decades. In song lyrics, they trade in their satin sheets, diamonds, new Mercedes, and "rich man's gold" for a good night's country loving.<sup>13</sup> These female performances, however, are not as common as those by men, and there are slight differences in the way the story tends to be told when women sing versions of it. In many of the female artists' performances, the lyrics remind the listener explicitly that the women have earned their money and social status through hard work and ambition, even if it is through the so-called oldest profession, as heard in Bobby Gentry's "Fancy," covered to great success by Reba McEntire, or the similarly themed "Hell on Heels" from the Pistol Annies. More common still is the woman expressing disappointment or disillusionment with the high-class lifestyle for its emotional vacancy, as in McEntire's "Little Rock." Running throughout these songs are elements of independence and the theme of choice: women in the songs select from among their options based on their own desires. Despite their differences, in both the male-delivered songs and the female-delivered ones, the basic narrative and its corresponding expression of value for the country lifestyle remain intact. Yet, of particular relevance to our analysis here, female artists' renderings of this narrative have not shown the same sharp rise in occurrence in recent years that male artists' have.

As this discussion has suggested, cultural ownership of the voice heard in these songs is a complicated matter that requires sensitive interpretation and acknowledgment. Although fans readily associate songs with the artists who make them famous, in many instances the songs were written by someone else, sometimes someone with a very different personal profile in terms of gender, politics, and musical interpretation. Nonetheless, a strong connection and easy transfer of identity exists between the performer and the characters in the song's lyrics. Given the nature of contemporary fan culture, a major portion of its audiences perceives a mainstream country hit as coming from the body and voice of the performer, with the songwriter invisible to the audience, even though sources and origins of expression and meaning are never that simple.

The basic story of women transcending class and economic boundaries is also embodied in the stars' careers and public selves within the country genre. For instance, Carrie Underwood, Lady Antebellum's Hillary Scott, Reba McEntire, Faith Hill, and, in the extreme case, Taylor Swift, all personify the narrative: they have achieved success in a pop-crossover world that transcends the limitations of the country genre and establishes them as stars in the bourgeois middle-American pop scene. They appear bedecked in the trappings of elegance and femininity; fame and fortune, respectability, global audiences, and power are in their ready grasp. Consider the relative ease with which country audiences allow

these female stars some measure of crossover success while still accepting them as country singers, a career opportunity for expanded audiences often denied to male performers. Yet from the vantage point of their crossover careers, these female stars proudly assert their country identity, proclaiming, as Taylor Swift did on stage at the Video Music Awards show in 2009, "I sing country music!" And to come home to "the country," they sing a homecoming narrative. In songs such as Carrie Underwood's "I Ain't in Checotah Anymore," Lady Antebellum's "American Honey," or Faith Hill's "Mississippi Girl," the singer chooses to return to the metaphoric country and declares a musical rootedness in the genre, its lifestyle, and the identity associated with it.

### The Roots of the Story

The fundamental conflict in this narrative originates with an individual who crosses boundaries of social status for purposes of romance, an act of social transgression at the heart of well-known stories and ballads for literally thousands of years. In his provocative book *Country: The Biggest Music in America*, author Nick Tosches traces the roots of the storyline (albeit not identified as such) all the way to Plato's fourth-century BCE account of Orpheus attempting to rescue his wife.<sup>14</sup> While the lines of connection that far back get a little thin, Tosches finds a more compelling instance of this narrative in centuries-old Celtic myths, and even stronger ties to a seventeenth-century ballad with strong echoes of the myths, in which a noble woman runs away with a gypsy. That ballad, published in 1737 as "Johnny Faa, the Gypsie Laddie," contained the fundamental elements of the narrative: an upper-class woman crosses lines of class and social propriety because she desires a man whose societal role is marginalized. In its musical and literary context, the tale evolved under several different names including "The Gypsy Laddie," "The Raggle, Taggle Gypsies," and the title known best in country music circles, "Black Jack Davy [David]," which Cliff Carlisle and the Carter Family recorded in 1939 and 1940 respectively. Whether one traces this redneck-blueblood narrative back only to the early decades of country recordings, to the ballads of a few centuries ago, or to the myths and legends of a few millennia ago, the conclusions reinforce the old adage that there are only a handful of basic plots in stories of human relationships, and there are not really any new ballads, only reworkings of older ones.

Country fans know well that songs about romance across lines of social class were common fare in the early decades of the recorded genre, such as the Carter Family's recording of "My Heart's Tonight in Texas" (1934) or Hank Williams's "A Mansion on the Hill" (1948), to name just two by major stars. But while the general presence of the narrative is readily traced back hundreds of years in the

ballad tradition and to the earliest days of commercial country music in recordings, there are significant differences in the way this narrative has been deployed in the era of Trace Adkins, Blake Shelton, and Nic Cowan that make this trend unique. One of the most notable differences is the connection drawn between the audience's identity, the performer's identity, and the male character. In "Black Jack Davy" the lady is seduced by a gypsy, but in the context of the ballad's folk performances and early country recordings derived from that tale, neither the performer of the ballad nor the listeners generally considered themselves gypsies. Similarly, when the Carter Family did the tune as "Black Jack David," their version failed to identify the character as a gypsy and instead painted him as an adventurer, or perhaps scalawag and scoundrel, who promises the lady a life of plenty ("you shall never want for money," he declares) but can deliver only cold, hard ground for a bed. As appealing as the tale and recording are, its text is set in the third person so that the audience is not readily encouraged to project themselves or the singer into that character.

The second notable difference in those early recordings and traditional ballads is a pervasive tone of doom: the "rich man's daughter" in "My Heart's Tonight in Texas" regretfully and miserably marries the British earl her father has chosen, rather than escape with her beloved Texan lad, and Hank Williams pines away alone in his cabin, longing for the woman who chose a rich but loveless life in her mansion instead of him. In the same vein, plenty of versions of "Black Jack Davy" end with the lady's husband taking revenge on the lady, her lover, and often the rest of the band of gypsies in a dark and tragic ending. In contrast, renditions of the redneck-blueblood narrative from the 1960s onward, most especially the more recent ones under consideration here, are generally upbeat, self-congratulatory, and positive in their accounts of the outcomes of romance across lines of wealth and class. Thus, while the roots of this narrative run far into the past, its contemporary deployments are distinct.

### Fixed Gender Roles: Redneck Women and Redneck Men

In this exploration of strongly gendered characters in the redneck-blueblood narrative, one might readily wonder if the genders are interchangeable within the narrative. In other words, can an upper-class male character return to a working-class, country-identified female character to find grounded satisfaction in rural values and romance? This version of the narrative shows up in countless tales, ballads, and film versions, such as Hollywood's *Pretty Woman* (1990), for instance. But these tales of working-class girls instead of boys and high-society men instead of women generally do not resonate with their audiences as "country" in their genre associations, and the conclusions generally

depict the female character rising into the male character's social space, not the reverse. By contrast, tales that follow the gendered characterizations of the redneck-blueblood narrative, such as the movie *Sweet Home Alabama* (2002), thrive as part of the larger country genre within pop culture.<sup>15</sup>

The time period in question also yielded a renewed interest in a female character within country music who is, on the surface, antithetical to this storyline: the so-called redneck woman. In 2004 Gretchen Wilson ushered a working-class, gutsy, outspoken female character back into the spotlight of country music with a smash single, "Redneck Woman."<sup>16</sup> Wilson brought the character to life through her own public persona, portraying the homegrown, backwoods, boots-wearing, God-fearing country girl who seemed resolutely proud of her limited formal education and outlook on life. That same female character later took up residence in country music as the focus of songs such as Jason Aldean's "She's Country" (2008). Miranda Lambert built her career on a gun-toting, cigarette-smoking redneck woman heroine, and other artists have adopted her in their songs as well; critics raved about Kellie Pickler's hard-country leanings on her third album, *100 Proof* (2012), for instance.

The relationship between this redneck woman character and the blueblood cosmopolitan character (even if she rose from original country roots) in our narrative is complex, but ultimately reinforces the larger meaning of country music within popular culture. As scholar Nadine Hubbs has convincingly shown, the character of the redneck woman crosses gender lines and appropriates aspects of masculinity in order to reject the norms of middle-class femininity.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the redneck woman employs traits generally known as "country boy" to define her own brand of working-class femininity. Gretchen Wilson's sexiness, for instance, is projected by her mud-splattered jeans and tank tops as she sits astride her four-wheeler. In other words, she is perceived as sexy precisely because she is one of the guys, and being one of the guys makes her an intrinsic part of country music culture, which is so heavily centered on expressions of working-class masculinity.

Songs about the redneck woman are plentiful, and have become more prevalent in recent years. One striking instance is Miranda Lambert's recording of "Mama's Broken Heart" (2012), in which the singer not only refuses to adhere to the guidelines for proper ladylike decorum but flaunts her "bad" behavior, as measured by the norms of middle-class, mid-twentieth-century femininity articulated through the voice of her mama. By refusing to act like a conventional "lady," Lambert's character implicitly becomes the redneck woman, rejecting mainstream femininity in the process. The element of social class is explicitly raised when Lambert contrasts her response to a broken heart with the Kennedys' "Camelot," leaving Lambert as the hard-drinking, revenge-seeking,

rough-around-the-edges, working-class redneck character against the foil of so-called American royalty.

Within the country world, the redneck woman is a comfortable co-inhabitant with the good ol' boy in a very real and unchallenged way: in song lyrics and in real life, country boys love this woman, marry her, cheat on her, grow old with her, and sometimes even get shot by her, particularly in Miranda Lambert's songs. But, throughout it all, they fantasize and brag about her more sophisticated, cosmopolitan, pearl-wearing cousin who has gone uptown, so to speak. As desirable as that sophisticate may be, even she cannot pull listeners' focus from the male character who, in these contexts, represents the whole of country music culture.

Thus, at the heart of contemporary instances of the redneck-blueblood narrative, we find not the female character, who is in motion across space, class, and genre, but rather the male character, fixed in space and time, who is grounded in the white, Southern masculinity of the country boy, the subject of much recent scholarship.<sup>18</sup> This country boy has a "boys will be boys" attitude toward misbehavior. He is often a patriotic redneck who, in the words of scholar Trent Watts, is "contemptuous of restraint or outside interference."<sup>19</sup> He expresses a working-class identity whether or not it reflects his own socioeconomic position—what scholars and journalists have inelegantly termed the "blue-collar wannabe" who accounts for the large swaths of the country music audience who are themselves educated and employed above the stereotypical constraints of a country identity, yet with whom that identity still resonates powerfully. And he asserts the historically cultivated and culturally sanctioned importance of his manhood and contribution to society at large. He is an iconic figure deserving of admiration and inspiring primal desire within country culture, manifest in the sweaty, rock-hard muscles that are the product of manual labor and celebrated in songs such as Sara Evans's "Coalmine" or Rodney Atkins's "Farmer's Daughter." And during the key years on which we are focusing, he was dominating the musical landscape in his boots and truck and dirt road tales.

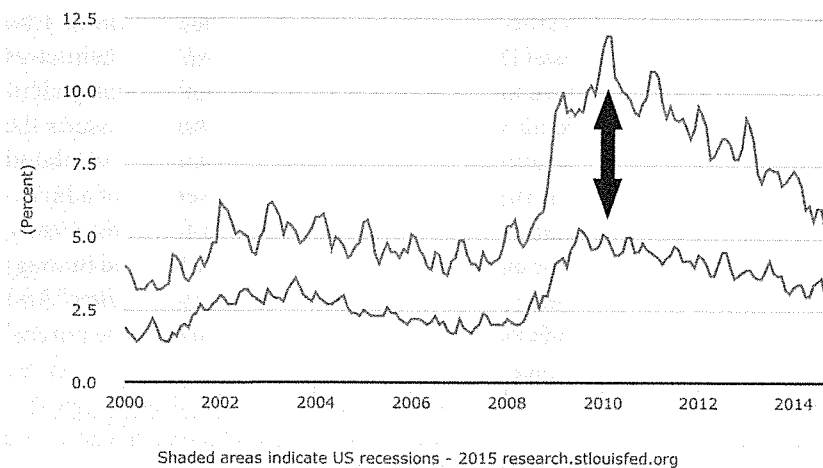
### Take What Job and Shove It?

In the wake of the economic crisis that reared its head in 2008, widespread blame for the situation fell on the shoulders of businesspeople and the corporate and financial infrastructures that represent the antithesis of country identity. Political campaign soundbites wore out the comparison between "Wall Street" as bad and "Main Street," which evoked small-town associations that rang with country elements, as good. The language of the problems—derivatives, sub-prime mortgages,





**Figure 1.2** Comparison of men's (top line) and women's (bottom line) unemployment rates 2000–2014. Data sets used are LNS14000025 and LNS14000026.



**Figure 1.3** Comparison of unemployment for high-school educated (top line) and college-educated (bottom line) people over the age of 25, 2000–2014; notice that the gap between these two unemployment rates essentially doubled during the time-period in question (as indicated by the vertical arrow). Data sets used are LNU04027660 and LNU04027662.

and credit-default swaps—suggested layers of abstraction and obfuscation that contrasted radically with the themes of transparency and simplicity underlying working with one's hands for hourly wages, roots, home, land, and fishing. But beyond rhetoric and association, the consequences of the recession and ongoing economic woes fell disproportionately on working-class men, a blow that appeared to devalue and even discard much of the central identity of the Southern, white working man within the broader mainstream American culture.

The statistics on employment, labor, and earnings confirmed that the stereotypical male character in the spate of good ol' boy country songs was in dire straits. His role in the economic and social fabric had shrunk dramatically. The Bureau of Labor Statistics data confirms that during the five years in question, the unemployment gap between men and women rose to the highest level it had ever reached in the post-World War II era, as jobs in sectors such as construction, with a male-dominated work force, disappeared in higher numbers than jobs in female-dominated sectors, including nursing and teaching (see Fig. 1.2).<sup>20</sup> To compound that, approximately 69 percent of the adult country music audience does not hold a four-year degree, and the economic situation for this group was even more grim (see Fig. 1.3).<sup>21</sup> Unemployment hit the country fan base personally: consider that in 2009, 20 percent of the country radio audience reported that they or someone in their household had lost a job.<sup>22</sup> In other words, the real-life counterparts to the male, working-class good ol' boys in the songs suffered tremendous economic and cultural setbacks during those years. The character celebrated so widely in the popular country music of that time period, in actuality, lacked competitive economic opportunities, had been emasculated, and was stuck, stagnant, in a global economic flow that largely passed him by.

This context situates dirt-road, truck-driving songs and the good ol' boys in their narratives as defenders of a new type of Lost Cause, to borrow a term from southern history.<sup>23</sup> Here, however, the lost cause is the character, lifestyle, and economic models on which southern white male working-class identity has long relied. The male character so celebrated in the country narrative—the working-class, high school graduate good ol' boy who eschewed cosmopolitan education and trumpeted the wage-labor job that he can “shove,” come five o'clock—is simply out of luck. And the situation is heavily gendered, in and beyond country culture. The male character in these songs cannot compete for the same job that the upwardly mobile female character in the same narrative can, courtesy of her “straight-A” college education, “law degree,” and international experience, an even more telling situation when current statistics show that women with a college degree outnumber men by 1.6 million and earn a growing majority of new degrees.<sup>24</sup> Given the full scope of the situation, it is little wonder that country music would have something to say about the matter.

## The Meaning of the Narrative

In this context, the redneck-blueblood narrative provided through its storyline, in words that are a hundred and fifty years old, “vindication of [the country boy’s] manhood” at the very time when such vindication was desperately needed.<sup>25</sup> In the song lyrics, the high-society female character’s choice of this male character is a metaphoric endorsement of his fundamental value: he ends up with the girl who has been freed from any class moorings and, presumably, has her choice of any man, in any situation, anywhere. That she still wants to be ridin’ around in his beat-up, country pickup truck is the equivalent, in a musical narrative’s form, of a locker-room high-five and swagger: he still matters, and he still has “it,” whatever “it” may be.

In the wake of the economic downturn and its subsequent impact on working-class men, the perspectives vaunted in these good ol’ boy songs, especially by the sophisticated woman’s endorsement, assert that the country boy lifestyle and, by extension, identity was inherently superior to the uptown banker’s lifestyle, and they simultaneously reinforced, validated, and celebrated a working-class identity when the corresponding real-life persona was confronting self-doubt and resentment over unemployment, loss of opportunities, and the inability to provide for his family in a way that has long been tied to the core of white, southern masculinity. It was also a defensive retrenchment into a position that desperately reminded everyone how fun it is to be a good ol’ boy. But however big the trucks, dusty the roads, and defiant the country boys, it was ultimately a weakly anodyne message in the face of the economic realities.

The interpretation of this narrative goes further, however, in that the male characters in the songs do not merely represent the men in the core country fan base. Southern white identity in general has long been presented through a masculinized lens, as suggested by the gendered exploration of the redneck woman character above. This perspective has long historical roots, notably covered by journalists and scholars in the 1970s when, as circa 2008, the working-class male character faced increasing irrelevance within American popular culture as a result of the confluence of increasing women’s employment, technological advances that eliminated some need for traditional skilled and manual labor, and increasing globalization that decentralized and denationalized the workforce. It was also a decade in which the South as a region piqued the interest of the nation as a conflicted site of apparently boundless potential, hampered by the burdens and weight of its past. And gendered interpretations of the South as masculine were never far below the surface of the discourse. In the 1970s, authors Peter Applebome and Jack Temple Kirby wrote at length about the rise of the South, but with a tone that scholar Alex Macaulay surmised ought to have a “gender distinction as well, since the numerous tributes to Southern culture

promoted a decidedly masculine version of the region’s supposedly glorious present.”<sup>26</sup> In 1976 *New York Times* columnist Roy Reed wrote that the “Southern countryside and small towns and even the suburbs and good-ole-boys preserves that sit in the very shadows of the Southern Skyscrapers are inhabited and given their dominant tone by men—and women who acquiesce in this matter.”<sup>27</sup> If we map southern culture onto country music culture, a correspondence that is not without exceptions but that is nonetheless defensible, we arrive at a perspective in which country music’s core base and cultural identity is metaphorically embodied by the male good ol’ boy character in the songs.

Within this interpretation, the redneck-blueblood narrative takes on even greater significance. One reason why male voices literally dominate country music is that the identity of country culture is, for the most part, intrinsically performed as masculine, a situation that holds true in terms of country music artists and in terms of the characters and narratives in the songs. In the narrative we are examining, the male character signifies the southern, white working-class fan base confronting the larger socioeconomic question of whether mainstream society values them, and the female character signifies the gaze of mainstream culture from the perspective of the country audience.<sup>28</sup> The songs become self-affirmations of the worth of country culture, the narratives claiming that obviously the sophisticated, globally connected world returns to the country as a site of value. This interpretation flows easily in country music culture, where the genre has, since its earliest days, been defined in opposition to mainstream culture, sometimes mocked and always “othered” for its distinguishing features. And when the core country audience was facing a forecast of terrible socioeconomic realities, the redneck-blueblood narrative’s pervasive popularity should come as no surprise.

## Counterperspectives

In spite of the airwaves’ saturation with male-dominated songs trumpeting the values of trucks, fishin’, and good ol’ country life, a few voices—largely female—emerged to challenge this nostalgic retrenchment of small-town country life that not only celebrates but mythologizes it. The bleak realities of opportunity and economics faced by a large segment of the country audience surface in those songs as a subversive counterpoint to the dominant sound of country music, and speak instead of the trapped stagnation of small-town America, where the buses no longer even bother to stop, and one stoplight blinks on and off in a monotony that suggests no one is going anywhere. Kacey Musgraves’s recording “Merry Go ’Round” (2012) sparked commentary from the mainstream media with just such a perspective: her lyrics offer a scathing and abject condemnation

of life in a small town devoid of dreams or a future, a stark rebuttal to the mostly male songs trying to out-country each other.

Yet, as with most country narratives, neither this theme nor its role in tension with other prominent themes is new. Two decades before Musgraves's song, Garth Brooks's eponymous debut album included the track "Nobody Gets Off in This Town" (1989), which lamented the complete dearth of opportunities—even for a cold beer—in this "square old merry-go-round" where the "cars and their dreams are starting to rust," the similarity in both rhetoric and images to Musgraves's song readily apparent. In 1965 Roger Miller sang, "If you ever want to get depressed, just come to this town," declaring "I'm bound to catch the next Greyhound leaving" in his song "This Town," a matter-of-fact condemnation of the bleak future for anyone stuck in small-town USA. In other words, throughout the history of country music, a counterperspective has persisted, challenging the usually laudatory characterization of a stereotypical country existence.

These songs, most relevantly the current crop headed by Kacey Musgraves, reveal a vulnerability in the usually impenetrable façade of country-boy confidence, but also represent an essential tension that helps define the genre. In the same 1976 article in which he articulated the masculine characterization of the white, working-class South, Roy Reed wrote: "The main [tension] that binds and afflicts the Southern mind is the tension found so often in the writing of the region—*roots versus possibility*. It is in large part the old story of home against the world. But in the Southerner it seems to roil deeper, maybe because the Southerner has both deep roots and a deep temptation to escape."<sup>29</sup> As global conditions threaten those roots, the country music instinct to defend home and burrow in manifests, as Chet Flipppo wrote, in "mini-scripts for manly TV commercials about pickup trucks and drinking beer and driving back road dirt streets looking for fishing holes," while a few countering voices scream for the possibilities those roots deny.

### Testing the Theory: Does the Country Boy Win?

Justin Moore's recording "Bait a Hook" (2011), which Moore co-wrote with Rhett Akins and Jeremy Stover, offers a deployment of the redneck-blueblood narrative that deserves a final close reading within this analysis. In the lyrics, Moore portrays a good ol' boy country singer whose attractive, well-dressed woman has taken up with some other guy. Moore sings the song as a second-person address to the woman, clearly positioning himself as both singer and protagonist directly involved in the action. In spite of the fact that the woman has left him, he sounds boldly self-confident. In the song's lyrics, Moore throws down a list of traits that, in the context of a country song, surely affirm the superiority

of the singer's country manhood and desirability over the alternatives. He is not about to worry, he sings, because his nemesis can't bait a hook, skin a buck, drive a truck, make out in a hay field, treat his mama right, drink, or sing a decent country song—a litany of country bona fides. The other guy's vulnerable points include his choice of a Toyota Prius for transportation, his taste for sushi, and—if one includes the music video as well as the lyrics in the analysis—his tailored suits and a lifestyle that apparently involves formal conferences, cocktail parties, and well-manicured hands. The tone of the video and song imply that no woman could possibly prefer *that* to the country charm of Justin Moore with his hat and well-worn boots, his fishin' boat, his worn-out ball cap, his guitar, and his ability to sing a decent country song.

The expectations of a country listener who is well-versed in country traditions are that Justin Moore—the personification of an authentic country boy—will unquestionably triumph in the end over any man so thoroughly lacking in the core country identity. Yet, in an instance that threatens to dismantle the long-standing narrative in which the country boy wins the sophisticated woman, the song concludes with the woman still in the arms of the other guy. The charming country singer is found lacking by the woman, his defiant confidence appears unjustified, and he sits hugging his dog, bruised by the rejection, and sullenly nursing his wounded pride while muttering about the woman's "Gucci shoes" (as the symbolic importance of designer sandals resurfaces). For a moment, this conclusion appears to reveal a vulnerable underbelly to the country boy's southern brand of masculinity, a thread by which the whole narrative begins to unravel.

The music video complicates the story, however. Just as viewers start to sense the appeal of the other guy, the video begins to contradict the lyrics: although viewers have not yet gotten a good look at the other guy, in the video, he takes the woman for a ride in his car, and it feels powerful and exciting.<sup>30</sup> Astute viewers—in this case, those who are quick to recognize cars by brand and model—immediately recognize that the car is not a foreign hybrid-electric hatchback but rather a Ford Mustang, suggesting more all-American masculinity and a hint of good ol' boy character.

The twist in the story occurs a few seconds later with a revelation that simultaneously validates the full superiority of country identity, affirms the integrity of the underlying narrative, and rewards the viewer who is a fully vested cultural insider.<sup>31</sup> Moore's nemesis appears in a full-face shot, and is none other than Carl Edwards, a Missouri native, NASCAR superstar, driver of the #99 Fastenall car, with country bona fides in spades. Indeed, within contemporary country culture, the one career that trumps country music singers at their own identity politics and authenticity games is arguably NASCAR. With Edwards's identity revealed, the video falls in line with the traditional narrative in which the biggest, most famous good ol' country boy gets the woman after all.



Of course, the full impact of Edwards's presence in the video would only be recognized by a viewer familiar with NASCAR in the first place; in other words, the full content of the message can only be understood by cultural insiders. To the outsider who either skips the video or does not recognize Edwards, Moore's country boy appears to lose, but the insider, savvy to the cultural references that form a code of communication within the country community, knows better.

The last few minutes of the video show Edwards catching a bigger fish and driving a much bigger truck than Moore; country pride appears fully vindicated. As a coda to this analysis, consider that I could not locate any published credits revealing the name of the female, brunette actor, wearer of the high-heeled shoes, who portrayed the woman in the video. As the woman in the story, her public anonymity is strong punctuation for this analysis of the country narrative, which is—and has always been—about the male characters' self-reflection and projected value and the assertion of country culture's social status within mainstream America.

### Country Entertainment

To conclude, let us return for a moment to Blake Shelton and the celebrity cow in his video for "Boys 'Round Here." I watched the video with a writer and editor of impeccable academic pedigree who is not a country fan. "Really? You've got to be kidding!" she exclaimed. "People take this stuff seriously?" I watched it with a high-ranking marketing executive, also not a country fan, who was utterly dismayed to see Blake Shelton in that context. "But he's a mainstream star," the executive countered, "on the television show *The Voice* and everything! Singing about being a redneck?"

The deployment of stereotypes, stock characters (including the cow!), and archetypal narratives in this video and similar ones happens in a liminal space, with the video hinting at but narrowly avoiding parody, while at the same time occasionally allowing just enough of a crack in the presentation's façade to acknowledge—and play with—the constructed nature of the image. "This is Hollywood for you," Blake confessed in a behind-the-scenes video for fan club members only, "Because we're actually, uh, *not* in Tishomingo, Oklahoma, which is where I pictured the boys that are in 'The Boys 'Round Here.' We are at the famous Walt Disney Ranch."<sup>32</sup> Walt Disney and Hollywood sets, directors, stylists, and celebrity animal cameos are all the ingredients of fictional worlds of fantasy and escape, fully in tension with the rhetoric of authenticity and working-class reality that form the bedrock foundation for the country genre. That cognitive dissonance opens up the possibilities for meaning that have been

explored in this essay, where country music is simultaneously a projected reality and an escapist fantasy for its audiences.

Country music's role as popular entertainment informs how we can interpret the redneck-blueblood narrative and the masculine posturing that characterize these performances. As art and entertainment, these songs and videos amplify and exaggerate aspects of the audience's world and the artist's perspective. If Blake Shelton is sincere in how he relates to his fans, as all indicators suggest he is, then his video renders themes, ideas, and images that matter legitimately to his fans. But Shelton's own expression of self-awareness hints that, for both him and his audience, this is predominantly entertainment, as he toys with images and concepts with an ironic layer of artifice and a tone that implies both artistry at work (the juxtaposition of the Pistol Annies' riverside footage in the video, dressed in vintage wear) and cultural criticism, laced with humor and darkened by brazen racial cultural appropriations.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the stock characters and their gendered natures, along with the recurring narratives, invite metaphoric interpretations and further probing for what they can tell us about country music's meaning at the intersection of class, gender, and race. The "boys" depicted in Shelton's song, who are the main characters in that collection of dirt-roads-trucks-and-fishin' songs from around 2008–2013 and who caught the attention of so many critics, have much to tell us about the concerns, fears, pride, and self-perceptions of the core country fan base. Far from drivel, these songs invite listeners into a tightly knit and long-standing discourse about the otherness of country music and its place in contemporary society, just as a good ol' boy seduces the mainstream sophisticate, feminine-gendered "pop world."

Blake Shelton drops a quote in the middle of his song, weaving together the ultimate declaration of resilience and a reference to Hank Williams Jr., which in turn invokes implicit engagement with Hank Sr. and thereby the full pedigree of country music. Four short words sum up the genre's identity, the character's masculinity, his relative youth, his assured confidence, and his defiance of any outside threat: "Country boy can survive!" Is the declaration a manifesto? Or just pure musical entertainment drawing on exaggerated stereotypes and invoking a legendary star? The answer, of course, is both. After all, this is country music, where walking the line between sincerity and parody is all in a day's work.

### Notes

1. This essay's primary focus is an analysis of gender and meaning, but the video for "Boys 'Round Here" engages in an appropriation of hip hop culture in a way that demands we also acknowledge the inherently racially charged power dynamics represented in the video, from the opening footage where Blake Shelton's huge truck dominates over the car driven by African



American actors portraying hip hop stars, to the lyrics that dismiss certain hip hop-derived dance moves even while the footage shows actors doing those same moves. A full analysis of the song's problematic racial engagement—which is part of a larger trend toward hip hop appropriations in commercial country music—is beyond the scope of this article, but readers and viewers are invited to contemplate it.

2. Chet Flippo, "If Miranda Lambert Can Make It, Why Can't You?: Country Music's Dirty Little Secret About Women," *Nashville Skyline*, August 4, 2011; [www.cmt.com/news/nashville-skyline/1668497/nashville-skyline-if-miranda-lambert-can-make-it-why-cant-you.jhtml](http://www.cmt.com/news/nashville-skyline/1668497/nashville-skyline-if-miranda-lambert-can-make-it-why-cant-you.jhtml), accessed November 5, 2013.

3. To add to this context, on *Billboard's* Hot Country Songs list for September 21, 2013, the only female artists to appear in the top 20 were the Pistol Annies, featured guests on Blake Shelton's "Boys 'Round Here," at #20; in other words, no female solo artists or groups appeared in the top 20, and no female artists at all were in the top 19.

4. Chet Flippo, "If Miranda Lambert Can Make It, Why Can't You?"

5. This is discussed in more detail and context in Jocelyn R. Neal, *Country Music: A Cultural and Stylistic History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 472.

6. For the era in question, Reba McEntire and the mixed-gender group Lady Antebellum also had a significant presence on the charts.

7. See <http://countrymusicreview.net/tag/luke-bryan/> for one example. The term "drivel" shows up with almost reckless abandon in Internet reviews of contemporary country music.

8. Lyrics sung by Conway Twitty in "Tight Fittin' Jeans" (1981), by Michael Huffman, and Travis Tritt in "Country Club" (1989), by Catesby Jones and Dennis Lord.

9. Nic Cowan cites a Mercedes in "Wrong Side" (2011), by Cowan, and Tritt mentions a limousine in "Country Club." Reba McEntire also mentions a Mercedes in "Little Rock" (1986), by Pat McManus, Bob DiPiero, and Gerry House, an instance of this narrative sung by a woman as discussed below.

10. Nic Cowan, "Wrong Side," *Hard Headed* (Southern Ground Artists, released on iTunes and Amazon as MP3 downloads, 2011).

11. Trace Adkins, "Ladies Love Country Boys" (2006), written by Jamey Johnson, George Teren, and Rivers Rutherford; music video directed by Michael Salomon.

12. This concept is presented in Diane Fuss, "Fashion and the Homospectatorial Look," in *Critical Inquiry* 18:4 (Summer 1992): 713–37.

13. Jeanne Pruett, "Satin Sheets"; Reba McEntire, "Little Rock"; and Patsy Cline, "A Poor Man's Roses (Or a Rich Man's Gold)."

14. Tosches's book, originally published in 1977 by Stein and Day (New York), has been issued and reissued under three different titles, including *Country: Living Legends and Dying Metaphors in America's Biggest Music* and *Country: The Twisted Roots of Rock and Roll*. Chapter 2, "Orpheus, Gypsies, and Redneck Rock 'n' Roll," is an extended discussion of the roots of the "Black Jack Davy" ballad, which contains the essence of the redneck-blueblood narrative.

15. *Hope Floats* (1998) similarly works along this narrative's lines; it is worth noting that the movie's theme song was a recording by country megastar Garth Brooks.

16. Co-written by Wilson and John Rich.

17. Hubbs's analysis appears in "Redneck Woman' and the Gendered Poetics of Class Rebellion," *Southern Cultures* 17:4 (Winter 2011): 44–70, reprinted in this book.

18. See, in particular, *Black and White Masculinity in the American South, 1800–2000*, ed. Lydia Plath and Sergio Lussana (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), and *White Masculinity in the Recent South*, ed. Trent Watts (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008). See also music-specific explorations of southern masculinity in the scholarship of Barbara Ching and Travis D. Stimeling.

19. Watts, *White Masculinity in the Recent South*, 11.

20. Graphs of unemployment rates generated from public data sets at <http://research.stlouisfed.org/fred2/graph/>, accessed November 5, 2013.

21. Reported in Coleman Insights Media Research, "Country P1 Consumer & New Media Study," presented March 9, 2011, [www.ColemanInsights.com](http://www.ColemanInsights.com), accessed November 5, 2013.

22. This statistic is reported in the Country Radio Broadcasters Edison Research 2009 National Country P1 Survey, which is discussed at [www.edisonresearch.com/home/archives/2009/03/the\\_edison\\_research\\_crb\\_national\\_country\\_research\\_study\\_2009.php](http://www.edisonresearch.com/home/archives/2009/03/the_edison_research_crb_national_country_research_study_2009.php), accessed October 20, 2013.

23. The phrase "Lost Cause" refers to a movement among white southerners such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy, who reinterpreted the Confederacy's aims as noble and honorable even in defeat at the end of the Civil War. Notions of heroism and nostalgic pride were inscribed into the evolving postwar social order as the region attempted to reconcile with the North, its former combatants. See Gaines Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of a New South, 1865–1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 4–8.

24. US Department of Labor Report, "Women's Employment During the Recovery," published May 3, 2011, [www.dol.gov/\\_sec/media/reports/femalelaborforce/](http://www.dol.gov/_sec/media/reports/femalelaborforce/), accessed November 5, 2013. Eric Church's "Drink in My Hand" includes the line "Boss man can shove that overtime up his can," using language that invokes Johnny Paycheck's famous recording of "Take This Job and Shove It." Trace Adkins's "Ladies Love Country Boys" cites both "straight A's" and "law degree" in its description of the female character.

25. Robert Toombs told the Georgia Legislature this in 1860, referring to the necessity of the war, quoted in Watts, *White Masculinity in the Recent South*, 3.

26. Alex Macaulay, "Marching in Step: The Citadel and Post World War Two America" (PhD diss., University of Georgia, 2003), 182.

27. Quoted by Alex Macauley in "Murder and Masculinity: The Trials of a Citadel Man," in *Black and White Masculinity*, 59; original text from Roy Reed, "Revisiting the Southern Mind: The South," *New York Times*, December 5, 1976, 42.

28. Barbara Ching made a similar argument in *Wrong's What I Do Best: Hard Country Music and Contemporary Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); see, for instance, "Abjection is constantly portrayed by an absurdly unregenerate white man who jokes and suffers while women . . . brandish the normative values that underscore abjection," 30.

29. *New York Times*, December 5, 1976, emphasis added.

30. The car ride begins around 1:45 in the video.

31. This action takes place at 2:07.

32. Video posted on Shelton's fan club website behind a required login and password, at [www.blakeshelton.com/news/basers-exclusive-behind-scenes-boys-round-here-223491](http://www.blakeshelton.com/news/basers-exclusive-behind-scenes-boys-round-here-223491), accessed September 10, 2013.

33. This particular video expresses an intrinsic racism that deserves further analysis.