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WHEN THE COUNTERCULTURE PICKED UP A SOUTHERN TWANG: A CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF LATE SIXTIES AND EARLY SEVENTIES COUNTRY ROCK MOVEMENT

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

The University of Mississippi

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April 2014

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ABSTRACT

My thesis is a cultural analysis of California-based country-rock movement in the late sixties and early seventies. Country rock is a hybrid music genre emerged during this period. Musicians active in the country-rock movement were mostly counterculture hippies, and they adopted country music to serve their own ends.

There is no unified ideological thinking in this movement. Some musicians were political while others were not. Music critics generally agree that country rock was a cultural reaction to the cynicism and rootlessness of youth culture in the late sixties and early seventies. The counterculture looked to country music for inspiration because it provided the authenticity and roots for the contemporary music scene that was generally in bad shape.

In my thesis, I focus on the music of three prominent country-rock musicians----Gram Parsons, The Band, and the Eagles. I will provide detailed analysis of how they borrowed country music elements to serve their own ends.

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INTRODUCTION

There is no a unified definition of country-rock music. The music form can be traced back to 1968, when country music bore the stigma of music of bigoted and racist white Southerners. Countercultural musicians such as Bob Dylan, Gram Parsons, Chris Hillman, and Michael Nesmith were the pioneers in incorporating country music elements into mainstream rock. The folk-rock band the Byrds' 1968 record *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* under the leadership of Gram Parsons was a premier work of country rock; it demonstrated the counterculture's capacity of interpreting classic country material. The Byrds was also the first hippie rock band that performed in the Grand Ole Opry not long after the release of the album. Bob Dylan's 1969 album *Nashville Skyline* was heavily influenced by country music, and his later TV performance with country icon Johnny Cash was considered as a gesture of reconciliation between the counterculture and Middle Americans.

When it comes to the musical form of country rock, music journalist John Einarson contends that there were several approaches to the genre. First, it was long-haired hippie musicians taking the form of traditional country with more progressive lyrics and rock attitude (Gram Parsons, Emmylou Harris). Conversely, some musicians approached country rock from the rock side by injecting country music-influenced lyrics and attitude into rock music or adding country music instrumentation to create a whole new concept (the Band, Poco, the Eagles) (Einarson, 12-13). Although the Austin-based "redneck rock" or "Oulaw Country" movement emerged at about the same period and it was sometimes included in the "country-rock" category, it is not my

major concern in my thesis. I pay attention mostly to California-based country-rock musicians, who, unlike Austin-based outlaw country musicians like Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, and Jerry Jeff Walker were country music outsiders; they learned country music secondhand.

The current literature on the late sixties and early seventies country-rock movement consists of journalist writings and biographies of artists such as Gram Parsons, the Eagles, and Bob Dylan. These sources thoroughly covered the detailed stories of these artists and their music, but none has done a cultural analysis of the meaning of the country-rock sound and their themes with more depth. Country rock has not received enough attention in the existing country music scholarship; even country music's premier scholar, Bill Malone, only briefly mentioned country-rock musicians such as Gram Parsons yet with no further analysis of country rock movement. Similarly, while those music scholars and cultural historians who are interested in the idea of "Sunbelt South" and seventies cultural politics have done some work on the seventies Southern rock and Austin-based outlaw country movement, the California-based country rock was still left unstudied. Musicologist Oliva C. Mather is one of the few scholars who have touched upon country rock. In his essay "Regressive Country': The Voice of Gram Parson," in *Old Roots, New Routes: The Cultural Politics of Alt.Country Music*, ed. Pamela Fox and Barbara Ching, he conducts a deconstruction work of Parsons' status as the founder of "Cosmic American music" via an in-depth analysis of Gram Parsons' vocal performance. Yet his training as musicologist confines him from further exploration through a textual and historical analysis. The perspective from social and cultural history is needed to evaluate the country-rock movement. This thesis argues that the genre was deeply situated in the late sixties and early seventies context. Country rock is not an "authentic" music genre but a hybrid form. In the cultural context of the late sixties

and early seventies, rock and country represent two polarized ideological maps: Left vs. Right; Woodstock vs. Grand Ole Opry; liberalism vs. conservatism. Although the meaning of country rock cannot be simply reduced to a cultural form that sought to bridge the gap between the countercultural Lefts and conservative Rights, some musicians took the music seriously. Gram Parsons, Bob Dylan, the Band, and Jackson Brown all displayed a certain tendency to unify the seemingly disparate cultures of country and rock. The movement also says something about the mentality of the youth and transitional nature of that period. William Bender characterized these musical developments in 1970, in a profile of the Band for *Time*: "Country rock is … a symptom of a general cultural reaction to the most unsettling decade the U.S. has yet endured. The yen to escape the corrupt present by returning to the virtuous past—real or imagined— has haunted Americans, never more so than today. A nostalgic country twang resounds all up and down the pop charts" (39).

Disillusioned by the stale and deadening political realities and the loss of "authenticity" of rock"n" roll by the early seventies, many former countercultural Lefts attempted to seek new legitimate cultural expression for their dislocation. According to music historian Peter Doggett, by the early 1970s, contemporary music was in a bad shape. Former rock heroes like Joplin, Hendrix, and Morrison died. The Beatles "splintered and rock and roll was going through a kind of metamorphosis needed once in a while to rejuvenate fans and rekindle their passion for live shows." Some former rockers turned to country music since country music provided a new direction. Plenty of former folkies were joining the movement. Robert Christigau commented: "Authenticity was what country seemed to be offering in 1968…country and western seems unspoiled. It has the feel of mass-cult folk music; just like rock and roll before its promotion into

rock, or rhythm and blues before its elevation into soul" (Doggett, 86, 215).

It is crucial to situate the symbolism of country music in the context of the late sixties and early seventies. When it comes to country music in the this period, most scholars focused on the increasing identification of country music with the conservatism, Vietnam War proponent, and Law-and Order voters, and on the correlation between the popularity of country music and the "reddening of America." While the music was originally created by Southern white working class, who positioned in the marginality of American society, yet it had become the voice of the "Silent Majority"--- the emblem of American conservatism and the establishment. As Bill C. Malone has concluded, country music "has historically defied explicit political categorization or ideological identification," but in the late sixties and early seventies, "for the first time in its history, country music began to be identified with specific political position, gaining reputation for being a jingoistic and nativistic music" (212, 239).

On the other hand, the counterculture—those who might previously have been expected to shun country music—also turned to the music for new inspiration. Country-rockers did not look to mainstream Nashville country of the same period for inspiration, but they rather sought the more "authentic" country music subgenre (bluegrass, honky tonk, and the Bakersfield sound) as their new source. Since most country rock musicians were country music outsiders (both geographically and demographically), their take on country music was an interpretive work. Many country-rock musicians indeed played out the classic tropes of country music---long-gone rural pastoral South/America, the tension between Saturday night and Sunday morning, adult pain, and outlaw images; yet their outsider status allowed them to shun the "hillbilly"/ "redneck" image associated with country music and to serve their own ends. In so doing, they expanded the boundary of

country music and influenced later musicians from both the rock and country fields.

My major concerns in my thesis are: why, in that period, did these former countercultural hippies (many country-rockers indeed belong to this circle) turn to country music for inspirations? What did they find in country music? How was the idea of "authenticity" played out in their music? How did their musical themes differ from traditional country music? How did these country rock musicians employ country music to serve their own ends, be they personal, political, or simply artistic experiments? Did they achieve what they attempted to achieve? In order to answer these questions I turn to both primary and secondary sources. My primary sources mostly come from interviews, musicians' biographies and autobiographies, journal articles, newspapers, documentary films, and lyrics. For secondary sources, I will consult historians and music scholars and critics with expertise on seventies popular culture, country and rock music, and "Sunbelt South".

The first chapter focuses on Gram Parsosn, who is associated with so-called "The father of country rock" and his "Cosmic American Music". Yet, people at that time did not see him as the central figure in country rock, but later music critics, musicians, and journalists (especially during nineties' alternative country movement) nurtured a posthumous cult. In my first chapter, I show that Gram Parson did know how to employ classic tropes of country music such as Urban/ Rural and hedonism/ religiosity to validate his position as music insider. In my analysis, I will argue that although Gram Parsons' music employed a "hard country" sound, Gram Parsons deliberately purged hard-country elements such as hard living, drunkenness, masculine aggressiveness, illicit love; instead he focused on the more emotional aspects such as loneliness, heartache, and shared alienation. On the other hand, he imagined reconciling "hippies" with "rednecks" through

inventing the idea of "Cosmic American Music." I will evaluate his achievement and weakness in his experiment of his version of "Cosmic American Music."

My second chapter talks about the working-class theme and the image of the rural American South in the Band's self-titled *Brown Album*. The Band's music was going against the grain of contemporary rock. The group's music was set against the psychedelic rock and heavy blues of the day, delving back into the past to create a unique hybrid musical melting pot of soul, country, old-time, folk, and gospel. Their second self-titled album, a.k.a. *Brown Album* touches upon the mythic American past and rural working class themes. I will argue that the Band's works were mostly set in the distant past, with a celebration of the rootedness of life in small town and pastoral America. Country music, to them, essentialized the values they desperately looked for. This required they selectively emphasize certain aspects of country music (working-class theme, pastoral South, and rootedness) while downplaying other elements such as the general lack of "class-unconsciousness" in country music and southern working class.

In the third chapter, the last country-rock musician I study is the Eagles. I will explore the rambling trope and the image of West in the Eagles' first two albums, which were considered as the peak of the country rock. Unlike their predecessors, the Eagles achieved a real commercial success and made it cool to play "country." The band's ascendency corresponds with the rising of the "Sunbelt" region. The band's borrowing of bluegrass sound of the Southeast and the exploitation of the Western image and outlaw persona can be viewed as the marriage of the South and the West in the Sunbelt region. Also, it reflects the dream of the seventies' bourgeoisie class of escaping the daily gritty reality.

CHAPTER I

GRAM PARSONS AND HIS "COSMIC AMERICAN MUSIC"

Gram Parsons is my premier interest, for the myths about this so-called "The father of country rock" and his "Cosmic American Music" are so powerful. Yet, Gram Parsons was not well-known until the early 90s. During his lifetime, he did not really achieve his stardom and his records sold poorly. He also loathed the label "country rock" in favor of the more eclectic "Cosmic American Music." His posthumous cult was mostly a combined effort by music critics, journalists, CD reissues, biographies, alt. country magazines like *No Depression*, and later musicians' tributes from neo-traditionalist Dwight Yoakam, to 90s alternative country/ Americana roots revival arts such as Steve Earle, Lucinda Williams, Whiskeytown, Wilco, and Gillian Welch (Mather, 155). Joli Jenson put it insightfully: "a celebrity is someone who has been symbolically constructed to serve the interests of the media, particular audience, and the times" (114).

First, it is necessary to examine the meaning of Gram Parsons' signature "Cosmic American Music." One common mythology about Gram Parsons is that he was intensely Southern regardless of his social and musical background; therefore, country music came very natural to him. In other words, it is his "southernness" that makes his music so "Cosmic American." For instance, Parsons' biographer Bob Kealing attributes his Cosmic musical roots to the American South: "The South, where Gram Parsons grew up, is Cosmic America---a region rife with musicians and storytellers spinning tales of sin and redemption, love and heartache, troubadours and reprobates" (3). In the liner notes of *Return of the Grievous Angel*, Bud Scoppa had gone even

further to refer to Gram Parsons as "the subversive Harvard-educated Hillbilly who invented country-rock in the mid-Sixties with the prototypical International Submarine Band before perfecting it with the Byrds, the Flying Burrito Brothers." *Melody Maker* writer Lorraine Alterman also concluded, "Growing up in Georgia is what put Gram's roots solidly in country music." However, this geographical understanding of Parsons' music achievement is misleading. One cannot ignore his privileged upbringing that does not resemble most country music artists. Gram came from a Southern family with old money, and they did not appreciate country music. To them, "country & western music is laughable, the corn-pone outpourings of hillbillies and hayseeds" (Fong-Torres, 15). Parsons' country music conversion was later in his life by some of his fellow country musicians. During his years in Harvard, he had a chance to get to know country music via the musicians he played music with. He credited these musicians for helping him find the music of his native region, as he said in an interview: "they actually reintroduced me to country music…and country singers like George Jones, Merle Haggard---they are great performers, but I had to learn to dig them, and they taught me a lot" (62).

Despite so, Parsons knew how to employ some core elements of country music to serve his music purpose. To achieve his goal of creating a musical melting pot of "Cosmic American Sound" or "country rock," Gram Parsons skillfully first invented his new identity as a "country boy" from the South; therefore, he legitimated his status as country music insider and could convincingly introduce country music to West Coast hippie countercultures. Secondly, Gram Parson intelligently played out the two classic tropes in country music: City vs. Country and Saturday Night vs. Religiosity. The dualism has always been prevalent in country music. Gram Parsons attempted to transfer this dichotomy into his version of country rock. Country music and

rock represented two disparate cultures. To Gram Parsons, if "City" and "Saturday Night" represented the rock side of his "Cosmic American Music," then "Country" and "Religiosity" represents the country side of country Rock. In so doing, Gram Parsons' aim was to reconcile the increasingly divisiveness of American society in the late sixties and early seventies via the innovative creation of a musical community---country rock. Musically speaking, the sound of country rock can be simply described as country harmonies and phrasing underwritten with a rock 4/4 drum beat. It adds pedal steel, dobro, fiddle and mandolin to the guitar and bass emphasis of rock. Gram Parsons' music is Barney Hoskyns' description of country rock as "the marriage of redneck roots and longhair modernism" (164).

Gram Parsons was concerned about the "authenticity" of country music. "Authenticity is not a quality but a way of affirming quality that now figures in many of the ways in which audiences and performers use recordings in identity formation" (Cole and Dolan, 33). David N. Meyer argues that "Gram was not into rock-diluted version of country music; he was into the real thing" (204). Admittedly, Gram Parsons had a clear sense of what counted as "real Country," for his music did not resemble the mainstream Nashville-based country at his time but employed "hard Country" sounds such as Bakersfield sound and honky-tonk. Lyrically, Barbra Ching identified the prevailing theme of hard country as "low otherness," and it is "nothing more than a painful class distinction even this particular form of country music has been dominated by white males." "While mainstream country singers croon reassuringly about rural idylls, cloying romance, family values, and patriotism," she argues, "hard country singers moan the blues of white-trash tragedy: broken homes, decrepit houses, binge drinking, dead-end jobs, and criminal record" (34). However, Gram Parsons deliberately purged hard-country topics such as hard living,

drunkenness, masculine aggressiveness, illicit love; instead he focused on the more emotional aspects such as loneliness, heartache, personal tragedy, and shared alienation. At the same time, he injected country music with more poetic sensitivity and a progressive message that could resonate with the counterculture.

The first trope Gram Parsons frequently employed is the traditional "rural" vs. "urban" dichotomy. This tension is frequently heard in traditional country music. Historians and country music scholars generally agree that country music, on the contrary to the conventional myth that country music was born in some isolated mountain hollers or rural farms, was intimately connected with Southern industrialization and modernization. Its first fertile region was the more industrialized cotton mill towns in the piedmont South, and it had roots in a wide range of sources from Vaudeville, parlor songs, ragtime, old-time, to blues. Just like blues and jazz, it was urban, modern, and a complete product of modernity (Huber).

What sits at the center of urban / rural dialectic is the loss of a mythologized home and the yearning for the replacement of home if going back home is no longer possible. The theme of lament of loss of "home" in country music has a lot to do with Southern migration. As a matter of fact, a lot of country songs were inspired by the nostalgia and uprootedness of working-class Southerners as they migrated to cities for industrial jobs. Country music, to a large extent, is the music of dislocation and nostalgia. According to Bill Malone, "Songs about the 'the old homeplace' have always provided emotional release and security for people who have moved into a complex world rife with uncertain loyalties and shifting moral values" (54).

The hard-core honky-tonk sound that Gram Parsons employed was originally associated with the migrant Southern working class who left home and tried to make sense of the great

economic and social forces that transformed their lives in the city. When country music entered into honky-tonk, it had to change, both in lyrics and style (Malone, 163). The music played in the honky-tonks had to adapt to the new urban environment. The introduction of the electric guitar was to cut through the noisy crowd, and the whiny and weeping pedal steel guitar replaced the twangy sound of the banjo. Steel guitar is the core instrument in honky-tonk music, for it "offers the wail of love and loss that men are too stoic to express directly" (Jensen, 34). In terms of lyrical content, the previous themes of country music about the pastoral countryside, mother church, and romance gave way to divorce, drunkenness, cheating, unrequited love, and loneliness. Honky-tonk deals with the human tragedy, the dark side of the life, with more candid and open discussion about sexual temptation and infidelity. In the urban setting, working-class males felt their masculinity largely threatened by the increasing regimentation of work, centralized power by government and corporations, the loss of rural home, and the weakening of the traditional patriarchal society. What is more, Jensen contends that in the city, women are more likely to be susceptible to the desire and the lure of city life and "trespass" into forbidden class territories. High-brow culture often has particular appeal to transplanted rural women who can momentarily "pass:" men, however, stay in "their own world of faded jeans, callused hands, and rough but honest ways" (30-32).

In the honky-tonk context, the rural home was lost; displaced southern working-class men and women have both been "tainted" by the city, yet the women's transgression is much greater. They can no longer function as a stable symbol of the mythic pure home space. Honky-tonk music largely mourned the loss of women as the embodiment of mythologized "home" place as they succumbed to modernity's freedoms and pleasures. The past now was impossible to return. "Home" thus became refashioned as a public and masculine domain---the honky-tonk, rather than

a private domestic space (Fox, 13, 65). Take the classic country song Merle Haggard's "Swing Door," for instance. The song depicts a guy abandoned by his wife, then seeking a new home in a honky-tonk bar. The narrator admits that the "new home" is not his favorite, yet he feels like being more welcome there. His new home had "swinging doors a jukebox and a barstool… and a flashing neon sign." Other classic country songs like "Detroit City" and "Streets of Baltimore" reflect a similar concern.

What Gram Parsons and the migrant Southern working class had in common is the longing for the rural home and anti-urban sentiment. His song "Do You Know How it Feels To Be Lonesome," released during his period with *The Flying Burrito Brothers*, reads like a country boy, newly arrived in the city, not getting used to the callused city life, for everyone seems so cold: "Do you know how it feels to be lonesome/ When there's just no one left that really cares/ Did you ever try to smile at some people/ And all they ever seem to do is stare." "Sin City" is a diatribe against the sinfulness and corruptness of city of Los Angeles.

Nothing exemplifies this tension between "urban" and "country" and the longing for home better than Gram Parsons' "Hickory Wind." The song is a poignant evocation of his yearning for his childhood home in the rural South. The song plays out one classic trope of country music--- the country boy is lost in the city, becoming nostalgic for a simpler time and place and longing for his home where he can no longer return. The lines goes, "It's a hard way to find out that trouble is real /In a faraway city with a faraway feel." What "Hickory Wind" and many traditional country songs have in common is the longing for return to the mythologized home that did not exist. Cecelia Tichi stated that country music expresses the yearnings for a kind of home "so idealized that no one can experience it." The paradox about the home is, she contends, "to stay home is to

risk feeling dejected and thwarted. But to appreciate home, one must leave it, never to return." This fits Gram Parsons' case perfectly. Ironically, it was after his years of living in Boston, New York, and Los Angeles that he rediscovered his Southern roots and learned to appreciate country music. His home was far from ideal as he sang in the song. Gram grew up in a dysfunctional Southern family filled with tragedy. His father committed suicide when he was twelve, and Gram's mother drank herself to death over the next few years. She died the day Gram graduated from high school. In his freshman year at college, he got the news his sister had been shuttled off to boarding school after his stepdad married the babysitter who was hired to look after the daughter he had with Gram's mother (George-Warren). Parsons never had felt a sense of home. On the other hand, country music could function as his symbolic home. This seeking to reconnect roots and return to a mythologized home is a predominant theme in country music, for "home" stands against all that is embodied in the singer's "current location of lament and longing – most commonly an urban existence and location." It is only in their memories that a return to the simplicities of the past and the South can occur. Yet it is memory that enables people like Parsons to continue in his present dislocation (Grimshaw, 99). What makes this song differ from traditional country song's lament of loss of home is the line "I started out younger, had most everything /All the riches and pleasures, what else can life bring?" This line highlights the narrator's class privilege. While most country singers complained of the low wages and discrimination they encountered in the big city, Gram Parsons seemed tired of "all the riches and pleasures" the city could offer to him.

Another country music trope used by Gram Parsons is the dichotomy between "Sin" and "Religiosity." The tension between "Saturday Night" and "Sunday Morning" is a prevailing tension in country music. Many country singers from Hank Williams Sr. to Johnny Cash to George

Jones embodied the prototype of W. J. Cash's "divided man"---- "uniting the two incompatible tendencies in a single person" (57). The worldview of traditional country music embraces both sin and salvation; it grew out of both churches and honky-tonks. It embraces the contradiction inherent in the lives of the rural southern working class. Country music emerged from a culture saturated with evangelicalism. It would treat sin in a direct and honest way. Since most country performers acknowledge traditional Christian morality, even when they are violating it, their struggles with temptation are portrayed as intense moral struggles. They admit their sins and yearn for salvation while at the same time confessing they cannot obtain it; therefore, they seek temporary escapism and deter their redemption, and the vicious cycle of sin and salvation spins round and round (Veith and Wilmeth, 130).

Gram Parsons clearly fits into the W. J. Cash's "divided man" persona. Parsons was firmly in the lineage of Hank Williams and Johnny Cash and, like them, he 'vacillated between Saturday night and Sunday morning, between debauchery and devotion' (Dawidoff, 193). He lived a hedonistic and self-destructive rock-star lifestyle; in the words of Fong-Torres, "Gram was in his own world, he did not need sixties, either as an excuse or as an inspiration for the way he lived." Yet many of Gram Parsons' songs conveyed an overt religious message. As a matter of fact, Gram Parsons viewed his music as "white gospel," "white soul music" and 'as a form of white spiritual music" (Fong-Torres, 61, 65). In the song "She" Parsons praised the female protagonist's religiosity: "she had faith / she had believin'/ she had all the people together in singin'/ and she pray every night to the Lord up above/ Singing hallelujah, hallelujah." "Sin City" was a condemn of the excess materialism and soullessness of big city as L.A, yet the criticism took on the language of religion; it sounded like a Baptist preacher, yet the music was performed by Gram Parsons and

his band The Flying Burrito Brothers, a long-haired rock group. "In My Hour of Darkness" seems to be an autobiographical song. The line "Another young man safely strummed/ His silver string guitar /And he played to people everywhere /Some say he was a star /But he was just a country boy" could easily remind us of Parsons himself. The protagonist has been tired of rock stardom and endless nights that involved drugs, boozes, and groupies, with the longing for the guidance of Jesus. "Then there was an old man/ Kind and wise with age /And he read me just like a book /And he never missed a page." The "old man" in the song resembles the Christ figure. The religious message is conspicuous. It is about the struggle between faith and temptation, the seeking for redemption. "In my hour of darkness/ In my time of need/ Oh, Lord, grant me vision/ Oh, Lord, grant me speed" reads like it comes from some traditional gospel song.

Michael Grimshaw argues that country music might be religious, but the theology of country is not evangelical. For in most country songs:

> the answers aren't that simple, because life is complex, and it is in our daily lives that we encounter that dualistic pull between Satan and God. Instead of corporate, communal belief, country is a theology of the questioner, the wanderer…what sits under a theology of country, is a sense of loneliness precisely because of being the liminal encounter between the call of the sacred and the delights of the profane. Therefore, underlying the embracing of a redemptive debauchery is the fatalism of continually being tested by God.

Gram Parson fits into this "liminal" encounter, and it is crucial to understand this liminal figure Parsons played. He embodied multiple identities: country boy and privileged trust-fund kid; hippies and country crooner; the religious and the libertine. Gram Parsons straddled with two divergent cultures: hippie counterculture and working-class country music culture. He did not

really identify with either group; a lot of times he played the role as an intercultural interpreter--- to introduce country music to the counterculture. On the other hand, he is not truly a country music insider. His approach to country music is different from either Nashville countrypolitan style nor hard-country artists such as Merle Haggard and George Jones, but rather brings “rock” attitude and folk sensibility. As Parsons’ protégé Emmylou Harris once told Holly George-Warren in an interview: “Gram’s writing brought his own personal generation’s poetry and vision into the very traditional format of country music, and he came up with something completely different.” To achieve his vision of cosmic American music that attempted to bridge the gap between hippies and “rednecks,” Parsons took the theological mindset of the Protestant South and of country music and used it to live the archetypal hedonistic rock ’n’ roll’ life of the hedonistic rock star in the late sixties and early seventies Los Angeles (Grimshaw). Country music, according to Lewis, was suited for such a mission because at its heart it reacts between three core tensions: those between an individual and society; those between social freedom and restraint; and those between a rural past and an urban present (107).

The problem about Gram Parsons’ cultural work of reconciliation is that sometimes it could be mistaken as a parody. This might explain his failure to reach country music’s core audience--- the rural white working class. Neil Flantz, a musician who used to work with Gram Parsons, said in an interview: “most of the places that we played weren’t country-music venues. We were looking at the rock-and-roll circuit. The dope-smoking circuit, Gram wanted to reach that audience---hippies” (Meyer, 386)

Take the songs “My Uncle” and “Hippie Boy,” for instance. Both songs address the concerns of the counterculture: the draft and anti-Vietnam War. “My Uncle” was released in 1969,

about the same time as Merle Haggard's pro-Vietnam song "Okie From Muskogee." It was inspired by Parsons' draft notice (Einarson, 142). Contrary to the massage of "Okie From the Muskogee," this song was a down-right anti-war and hippie-friendly song. Upon being drafted, the protagonist was thinking about moving to Vancouver, for "So I'm headin' for the nearest foreign border/ Vancouver may be just my kind of town/ 'Cause they don't need the kind of law and order/ That tends to keep a good man underground." The lyric reads like a typical anti-war hippie folk-rock song, yet the musical arrangement was the typical Bakersfield country sound. The signature twangy telecaster guitar ran through the whole song in a very loud volume, plus adding Gram Parsons' Southern drawl, it could easily be interpreted as a mockery of these anti-hippie and jingoistic rednecks. The other song of similar theme "Hippie Boy" is about a dialogue between a hippie boy and redneck. It recounts a tragedy of an innocent kid cut down in the melee (Meyer, 278). The voice of the hippie boy expressed Gram Parsons' desire of cultural reconciliation: "We can enjoy the sunshine and the weather/ So why don't we put our differences aside /And just talk to each other?" Yet the use of the church organ and Southern gospel arrangement as background, and Chris Hillman telling the story in the form of Southern evangelical sermon seems to lampoon and indict the "Silent Majority," who was mostly responsible for the war in the eyes of the counterculture.

The use of country as parody, according to Hanson, "made the use of country music as a link between generations and social groups problematic, if not impossible." A song like the Flying Burrito Brothers' "Hippie Boy" had the potential to bridge the "culture gap": "You want to have it played on every C&W station in the country, and have visions of it easing all the world's shorthair vs. longhair-type tension." But as Smith suggests, they blew "the whole thing at the climax,

converting the whole thing into … a sophomoric put-down of country ways." Therefore, "What ought to be the most genuine music in the country becomes a cheap novelty" (Smith, 18).

Gram Parsons achieved a degree of success in introducing country music to the counterculture. Later country rock artists from Emmylou Harris to Linda Ronstadt to the Eagles were all indebted to Parsons. However, his failure to reach the country music's core white working class audience is worthy of discussion. It is true that Gram Parsons displayed his fascination with country music's fan base---working-class whites. Among his original songs, "A Song for You" basically sums up his generation's rootlessness and longing for new identity: "Some of my friends don't know who they belong to / Some can't get a single thing to work inside/ So take me down to your dance floor/ And I won't mind the people when they stare." He apparently called for looking for guidance from the rural working-class people even though he acknowledged the huge gap between them and his peers. So Parsons attempted to use country music's gritty realism to speak to the counterculture generation, as moderation to their utopian and ideological dreams, as a call to hear the voice of common, everyday experience of the working class.

Grace Hale argues that emphasis on feelings among folk revivalists of the late fifties and sixties made "authenticity into an internal rather than an external quality." She continued, "being alike on the inside, as people who shared emotions and the need for self-expression, replaced being alike on the outside" (98). Simply put, folk revivalists attempted to redefine class status as a matter of cultural choice rather than material reality. Gram Parson exemplified this idea. Gram Parsons never attempted to become the next Johnny Cash or Merle Haggard. He tried to be honest to himself. Parson's musical themes differ from those of traditional country music such as drinking, cheating, drunkenness, rambling outlaw, and jail. The lyrics of his songs were filled with lost

innocence, nostalgia, and wistful sentimentality; his music was generally more self-reflective and sophisticated than mainstream country music. Although he desperately wanted to seek roots through embracing the working-class world, Parson's musical talent did not hide the fact that he was distant from the working-class world he tried hard to understand and from which he sought to connect.

Gram Parson resembles the character "Bobby" in the 1970 film *Five Easy Pieces*. Bobby concealed his upper-class background and worked as an oil worker; he has a dim-witted, country music singing waitress girlfriend. He drinks and goes bowling with his fellow workers, yet deep in his heart, he never fully embraces his working class identity. He knows that he could always retreat back into his comfort zone. After a fight with his oil worker buddy, he condescendingly said to him, "I can't believe a dumb cracker who lives in a trailer compared his life to mine." He was never fully committed to his waitress girlfriend, either. In the end of the movie, Bobby chooses to leave his girlfriend and continue his meaningless journey. Like Bobby, Gram Parsons merely attempted to seek temporary refuge in the working-class identity that country music represented. Within the liner-notes of the album "GP," featured with a picture of Parsons standing in front of a rig, Parsons clearly regarded the trucker identity as something authentic, genuine, and "real," as opposed to the rootlessness, aimlessness, and nihilism of his generation. However, unlike his hero Merle Haggard, Parsons never did a day's manual job; he never experienced these "hard country" themes such as hard living, hard luck, hard labor, jail, and loss. Even his "Southerness" that he touted in his identity remained such an irony, for the only time he came back south was to collect trust fund payments, and recruit friends to play on his recordings. His annual five-figure trust fund payouts meant he did not have to worry about being a working musician (Meyer). For Gram,

subsistence was always within arm’s length, a short grab from an ever-flowing river of family money. He could afford dropping out of Harvard and experimenting with the drug subculture, which was a completely unfamiliar world to Haggard. Other than an occasional wandering into a blue-collar dance hall, as his song says, he remained an outsider to the country music world those people associated with it. According to Parson’s friend, fellow musician Chris Hillman, Parsons had an opportunity to produce an album together with Merle Haggard, but he blew it. After Parsons showed up drunk in the studio, Merle quit. As Richard Doggett commented incisively, “Why should the poet of American working man waste time on a hippie who wanted to be a country star?” Before long, Parsons was found dead out of a drug overdose in a motel room in Joshua Tree, California.

In sum, Gram Parsons’ cultural work included reinventing his identity as “Southern” or country boy via skillfully employing classic country trope such as “urban” vs. “rural”. He emphasized his regional identity ---the South that gives birth to country music while downplaying his class identity (upper-middle-class upbringing with no appreciation of country music). Parsons’ liminal figure also enabled him to move between two disparate cultures---rock and country, playing the role of reconciliation.

CHAPTER II

THE BAND'S FASCINATION WITH WORKING CLASS IN THEIR *BROWN ALBUM*

William Bender characterized musical developments in 1970, in a profile of the Band for *Time*: "Country rock is … a symptom of a general cultural reaction to the most unsettling decade the U.S. has yet endured. The yen to escape the corrupt present by returning to the virtuous past—real or imagined— has haunted Americans."

Although the Band is not usually lumped with other Los Angeles-based country-rock groups for its low-profile image and it was mainly based in Woodstock, New York, the Band in fact played a crucial role in this country-rock movement. As the band name suggests, they played music as a person. There are no solos in most of their songs; the simplicity of their music serves as an antidote the acid rock and boastful guitar solos of their time. While their generation was indulgent in the embrace of experimentation and cultural alienation, the Band looked to traditional American music, including gospel, soul, country &western, and early rock' n' roll for inspiration. They embraced the lost values of the past, especially the nineteenth-century frontier and the rootedness of small-town American life. Their music resembles more country music than rock in that it deals with themes of hard living, family, crops, human tragedy; their songs told good stories about include "a cast of characters, a variety of situations, a range of human emotions," and were saturated with a sense of community. It is closer to country and western than rock music. Music critic Greil Marcus effectively evaluated the Band's music as "against a cult of youth they felt for a continuity of generations; against the instant America of the sixties they looked for the traditions

that made new things not only possible, but valuable; against a flight from roots they set a sense of place" (50). For some country rockers and the counterculture, the innocence and the idealism of 1967's Summer of Love were gone. Some music critics, however, viewed the pastoralism celebrated in their music as "a retreat from political engagement into insularity, complacency and self-centeredness" (Ingram, 145).

In the context of the late sixties, political rock musicians consisted of liberals and radical revolutionaries. According to music historian Peter Doggett, country music represented the enemy to them—"white southerners, conservatives; at best apologists for intervention in Vietnam, at worst racists and bigots" (87). "Country" in mainstream country music is equivalent of "American," pro-Vietnam war, the establishment, and the sound of the "Silent Majority," some country rockers apparently viewed it differently. To them, country rock reflected the yearning for the retreat into the rural America.

Recorded in a makeshift pool-house studio in Los Angeles in early 1969, the Band's second self-titled album *The Band (*also known as the *Brown Album*) exemplifies this spirit of searching for roots and simplicity in traditional rural life. The Band's biographer Barney Hoskyns contended that this album defined the group's character. The record sounds timeless, a distillation of the American experience stretching from the Civil War to the menacing unrest of 1969 itself. In this album, the Band attempted to find new fascination with the rural working class. They looked to the rural working class community for the new source of authenticity and inspiration. All the songs on "The Band" were written by lead guitarist Robbie Robertson, several with Richard Manuel and one with Levon Helm. It is a "concept album" that "can be said to take place around some imaginary country town" (Hoskyns, 190-91). The songs deal with peoples, places, and

traditions associated with old mythic America. The lead guitarist Robbie Robertson demonstrated remarkable story-telling skills; all the songs were telling the stories. The protagonists consisted of low-down characters: trucker, thief, servant, sailor, and sharecropper. Robbie mentions William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, Tennessee Williams, and Ernest Hemingway as his inspirations for song-writing in one interview (Viney), and some characters in this album are indeed reminiscent of Faulkner's or Williams' characters. Music Critic Susan Lydon even claimed that the songs reminded her of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County. The cover of the album is five band members, dressed in working man's clothes with scraggly beards. It is stuck in a time warp and seems so surreal in the flashing sixties way. In journalist Peter Doggett's words, "they could have passed as a gang of railroad pioneers from the 1850s, or outlaws bustling along the Western frontier" (90).

The album opens with the track "Across the Great Divide," a dialogue between a hopelessly unfaithful man and his pistol-toting wife that occurred in a rural small town. The man attempted to clear all the misunderstanding between him and his wife; he reminisced how he came to town with nothing and finally built a place to call it home. He remembered his hardship and his fears. He claimed to hit the road again if his wife did not put down the gun. The song, on the surface, is a classic trope of cheating, violence, and betrayal that permeates country music; yet there is a deeper metaphor: it shows an ambitious cultural work of reconciliation. The song reflects the increasingly divergent American society in the late sixties. "The Great Divide" symbolizes the two divided sides of the nation separated by race, gender, generation, region, political opinions: the blacks and whites, men and women, the elders and the youths, the North and the South, country and city, hippies and rednecks.

It is true that the whole album was soaked in the past with a sense of place. In this album,

the “sense of place” happened to be set in the American South. “The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down” was set in the distant Civil War era. It gives voice to thousands of anonymous Civil War soldiers’ stories. The song is a recounting of the end of the Civil War from the perspective of a Confederate soldier named Virgil Cane, who was a poor farmer from Tennessee. The lyric refers to conditions in the Southern states in the winter of 1865, as the lines "We were hungry / Just barely alive," portraying the Confederacy on the verge of defeat. Although he claimed that he had no idea what the song was about, in an earlier interview, the band’s chief songwriter, Canadian Robbie Robertson had mentioned his love affair with the South:

> When I first went down South, I remember that a quite common expression would be, "Well don't worry, the South's gonna rise again." At one point when I heard it I thought it was kind of a funny statement and then I heard it another time and I was really touched by it. I thought, "God, because I keep hearing this, there's pain here, there is a sadness here." In Americana land, it's a kind of a beautiful sadness.

Robertson apparently did his homework, and it is not hard to perceive his deep sympathy for the Confederate South. The song was set in the South during the last days of the Civil War era, but it was important that Virgil Cane was from Tennessee rather than lower South states such as Mississippi or Alabama. Rather than pictures of wealthy slaveholders living in mansions among the cotton field of Deep South, Civil War Tennessee could easily evoke sympathetic images of sturdy self-reliant slaveless yeomen farmers (East Tennessee was notable for its pro-Union stance, and it even threatened to secede from the state of Tennessee). Music historian Robert Palmer highly praised this song as “It gets inside the sense of place and tradition…and it captures the emotional climax of that apocalyptic moment in Southern history, the Surrender, in a few

exceptionally well-chosen words and a dignified, understated arrangement." Greil Marcus argues that although most songs of the album were set in the mythic American past, they do not serve us history lessons but because "every way of life practiced in America still matters---not as nostalgia, but as the necessities of someone's daily life" (55).

"Up On Cripple Creek" is about a trucker who was on his way to meet his mistress down in Lake Charles, Louisiana, while his wife was waiting at home. It is the modern version of the traditional old-time/ bluegrass song "Cripple Creek." The lines in "Upon On Cripple Creek": "When I get off of this mountain/ You know where I wanna go/ Straight down the Mississippi River/ to the Gulf of Mexico/ To Lake Charles, Louisiana/ little Bessie, girl that I once knew/ She told me just to come on by/ if there's anything she could do" bear strong resemblance of "Hey, I got a girl at the head of the creek /Goin up to see her about two times a week/Kiss her on the mouth, sweet as any wine/Wrap herself around me/ like a sweet potato vine." Both songs deal with illicit love. According to Greil Marcus, "Cripple Creek" in American folklore is "a place where all fears vanish beyond memory." The song was released well before the CB trucker fad of the late Seventies "Good Ole Boy" films; the character of this song might be a fun-loving "good Ole Boy" who was overworked and drove his rig down some lonesome highway, dying to drop his load and dreaming of well-earned freedom, and his mistress Bessie was the comfort to him. Here the character Bessie resembles the "honky-tonk angel" persona in many classic country song, who are unattached loose women haunting the bar scene for drink and sex. Since honky-tonks are considered as the traditional male public space, the frequent presences of these unattached "honky-tonk angels" were considered as the invasion of the male domain thus disrupting the traditional moral hierarchy. Unlike many country songs that tended to blame these loose women

for being home-wreckers, Robertson did not offer social commentary. He instead simply celebrates the good time: it is “A drunkard's dream if I ever did see one.” During a radio interview in 1988, Robbie Roberson explained:

> We're not dealing with people at the top of the ladder. We're saying what about that house out there in the middle of that field? What does this guy think, with that one light on upstairs, and that truck parked out there? That's who I'm curious about. What is going on in there? And just following the story of this person, and he just drives these trucks across the whole country, and he knows these characters that he drops in on, on his travels. Just following him with a camera is really what this song's all about.

The major characters in the songs “Rocking Chair” and “When You Awake” are old folks, a rare topic in a sixties rock group. “Rocking Chair” is about a weary old sailor, who finally came to his home in “Old Virginny” and spent his last days with his old buddy, Ragtime Willie. Arranged in the style of an old-time string band, the song, according to Hoskyns, “re-established the sense of generational continuity. (187)” “When You Awake” is about a young boy who picked up some advice from his grandpa after an unpleasant encounter on the street. “Ollie told me I’m a fool /So I walked on down the road a mile/ went to the house that brings a smile/ sat upon my Grandpa’s knee/ What do you think he said to me?” This generational harmony sounds so out-of-date when considering the upheaval in the late sixties caused by generational misunderstanding and miscommunication. Robertson displayed his respect for the elders: “In my time I’ve run up against some old people who were able to explain things to me and make me see things in a way that nobody else could” (186-87).

The album wrapped up in “King Harvest (Has Surely Come).” It is the central song of the

album, according to Robertson. The song was so important because “It's a country album and the theme of harvest, as a time of change and fulfillment, runs all through it” (Lydon). No other song better exemplifies the Band’s sympathy for the working class than the song “King Harvest (Has Surely Come).” During an interview, Robertson said: “We live in these cities and we forget that there is more than 3000 miles between New York and the smog of Los Angeles”, he said, “Those 3000 miles are deeply rooted to another world in another time and with another set of values. ‘King Harvest’ takes us there.” The song draws on the American past and deals with labor union and working-class life in the rural South/ America. Robertson said he had been immersed in the novels of John Steinbeck when he was writing the song. It is true that the protagonist of this song could easily fit into the characters in *The Grapes of Wrath,* except the geographic location was more likely set in the Deep South, for the mention of “rice field” and “magnolia trees,” or as “a kind of soundtrack to James Agee’s epic account of Depression-era tenant farmers *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,”* wrote Ralph Gleason. Since *The Band* is a concept album, many stories and characters could be related. In this song, the protagonist, a dirt-poor southern tenant farmer or sharecropper is likely to be the grandson of the Confederate soldier Virgil Cane in “The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down.” He prays for the rain to come after a dry summer and for a harvest. He envisions the possibility of unionization if the crops failed. Robertson imagined an ideal situation of what a Labor Union could have done to the Southern working class:

> I work for the union /'Cause she's so good to me /And I'm bound to come out on top /That's where she said I should be/I will hear every word the boss may say /For he's the one who hands me down my pay /Looks like this time I'm gonna get to stay / I'm a union man, now all the way.

The working-class character in this song is worthy studying, for it runs counter to the common portrayal of the working-class man as a jingoistic, Wallace-supporter, and bigot. He is class-conscious and loyal to labor union, a prototype of the thirties working-class man. It is ironic that labor unionism had become an obsolete idea by the time Robertson wrote the song. It is not that labor was not a big issue in the late sixties and early seventies, but it was overshadowed by other issues such as the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, and conflicts on busing. The cross-class alliance during the Great Depression can hardly be replicated when race and gender had become part of the totality. Given its historical context, working class identity had undergone significant transformation. The unified notion of a "working class" in the late sixties and early seventies crumbled. Working-class identity in America had been undergoing a process of collective "identity crisis"; the idea of worker solidarity and loyalty to unionism failed in this period due to economic and political injuries worsened by the scorn and contempt of the imagined "hard-hat," "redneck," or working-class jingoism and bigotry from the national media. According to historian Jefferson Cowie, the working class in the seventies had become "an 'other' dwelling outside of the new politics built by and upon minorities: women, youth, and sexuality" (240).

It is not a coincidence that country singer Merle Haggard wrote a song about working-class conservatism and cultural pride in his song "Okie From Muskogee" about the same time as Robbie Robertson wrote "King Harvest." Similar to the transformation of working-class identity, country music, traditionally associated with the marginal group Southern working class, had become identified with "the Silent Majority." Country music historian Bill Malone contends that "in the late sixties and early seventies, for the first time in its history, country music began to be identified with specific political position, gaining reputation for being a jingoistic and nativistic music"

(239). Regarded as "Poet of the Common Man," the son of "Okie" migrants in California, Merle Haggard was the spokesman for the working class at that period. He could easily fit into a character in the Band's *Brown Album*. In "Okie from Muskogee," he seemed to declare war with the countercultural generation: "We don't smoke marijuana in Muskogee/ We don't burn our draft cards down on main street," Merle Haggard sang, "Cuz we like living right and being free." It would be exaggerated to conclude that this song truly spoke for the mentality of working-class Americans like Haggard at that time. After all, like many working-class people, Merle Haggard himself was ambivalent about the War and the protests. However, Merle Haggard explained, "it irritated me a little bit to see them roaming the streets and bitching and burning and not really coming up with any answers to anything. So some of the frustration came out in different songs" (Cowie, 180).

Similarly, conservative politicians like Richard Nixon seek to recast the definition of "working class" from economic to cultural, from workplace and community to cultural pride. He paid homage to a working man like Merle Haggard yet his plan lacked both resources and inclination to offer material improvement to the whole of the American labor force. Better than many Democrats, Nixon offered an ideological shelter to those white male workers and union members who felt themselves slipping through the widening cracks of the New Deal coalition (Cowie, 165). If Merle Haggard and Nixon's version of "Okie" was a representative of seventies newly emergent "Silent Majority," then Robertson's "Okie" bore more resemblance with Dust Bowl "Okies" from the Great Depression, like a character that stepped out of John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*.

In the book *Hard Hats, Rednecks, and Macho Men*, Derek Nystrom framed his study of the

representation of white working class characters in 70s films in the key social and political developments of the decade, such as the decline of the New Left and counterculture, the re-emergence of the South as the Sunbelt, and the rise of the women's and gay liberation movements. He concluded that these insecurities manifested themselves in a discourse through which "PMC" (Professional and Managerial class) projected its fears, desires, and fantasies onto the working class. Therefore, cinematic representation of blue-collar men is best understood as products of middle-class imagination and fantasy about that class. Working-class characters were the social ''other'' onto which middle-class projected their concerns, anxieties, and dilemmas. For instance, the 1969 film *Easy Rider* is an indictment of the reactionary politics of working class America. At the end of the film, when two southern rednecks pull a shotgun and shoot the two hippie protagonists to death, the message is pretty clear: these backwoods rednecks were the reason that America was declining. As Terry Southern, an author of *Easy Rider,* explained, "in my mind, the ending was to be an indictment of blue-collar America, the people I thought were responsible for the Vietnam War" (Biskind, 68). In this light, Robbie Robertson's depiction of working-class characters was a cultural work of reimagining what the ideal American working-class man should be. In so doing, he attempted to achieve what historian Jefferson Cowie mentioned, "to bridge the gap between 30s Woody Gutherie's "Okie" and Haggard and Nixon's "Okie" by offering them with economic base" (185-186). As Robertson lamented the declining of the labor Union movement in an interview, "At the beginning, when the union came in, they were a saving grace, a way of fighting the big money people," he continued. "It is ironic now so much of it is like gangsters, assassinations, power, greed, insanity. I just thought it was incredible how it started and how it ended up" (Viney).

Identifying with the "common man" was a popular theme of the late sixties and early seventies. For instance, Jackson Browne's 1973 album *For Everyman* attempted to seek alliance with the rural working class, whom he neither understood nor was comfortable with. Californian John Fogerty of Credence Clearwater Revival had gone further to adopt an affected "Southern twang" and imagined himself as a Louisiana backwoods man who was "Born on a Bayou," even though Fogerty confessed that he never been to the South. Robbie Robertson's depiction of working class character may be free from this minstrel-style acting, yet it is not unproblematic.

First of all, despite Robertson's fascination with the Southern working class, he did not truly understand the labor movement in the South and the general lack of class consciousness of the (white) Southern working class. Many factors might contribute to the weakening of the class consciousness of the Southern workers, among which a strong sense of individualism is a very important one. Unlike their Northern counterparts, labor unionism has never gained a strong foothold among Southern workers. Racial issues were the most significant obstacle to unionization, but the power of management, especially in the company towns of the textile, lumber and mining industries, politicians, and evangelical preachers demonized unionized efforts. They preached self-reliance and individualism and viewed unionism as un-American, equating it with evil Communism. John Street contends that country music's conservatism comes from the way it deals with "the conflict between what is and what might be in favor of the status quo. County music offers a sympathetic understanding to the common issues of working class life. It does not necessarily offer a solution to the life problems; yet it is not pure escapism since most country songs acknowledge the problems still remain." John Buckley states, "Country music is rooted in a belief in the worth of an individual… people meet and come to terms with, but do not always

conquer"(201). Bill Malone also expresses the similar view:

> Southern working class recognized the clear distinctions between working people and those who profited from their labor, but they rarely called for government actions…instead emphasizing the self-reliance of the individual and family as the ultimate source of security" (Malone, 42).

In facing hardship, the southern working class is more likely to resort to their cultural pride than the Band's vision of collective efforts. Let's look at several mainstream country songs of the same period for examples. George Jones' "Small Time Working Man," released in 1968, is a typical song of this theme. Again, the song describes the hard toil and monotony of working-class life. The protagonist works because he has no other option but to feed his family. Although his life is hard, rather than complain about his misfortune, the narrator instead fights against trying as hard as he can fighting for his country with his calloused hands --"For I'm a small time laboring man." Merle Haggard's "Working Man's Blues," a 1969 tune, articulates the same pride in his fierce individualism, family and country. The narrator is trapped in the routine of a meaningless dead-end job and has a wife and kids to support. Despite an occasional escape through "catching a train to another town or drinking a little beer in a tavern," still he has to confront his reality. Nevertheless, he does not complain. Instead, he will work as "long as my two hands are fit to use."

What is more, race was generally neglected despite the Band's sympathy for the rural working class. Country music rarely deals with race. One possible explanation is that country music is a mass-mediated musical form designed mostly for the market sales, and any denotation of negative racist image will undermine its commercial appeal. But that does not mean country singers and fans are exempt from racial prejudice. Notorious segregationist governor George

Wallace was the first presidential candidate to recruit country musicians to assist his campaign, and his support from many country music performers at that time including Bill Bolick, Hank Snow, Grandpa Jones, Tammy Wynette, and Roy Clark. Malone contends:

> The ideology of the Wallace movement, with its populist-tinged contempt for intellectuals and social planners and its resolve to preserve the older racial hierarchies, undoubtedly attracted many of the performers who shared its fears and presumptions. (238)

As Scammon and Wattenberg insightfully pointed out in *The Real Majority*, for many working-class whites who voted for Wallace in 1968, " 'Law and order' beats 'bread and butter'; social beats economic. Keep your tainted federal dollars if it means putting my kid in school with the colored."

It is true that working-class whites and blacks shared the common experience of poverty, frustration, and exploitation. They both lived in a marginal world that offered little hope for economic prosperity and political expression; however, historically, the white working class's racial consciousness often surpassed their class consciousness, thus preventing many possibilities of potential alliance between them and working-class blacks. Sociologist Joe R. Feagin contends that throughout U.S. history, on account of the dominant racist ideology engendered by white elites, the white working-class has been more likely join their class oppressors than to join the workers of other races, and generally accept the "public and psychological wage" of whiteness. As a result, Feagan concludes that not only did white workers lose the chance for class solidarity with black workers but also undermined their consciousness of class relations and of themselves as workers under capitalism (178-79).

When it comes to the sense of community, the problem is that the Band seems so detached

from the place and people with which they were so fascinated. Most songs were written in the third-person narrative with a little bit top-down elitist perspective. Their outsiders' status may have offered them some unique perspectives and allowed them to see the nation or the region as a whole instead of pieces, yet, as John Street insightfully points out, the Band was successful in conjuring up the rural past images and a sense of community yet "the community they helped to forge identified itself against the rest of the people, not as part of them…it depends on setting 'them' apart from 'us' (212-13). When Robbie Robertson recalled his first visit in rural Arkansas, he saw a little shack out in the middle of the night, said Robbie, "I wonder who was in there. Not that I wanted to knock on the door, because I preferred to use my own imagination." He also mentioned his songwriting process once: "They [the songs] are not specific stories. These are just in the attic of my mind, in storage. Just like all writers do, you go up into the attic when you're writing. It was 'North American mythology in the making'" (liner notes, Bowman). The Band wanted to discover the richness and diversity of the nation, yet they did not really participate in the community they advocated. They made their first records mostly in isolation, walled off from the crowd by their manager, Albert Grossman (Marcus, 57). They did not talk to the union members, the truckers, and the farmers; they chose to shelter themselves from performing for the rowdy audience in many working-class dance halls and bars scatter all over the country. John Fogerty might perform a minstrel-type of caricature when he sang "Born on a Bayou," but he was right when he expressed his contempt for his fellow country-rockers during an interview: "We're all ethnic now, with our long hair and shit. But when it comes to doing the real crap that civilization needs to keep it going, who's going to be the garbage collector? None of us will" (Doggett, 104).

Robert Dorman had an insightful view towards the function of the myth when he studied

the Regionalist movement. “Myths have concrete existence in history, but only in partially realized, problematized form. Art, religion, and politics abstract myths from history’s course according to their ideals,” wrote Dorman. “Regionalist civil religion was the recognition of the absence of communitarian ideals in the modern era and the use of social art to fill that gaping moral vacuum” (94-95). This applies to the artistic work of the Band, too. The problem with the Band’s portrayal of the American rural past is not that it lacked historical accuracy, but its history was mostly selective and mythical, written by outsiders who did not have its interests at stake. Despite the Band’s claim to find plurality and drama in an America that seemed so homogeneous, their version of “another America” was defined against the discourse of “the counterculture”----the rural, white, heartland, Southern, blue-collar America abandoned by the new Left. Therefore, we only see good ol’ boys having a real good time in the songs such as “Rag Mama Rag” and “Up on the Cripple Creek”; we only see the struggle of the poor Confederate Soldier Virgil Cane during the Reconstruction era; we only see the old sailor finally return to his sweet home in Virginny in “Rocking Chair,” and a picture of harmonious community without generation conflict in “When You Awake.” But what about the other side of history? What about slavery, Jim Crow racial injustice, and the labor exploitation? Considering the Native American heritage of Robbie Robertson, it is ironic that the image of “Native American” and other racial minorities was completely erased from his historical narrative. “I was brought up to think that if you want to get ahead in this world, you’ve got to forget this Indian business,” Robbie explained. “I would never impose that heritage on the other guys…It was personal” (Doggett, 91). Would he express the similar opinion towards the issues like “racial integration” and “affirmative action”? Even the labor Unionism and American working class he so idealized has its limitation, for traditional

working-class identity in America was defined as white, male, union worker that came out of New Deal days, and the labor union historically had the records of keeping African Americans and women from joining the union.

To country-rockers, country music represented the roots, a sense of place, and tradition lacking in rock music of late sixties. Unlike some other country rock musicians, who generally ignored the working-class theme, the Band showed its deep sympathy for country music's core-base, the rural working class. Yet, like many country rockers, the Band's interpretation of country music was largely based on imagination and partial understanding. The setting of most of their songs in the distant American past allowed them to selectively stress certain aspects of country music such as the rural past, the pastoral South, and a sense of community. For instance, the Band picked up the sound of old-time country music and redefined the working-class identity in the terms of the Dust Bowl period. The serious discussion of labor unionism was also rare in traditional country music.

CHAPTER III

THE IMAGE OF THE WEST IN THE MUSIC OF THE EAGLES

The emerging idea of the Sunbelt provided the country rock's cultural context in the 1970s. First of all, it redefined the traditional idea of the South in a generally positive light; secondly, there was the marriage of the traditional Confederate South with the mythic West. Both sensibilities resulted in new representations of the region in popular culture (Mather, 34). If country experiments by country-rock pioneers such as the Byrds and Bob Dylan still caused confusion among the leftish countercultures, for the general negative association with country music as reactionary, right-wing, and even racist during the sixties, then we should examine the Eagles' employment of country music sound and its commercial success in a different light. The band's success benefited from the economic and political ascendency of the South and the correspondent increasingly favorable portrayal of the South in national media.

The term "Sunbelt" was first coined in 1969 by Kevin Phillips in his *The Emerging Republican Majority*. Phillips identified the booming Sunbelt region covering the Southern tier of the United States, stretching from Virginia and Florida to Southern California. He also insightfully predicted that the merging of South and West was going to be the hotbed of the conservative majority, the solid base for a new generation of Republicans (Schulman, 107). The term was later spread by a series of articles in the *New York Times* in 1976, including most of the traditional Southern states plus the Southwest, including parts of California, Nevada, and Colorado (Abbott, 8-9). Carl Abbott argues:

> The discovery of the Sunbelt has created an enlarged vision for the South that is essentially an enlarged version of the West. The idea of a Sunbelt has meant more for the South than for the West. The West or Southwest did not really need the Sunbelt, since it has already had a positive regional reputation. California surfers and Texas "super-Americans" merge easily and directly into the idea of a Sunbelt. The South, however, is fundamentally redefined when it is viewed in terms of the Sunbelt. Having been historically defined in negative terms, the South has found a sort of rescue from its past riding on the coattails of the Sunbelt (17).

From World WarII to the seventies, massive economic and societal transformation wrought by modernization has been undergoing in the South. The South became the leading region in terms of job growth and industrial development in the nation. By the mid-seventies, the southward shift of investment and population growth had long been under way. According to Cobb, the influx of new jobs increased standards of living: between 1955 and 1975, per capita income and median income increased at a greater rate in the South than in the rest of the nation (88). Historians generally agree that the key to the region's economic growth came from abundant natural sources, federal investment, tourism, low tax rates, and relatively cheap labor.

As Cobb put it, "economic prosperity put southern lifestyles and values in a new and more favorable light" (80). In the post-Civil Rights era, the South was no longer burdened by its racial segregation, coupled with the events such as the defeat of Vietnam War, Watergate, discovery of Northern racism, and the rising of the "Sunbelt South," the whole nation began to show an appreciation for things "Southern." George B. Tindall prophesied in 1973 that "the South was reincarnated as the imperial Sun Belt," and it [the South] was "about to assume a new role--- as

arbiter of the national destiny" (Cobb, 237). Accordingly, the media representation of the South was changing. For instance, Hollywood portrayed southern life in increasingly positive terms; the South became a place where people were more laid-back, hospitable, and carefree. The old stereotypical image of racist, ignorant, and bigoted working-class Southern white male that appeared in the films such as "Mississippi Burning," "Easy Rider," and "In the Heat of Night" was gone; instead, we see the updated version of the white Southern working-class male as fun-loving good ole boy portrayed by actors like Burt Reynolds and Jerry Reed. Even the derogatory term 'redneck' was endowed with a different connotation. Richard Peterson argues, "To call oneself "redneck" is not so much to be a redneck by birth or occupational fate but rather to identify with an anti-bourgeois attitude and lifestyle" (58). As the South was no longer burdened from the past guilt and shame, the white southerners found the channel to express their regional pride through country music. As a cultural product of the region, country music enjoyed an unprecedented popularity throughout the nation. The country songs about regional and "redneck" pride are abundant in the seventies. "Redneck Mother," "Long-Haired Rednecks," "Rednecks, white Socks, and Blue Ribbon Beer," "I believe the South is Gonna Rise Again," and "If the South Would Have Won" are but a few examples. This new country attitude, with an overt "redneck rebellion," according to historian Jefferson Cowie, was recasting American political iconography in the early seventies. "The tensions between, on the one hand, a longing for roots and tradition, and on the other, the maelstrom of modernity," he contended, gave country music "an appealingly rebellious yet conservative political identity for America's modern white working class" (170). Since "Redneck" identity had become chic, many affluent upper-middle class and middle class people living in the Sunbelt, who were not "redneck" by birth, adopted the term as a position of resisting high taxes,

government welfare programs, liberals, racial integration, and the feminist movement. This phenomenon in the seventies was what Roger Shattuck called "Reddening of America."

By 1972, the year of the Eagles' first album, the South's status as nation's economic, political, and cultural problem had begun to decline (Mather, 30). Meanwhile, most of the idealism of the sixties had failed. The U.S.'s involvement in the Vietnam War showed no sign of ending. Conservative president Richard Nixon was about to be re-elected. The backlash against busing, tax, and social welfare was under way. By the early seventies, the link between radical politics and rock music, Peter Doggett concluded, had vanished (157). Country-rock's final commercial form in the late stage, represented by the Eagles, reflects this "Reddening of America" trend. It reflects the trend of retreating into "reactionary individualism" that followed on the bankruptcy of the collectivism of the sixties. The Band's employment of Western tropes exemplified this aspect. As Robert Christgau commented, the Eagles "bespeaks not roots but a lack of them, so that in the end the product is suave and synthetic-brilliant, but false" (Christgau, 120).

As country music enjoyed more cross-over success in the seventies, it became less noticeable or controversial, enabling country-rockers to employ the "Southern" sound without necessarily being "Southern." The Eagles, like their fellow country-rockers, learned Southern culture and country music second-hand; the Eagles successfully blended country, folk, adult pop, and bluegrass into soft rock. Echoing the "southernization" of American popular culture, the band borrowed the sound of country music for their purposes. It was this more elusive, laid-back quality that the Eagles and their contemporaries developed based on their own perceptions of country music, perceptions that drew power from the power shift from the Northeast to the Southern tier of the nation taking place in American society, as the South's economic status had improved greatly,

along with media portrayals of it (Mather). The Eagles borrowed heavily from the sound of the white South: country and bluegrass while relying on the image of the mythical cowboy/West. The "redneck" may not carry its derogatory connotation as it used to, but in the eyes of the country-rock major audience---the leftish counterculture, that term was still not so favorable. The Western image, the symbol of individual freedom, on the other hand, allowed them to present the suburban middle-class version of country without sounding "hick" or "hillbilly." This explains why many country-rockers were more inclined to rely on the Western persona to express the "country" side country rock. For instance, the cover of Bob Dylan's 1969 album *Nashville Skyline* featured him tipping a small cowboy hat. The bandmates of the Flying Burrito Brothers led by Gram Parsons adopted Nudie suits that dominated the traditional country & western performers (see Hank Williams Sr., Buck Owens, and Porter Wagoner). Poco eventually took a horseshoe as its logo, and its album covers carried a horse motif throughout much of the seventies. This adaptation of the Western image by countercultural country rockers was so skillful, for it allowed them to deflect the unwanted association such as racism, since such imagery pointed the audience away from the South and toward a mythologized West that was being more acceptable by more Americans. Cowboys enjoyed widespread popularity and cultural legibility while rednecks and hillbillies of the Southeast seemed more problematic.

The "Western" side of country music can be traced back to the twenties when Mississippi native Jimmie Rodgers adopted the cowboy attire and yodeling about the rambling way of outlaw life. In the thirties, the country music industry has employed the cowboy persona at the time when Hollywood Western movies were popular and the whole nation was mired in poverty during the Depression. The cowboy, on the other hand, unrestrained by the regiments of urban life,

symbolized freedom and independence. The popularity of Western movies inspired many country performers and their managers to seek alternatives to the old hillbilly image. Cowboy attire was decidedly more romantic than any kind of clothing associated with rural plain folk life. Since then, country singers borrowed heavily from popular culture to fashion their versions of the cowboy myth, but then reinforced and recycled that myth through their music, performing attire, and life-styles (Malone, 94).

In the seventies, the emerging idea of the "Sunbelt" region provided the opportunity for the possibility of marriage of the "country" and "western" again. Similar to the country-rock movement, 70s Austin-based outlaw country movement and Southern rock scene mostly active in the Deep South also adopted the cowboy image. Outlaw country movement was a reaction against a conservative Nashville establishment. If Nashville-based mainstream country singers embraced redneck and Southern pride, Austin-based outlaw country musicians relied upon the rugged individualism of cowboy culture. According to Bill Malone, outlaw country musicians "flaunted a hedonistic life-style and rebel persona, and seized upon the cowboy as the most usable symbol to define and embody the free-spirited musical culture that was busily building" (Malone, 111-112). The artful transferring of "redneck chic" of the Deep South into "Cowboy chic" of the Southwest further turned away from the negative racist image of country music in the early seventies. The movement helped improve the image of country music and injected country music with more progressive elements. As Jim Cobb pointed out when he analyzed the country songs' glorification of the South in the seventies: "Country music's failure to apologize for the Southern past was mitigated to some extent by a fusion of the southeastern "deep South" with the "Cowboy South" of the Southwest," he explained. "[for] any knowledgeable listener knew better than to expect an

apology from Willie Nelson or Waylon Jennings" (83-84).

Similarly, Southern-rockers from the Deep South borrowed heavily from the Western cowboy image. Southern rock musicians generally deliberately downplayed the country element in their music, instead based it heavily upon rock "n" roll and black music in the South from blues, soul, to jazz. It was the music of reconciliation as well. The movement was a cultural formation that sought to bridge the racial gap and redefine the southern male identity to include racial and politically progressive qualities. Most Southern rock bands appeared on the popular music landscape almost at the same period as the country rock phenomenon. Having lived and grown up in the South during the Civil Rights era, southern rock musicians played an important role in confronting and reconciling these very personal and bitter issues important to all Southerners. Southern rock bands attempted to redefine Southern white male identity in the post-Civil Rights South by demonstrating racially and politically progressive ideals (Keith, 1). To achieve this end, they not only infused traditional forms of black music such as blues, soul, and R&B into their British-invasion influenced rock music, but also adopted the cowboy images, from Dickey Betts of Allman Brothers, Ronnie Van Zandt of Lynyrd Skynyrd, to Toy Caldwell of Marshall Tucker Band. In so doing, they created a musical melting pot in the hope of having a color-blind "New South." As music journalist Chet Flippo gave credit to the first southern rock band, the Allman Brothers Band, for "returning a sense of worth to the South" (Malone, 144)

The California-based the Eagles apparently capitalized upon Western tropes for many of its albums deal with outlaws, desperados, and were set in the Southwest. For instance, the band members pose as gunfighters in jeans, brown shirts, cowboy hat and holsters in the album cover of *Desperado.* The album was a concept album. It deals with Old West outlaws--- the Doolin Dalton

gang, who robbed the banks in the nineteenth century. After the Dalton brothers robbed two banks, they got caught in a shoot-out (Doggett, 168). The cover photo is a reenactment of the capture of the Dalton gang. In the song “Outlaw Man,” the songwriter fantasized himself as an outlaw man and overtly flaunted their swaggering masculinity. “I am an outlaw, I was born an outlaw's son /the highway is my legacy …/Well, don' you know me /I'm the man who won /Woman don't try to love me /Don't try to understand /A life upon the road is the life of an outlaw man. “Sexist and condescending, it exposed all the arrogance which linked all these would-be cowboy heroes” (169). Robert Christgau harshly criticized the Eagles’ music: ‘With its barstool-macho equation of gunslinger and guitarschlonger, its on-the-road misogyny, its playing-card metaphors, and its paucity of decent songs, this soundtrack to an imaginary Sam Peckinpah movie is "concept" at its most mindless”.

While the band heavily capitalized upon the image of the West, their music had little to do with cowboy music. Instead, their music was an intermarriage of the country/ bluegrass sound of the Southeastern region and the Western landscape. They frequently added the bluegrass banjo in their early albums, mixing with the singer-songwriter sensibility and soft-rock sound to project an easy-going feeling. For instance, their early song “Take It Easy” captured the sense of personal and romantic freedom, with the protagonist “runnin’ down the road tryin’ to loosen my load” (Malone, 119). The lines “I've got seven women on my mind/ Four that wanna own me/two that wanna stone me/ one that says she's a friend of mine” read like selling Californian dream by a bunch of the newly-assimilated Californians (The Eagles members were Californians by adoption), who “swallowed every frame of those beach movies which promised beautiful airheads in bikinis for every boy” (Doggett, 156). The song’s most obvious link with country music is the instrument of

the banjo and the country-style guitar licks. The adaptation of the traditional Southern instrument the banjo was worthy of analysis. Since the playing of the banjo definitely requires virtuosity (especially three-finger bluegrass style), one could argue that the band tried to demonstrate their masterful musicianship. What is more, it embodies the broadened concept the "Sunbelt" region (Mather, 39). This song was a perfect illustration of the marriage of the West and South. The song was set in Southwest Arizona, yet the sound of banjo reminded us that the music came form the Southeast. The banjo in American popular culture carries some backward hillbilly image, and sometimes it could even sound terrifying as in the 1972 film *Deliverance* (it was also one of few 70s Hollywood films that portrayed the South in a more negative light). Yet in this song, the sound of Southern backwoods did not sound frightening anymore; it was mixed perfectly with the image of the wide-open space of Southwest. It so doing, it blurred the distinction between the South and the West. The Eagles successfully employed the country/ bluegrass' sounding into good feeling to project a laid-back, hedonistic and easy-going middle-class lifestyle.

The Old West easily morphed into imagery of Southern California as an epitome of the American dream, myths of western expansion, and rugged individualism, lending a contemporary cultural significance to the music (32). The mythical West offered the Eagles a way to reject mainstream culture by emphasizing the highly selective themes such as individual freedom, American exceptionalism, and nature while at the same time benefiting from it (male and racial privilege).

One of the most conspicuous tropes of country music employed by the Eagles was the theme of "rambling." Country music historian Bill C. Malone explains, "Historically, rambling has been an intensely masculine preoccupation, with the unbridled desire for freedom at its core."

Rambling reflects the desire of breaking off from the social convention. In the context of traditional rural southern culture, the rambling metaphor means to rebel against Southern evangelicalism. It shows the hedonistic side of country music. Deeply rooted in rural southern culture, the worldview of country music embraces both sin and salvation; it grew out of both churches and honky-tonks. Many country singers personified the hedonism/Puritanism dichotomy. It embraced the contradiction that is inherent in the lives of rural southern working class. For instance, in many of Willie Nelson's concerts, he often starts with "Whiskey River (Take My Mind)" and ends with classic hymn "Amazing Grace"; Ira Louvin simultaneously celebrates the certainty of Christian life in "I Love This Christian Life" while embracing the bottle in "Bottom of the Bottle"; Hank Williams also sang about "honky-tonkin'" on Saturday night, and later became "Born again" Christian in "I Saw the Light". In the Eagles' music, nonetheless, there are many "Saturday nights" but the "Sunday Morning" is gone. As they stated in their song "Saturday Night": "Whatever happened to Saturday night/Findin' a sweetheart and holdin' her tight?"… "Whatever happened to Saturday night/ Choosin' a friend and loosin' a fight." The song "Chug All Night" took us to a barroom with booze, loud band, dancing, and carousing with women. "I believe we could chug all night I believe we could hug all night /the band is loose and the groove /is right you're so much woman/ I believe we could chug all night." After all, their rock star status and more socially tolerant Southern California setting enable them not to feel so guilty about their hedonistic lifestyle.

Besides, Barbara Ching points out that the ramblers in country music are often down-and-outs (256). The rambling characters in country songs are more often hobos, drifters, cowboys, truckers, and fugitives; they could be on their way to search for a job or simply a place to

stay; a temporary getaway from the regimentation of daily routine is also common in country music. They may try to have some fun or good time but they do not forget to make a living. For instance, Merle Haggard in “Working Man’s Blues” discusses how sometimes he wandered into some tavern and even had the urge to catch a train and “bum around,” but the reality of having to raise his family stopped him from running away and he got back to work. However, in the Eagles’ music, a sense of “Peaceful Easy Feeling” without any material concern deflected from traditional country. In “Peaceful Easy Feeling,” the protagonist thinks about running away with his lover tonight and sleeping with her in the desert “with a billion stars around.” As country music expanded its fan base, more and more non-southern and suburban middle-class fans and musicians could appropriate country music for their own purposes.

Other than rambling, what made the Eagles significantly differ from country music is “flight” imagery. According to Barbara Ching, flight is a dominant theme of country rock. It represented “the counterculture’s supposed transcendence of the drab demands of middle America” (255-56). As the Eagles expressed in “Twenty One”: “Twenty-one and strong as I can be/I know what freedom means to me, I might spend my life upon the road/ Just tryin' to add to what I know, They say a man should have a stock and trade /But me, I'll find another way.” The song “Earlybird” exemplified this “flight” image. It began as an interesting comparison between earlybird and the eagles. The earlybird has to work early in the morning, “so his life don't fade away,” but “he's got no time for flying in the breeze,” and “time is passing by him and he just can't get enough /He'll tell you all is well when /all is really going wrong,” then the writer concludes, “the Earlybird will wake one day/ and find his life is gone.” On the other hand, “High up on his own, and “flies alone, and he is free.” In the end, the protagonist clearly identified with the eagles’

lifestyle, for "You know I like to lay in bed /and sleep out in the sun /Reading books and playing crazy music just for fun." The earlybird easily reminds us the working class people, while eagles are likely to be the prototype of the bourgeois represented by the band itself. The protagonist thinks he is like eagles in that they both can do what they please and be free from the concern of daily economic struggle. The song epitomized what Jefferson Cowie called "The condescension of the seventies bourgeois dream of escaping the grit of daily life," and "they obtained their freedom from the daily materialistic struggle in favor of escapism." It might be true that the Eagles could freely explore their unlimited self and experiment with alternative lifestyles without being worried about starvation; but working class people like Merle Haggard could have told them that "the working man still had rent to pay" (Doggett, 161).

Not all country rockers took the Eagles' music seriously. As Gram Parsons said in a 1973 interview, "The Eagles and some others I would call bubblegum. . . . It's got too much sugar in it. Life is tougher than they make it out to be (27). Rock critic Christigau went further to criticize that "The Eagles are the ultimate in California dreaming, a fantasy of fulfillment that has been made real only in the hip upper-middle-class suburbs…the Eagles put the truth aside and pay only lip service to the struggle that real fulfillment involves (269).

It should be fair to point out that the Eagles' music was not simply conservative and pro-establishment. They inherited the counterculture's idea of rebellion but their approach of rebellion was more individualistic, and it was not unlike the individualism manifested in country music. The elements in the Eagles' music, be it Western outlaws or the "flight" imagery, echo Tom Wolfe's Me Decade----"an era of narcissism, selfishness, personal rather than political awareness" (Schulman, 145). The idea first appeared in Tom Wolfe's famous essay "Me Decade." Tom Wolfe

pointed out that many middle-class Americans in the seventies tended to be obsessed with self-exploration and liberation via seeking new identities and new sources of awareness. They rejected the grim routine of the workday, breaking off from "conventional society, from family, neighborhood and community and creating worlds of their own" (79). The idea of seeking meaning of life through pure individualism was further reinforced by Richard Bach's "Jonathan Livingstone Seagull." The character Jonathan Living Stone Seagull was not satisfied with being the same as the other seagulls that "don't bother to learn more than how to get from shore to food and back again," he exclaims. "For this gull, though, it was not eating that mattered but flight. More than anything else, Jonathan Living Seagull loved to fly."

The line "high up on his own, the eagles flies alone in "Earlybird" seems to echo Jonathan Seagull's rejection of material struggle in favor of spiritual awakening. The band Eagles represents the newly emerging more affluent middle-class living in the Sunbelt region. Many of their songs describe the experiences of a middle-class subject, as Mather put it, "one privileged enough to take it easy and whose major problems in life are romantic" (44). At the same time, they were bored with the monotonous and homogeneous upper-middle class lifestyle in favor of "flight." The middle class fantasy of escapism and arbitrary appropriation of American iconography such as outlaw man and cowboy exemplified the trend. The mythic landscape of the Southwest provided the channel for middle-class escapism and fantasy. For instance, the cover of their first self-titled album paints a typical Southwestern landscape: the dusty sky, underneath is a shadowed desert cactus. Inside the album, the band members sit around a campfire in the wilderness, passing joints. Peter Doggett interpreted the symbolism of the image as: "The desert suggested loneliness; hippies were a symbol of community; the band's name encompassed America." He then agued. "For

anyone mourning the lost ideals, searching for somewhere to belong, this was a way back home (160).

The ascendency of the South enables the band to incorporate the country music sound and remain hip. Given the social status of the group members as rock stars, they certainly had more access to wealth, groupies, and fame than country musicians who usually came from humble backgrounds. Erving Goffman describes the hegemonic male type in a twentieth-century American context as "a young, white, urban, northern, heterosexual, Protestant, father, with college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight, and height, and a recent record in sports" (Quoted, Kimmel, 11). Country-rockers like the Eagles were apparently closer to this male model than traditional country musicians, for the dominant group set up the dominant idea of masculinity, which is defined against marginalized masculinities "othered" and emasculated by class and race (Connell, 75-77). Other than shared wanderlust and fascination with outlaws, the traditional "hard country" elements that express the working-class males' frustration and marginality such as hard-living, lost love, betrayal, and sense of failure were purged from the Eagles' music. They were replaced by relaxed easy mind, romantic love, mellowness, and confidence. After all, the image of wandering through the Wild West or "fly high up on the sky" was much more appealing and romantic than low-down drunkards in country music. Last, if white musicians' performing of the blues during the sixties came from the "love and theft," then country-rockers like the Eagles' borrowing of country music, in the words of Doggett, shows "love, theft, and a certain contempt" (106-107). After their first two albums of country-rock experiments, the Eagles finally left country rock for more commercially-lucrative arena rock and hard rock.

CONCLUSION

Grace Hale studied white American middle class' tendency to romanticize the outsiders in her *A Nation of Outsiders*. She argues that the white middle class imagined people living on the margins, without economic or political or social privilege, possessing some essential cultural values missing among other Americans (1-3). For many middle-class country-rockers who are outside country music culture, country music has indeed served as a key medium for the romance. Yet most country-rockers were free from the minstrel-like mimicking. In other words, they did not try to emulate the lyrics and performance of traditional country artists. Instead, their middle-class outsider status allowed them to appropriate country music on their own terms. Gram Parsons' lyrical sensitivity, The Band's class-conscious themes, and the Eagles' fantasy of "flight" are but a few examples. In so doing, they at least successfully achieved their artistic sense of "reconciliation": the blending of rock, folk with country music, if not in a political sense. The country-rockers' main purpose was to introduce country music to the counterculture peers; their ignorance of country music core-audience--- a working-class group might affect their influence among blue collar whites, yet their legacy is also profound. For instance, Emmylou Harris, a former urban folkie and a protégé of Gram Parsons, achieved huge commercial success in seventies after Parsons' death. Her success was largely indebted to Gram Parsons' approach: combining hard country sound with singer-songwriter sophistication and rock attitude while avoiding hard-country working-class themes.

Many artists of the nineties' alternative country movement sought the alliance between

punk-rock and country music---- two seemingly distant music genres yet shared one thing in common: they both valued emotional honesty above all virtues. Many of them were also middle-class outsiders. To them, "Country connotes an unindustrialized territory free from the pressure to consume and inhabited by uncorrupted rustics whose time isn't money and whose labor produces food and folk art rather than exchange value" (Ching and Fox, 6, 9). They acknowledged the authenticity and sincerity of country music while defining their version of country music as "cerebral, devoid of anything hick." For instance, alternative country artist Steve Earle justified his adoption of New York as his home by explaining: "I'd like to be able to see any movie and get any book and see good theater." Lucinda Williams, daughter of poet Miller Williams, claimed that she "grew up around a bunch of poets…Charles Bukowski, e.e. cummings, and all that stuff" (Ching and Fox, 14). As Geoffrey Himes states: 'They looked for an alternative-country music that could accommodate their new middle-class tastes in folk-music realism, rock-and-roll aggression and singer-songwriter irony (Himes, 248). This take on country music was not unlike country-rockers' take on country music in the late sixties and seventies. They disregarded the reality that country music had modern and urban origins and were in favor of their own interpretation so that they could authenticate their own music as "authentic, anti-commercial, and sincere."

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Education

08/2012 ~ 05/2014: University of Mississippi Southern Studies M.A.

10/2009 ~ 12/2011: Shanghai International Studies University Major: English Language and literature

09/2002 ~ 07/2005: Shanghai Jiguang College Major: Landscape Design

Work Experience

10/2008~ 10/2011 Teaching Activity Specialist, Talk English Club

Worked in CRM department

Supervised and evaluated foreign teachers' teaching result

Organized activities for club members and explore the potential clients to meet the sales goals

Communicated with club members and offered them constructive advice on learning English

10/2006 ~ 08/2008: Hotel Reservation Consultant, Shanghai Nan Peng Airline Company

Worked in customer service department

Dealt with requests from sales offices and selected appropriate hotels according to sales

requirements

Provided suitable hotel alternatives when required

Dealt with cancellations, amendments, book outs and complaints

Completed administration tasks such as inputting of rates, message distributions, fax, distributions or any other duties as and when required

03/2006 ~ 2006/8: Asia Travel

Worked in customer service department

Help both domestic and foreign customers book the hotels throughout China

Dealt with cancellations, amendments, book outs and complaints