PERCEPTIONS OF RURAL AMERICA: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF PROTEST ELEMENTS IN POPULAR COUNTRY MUSIC

by

NATALEE DENISE SINGLETON

CYNDIA RYAN, COMMITTEE CHAIR
KYLE GRIMES
BRUCE MCCOMISKEY
KAREN UTZ

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NATALEE DENISE SINGLETON

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH COMPOSITION AND RHETORIC

ABSTRACT

As rural America evolves from its agrarian roots, an onslaught of economic, geographic, and sociopolitical changes affect cultural tensions. During every significant cultural shift in America, pop culture and mass media outlets have been there to interpret it, commentate on it, and sometimes provoke it. Country music is no exception. A rhetorical analysis of popular contemporary country music shows that country artists are seeking expression on the topics of rural identity, cultural endangerment, and methods of cultural sustention. An exploration of the lyrical and musical elements of select songs, examined against scholarly studies of the protest and propaganda music of America’s most significant sociopolitical climates, opens doors for a re-evaluation of the boundaries of protest and propaganda. The findings in this study also call for a reconsideration of the sociopolitical composition of country music genre and the mores of rural culture itself. The interplay between country artists, their audiences, and the medium and method of message delivery provides an opportunity for the delicate task of deciphering and purposing the various perceptions presented in compositions concerning rural life.
DEDICATION

To my father, O.D. Singleton:
a good steward of the earth and a small town, Southern man
March 3, 1948 – April 3, 2009
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, Cynthia Ryan, for her infinite insight and patience. I give special thanks to my husband, Jimmy Hill, for his support throughout this process and for standing by me under Magic City lights and starlit country skies.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

When the sun set on the nineteenth-century’s Appalachian mountains, Midwest prairies, and Southern farms and deltas, Old World settlers who spent the sunlight hours carving out their existence in the wild countryside gathered hearthside to pick out the day’s hardships on the stings of guitars, fiddles, banjos and mandolins. Both for catharsis and communication, their oral storytelling tradition took on musical transformation, and by night, their days of sweat and toil transcended into art. Finding worthy all ranking of themes—both the highly philosophical and the most ordinary pleasures, from the common man’s fight for the American dream, through the trails of heartache, to the redemptive grace of a Sunday morning—these musicians painted America’s heartbeat with lyrics and melodies. In this manner, the roots of country music sprawled throughout America’s rural soil for the next 200 years.

The history of country music’s conception supports the contentions of people like sociologist Jock MacKay, who claims it is populist music by nature and has been a champion of the American working-class since its beginning (285). MacKay explains that although it never received the same upper-class nod as other folk genres, such as jazz or blues, but received a branding as extreme poor taste, the derision may have served to bolster group
solidarity for those "adherents to the country music ethic" and reassured them of the genre’s honesty and authenticity (285). Originally, country music was designed to speak to the life and times of its audience. Written and sung by members of the audiences’ same culture and class, it was classified as a "for the people, by the people" type of genre, or "communal music" (MacKay 285). For this reason, the exclusivity of this type of genre would have been the perfect kind of safe haven for its writers, performers and audiences, as a sounding board for their collective hopes and fears and certainly their qualms with the rest of the world, and in a semi-private setting… since, presumably, no one else was listening. Country music writers and performers no longer all belong to the same culture and class as their listeners; however, some remnants of this exclusivity may still hold true today. The songs that I chose for this study were ones that I understood as poignantly communicating the cultural issues surrounding modern rural identity, pride and sustention. These songs are predominantly written and sung by artists who do hail from rural areas. Moreover, most all of these singers and songwriters have given interviews in which they profess their identification with rural land and culture, and often express a desire for its sustention. And as my research will show, rural Americans have cause for protest or propaganda speech, whether they employ it or not.

The entertainment industry may arguably be the best place for messages of protest and propaganda. Stunning visual effects in a movie may peak the interests of viewers who may be intellectually opposed to its other content. Music, in particular, as a form of poetry, allows an excellent format for the artistic communication of topical sentiment and obscure messages; however, this also means creative interpretation risks obscurity of the message, and rendering it a catchy, yet topically-void ditty. But when the message is understood,
music may also serve as a better means of communicating a purposeful, perhaps even didactic, vessel that can galvanize its audience.

Songwriters have used their music to express the entire spectrum of human emotion. On the political front, they have used it both to promote and denounce wars. Music is rare in its ability to provide its listeners with an intellectual and spiritual experience. It can alter moods, provoke or discourage levels of thought, and, ostensibly, alter opinions. Songwriters may choose to reinforce or rebel against societal and cultural norms, and with the assertion of their opinions, they implore listeners to join in.

While some listeners may experience moments of cognitive dissonance upon discovering less agreeable meanings behind the lyrics of a song they find melodically enjoyable, others who support the message may feel unified and uplifted. In this way, songs have the ability to become anthems of sorts to the ethics and sentiments of their audiences. "We Shall Overcome" serves as a powerful example in its contributions to the Civil Rights Movement.

There is confusion, even amongst scholars and musicians, as to what classifies as protest or propaganda music. Sociologist R. Serge Denisoff’s research (discussed in Chapter 1) requires that propaganda music bring awareness of "deviant" sentiment and present some solution to the implied problem (Social Change 21). Denisoff’s study of protest and propaganda music explains that it does not need to fit neatly into a boxed definition, but can range from highly aggressive and straightforward to rather passive and obscure (Sing a Song). Some forms are meant to attract new support, while others are designed to galvanize existing supporters (Sing a Song 60). Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, in their book Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century, explore the interplay of the music with the lyrics in protest and propaganda songs. They suggest that
these songs are purposefully contrived using certain tunes, rhythms, and lyrical phrases pulled from familiar musical traditions, such as secular and spiritual sounds, to achieve their goals (43). A county artist, for example, might pull from the melodies of traditional gospel hymns or the slowly-executed, heavily-country-accented vocals of Hank Williams. The right use of such devices could even put an audience at ease while the performer delivers a message of propaganda.

Compared to many popular forms of protest and propaganda, such as pro-life posters or anti-war documentaries, the music and lyrics of the six country songs explored in this study do not carry the same aggressive punch; they weave a more subtle seduction. Using rhetorical devices such as word choice, tone (in both the lyrics and instrumental tunes), and catchy hooks, the singer and writer are able to gently persuade, evoke a sense of nostalgia, and boost morale (Eyerman and Jamison 163).

Within many country music lyrics, listeners can explore the life and times of America’s working-class and navigate the contemporary dynamics of rural and working-class culture. Presently, exploration of rural identity and cultural angst appears popular amongst country music’s writers and performers. Discussion of rural identity and rural-versus-urban cultural disparities exists among the lyrics of many American country music hits at this time. As a personal observer, I believe this may be a strong growing trend within the genre.

Rascal Flatt’s Billboard Hot Country Songs chart number one hit in 2004, "Mayberry," delivers a distressing message about the spread of urbanity. The lyrics "So naturally, we have more natural disasters/ From the strain of a fast pace" blame this transition for more than just personal emotional woes, but for distressing balance of the earth as well. The third stanza, however, makes the most poignant urban-versus-rural distinctions:
That’s when I climb up here on this mountain
To look through God’s window
Now I can’t fly
But I got two feet
to get me high up here
Above the noise and city streets
My worries disappear
I miss Mayberry

This particular excerpt offers a relatively simple dichotomy of geography, population levels, and lifestyle pace. If the lyrics could have been interpreted as simply reactionary against stress or modernity, this stanza adds a new dimension of tension between the urban and the rural. The narrator must retreat to the rural mountains to find sanctuary from the city. Then he decries the disappearance of Mayberry, the quintessential American small town from *The Andy Griffith Show*. The significance of using Mayberry, a fictional hamlet from a legendary television series, is that not only is this town familiar to most listeners, it is a harmonious combination of positive small town stereotypes. This helps create an uncomplicated hero-versus-villain scenario between the rural and urban environments.

A Billboard Hot Country Songs number one hit, from March of 2010, "A Little More Country Than That," written by Rory Lee Feek, Wynn Varble, and Don Poythress, and performed by Easton Corbin, poses an interesting assumption about country culture. In the following lyrics, a young man discusses his marriage proposal: "But this ring ain’t something that I mean to give you and then take back/ I’m a little more country than that." These lyrics take the definition of country far from the standard classifications of geography and population density. This suggests that certain ethical, cultural characteristics are native to country people. Presumably, what is most country is also most dependable and trustworthy. Listeners can then infer that anything pulling away from country, toward its foil (in geographical and population-related context this would mean moving from more rural to
more urban) may be associated with increasingly less dependability and trustworthiness. An analytical listener may take this to mean that people with country attributes are steadfast while those with urban (the literal geographical and statistical opposite of country) values are not. To make this leap, however, we would have to assume the songwriters are connecting the literal, statistical definitions with their cultural one.

Through their music, country music artists have offered their audience an ethical definition for a term that is otherwise only defined by simple geography. Sociologists’ studies into cultural interactions between urban and rural Americans (discussed more in Chapter 1) indicate that rural people have legitimate reasons for wishing to redefine what is country and/or rural in their own terms. For example, Kim Donehower, Charlotte Hogg and Eileen E. Schell, in their book *Rural Literacies*, speak of the detriment that rural people have suffered as a result of allowing urban scholars and artists to define their moral, cultural and intellectual identity. In response to centuries of outsiders creating and perpetuating negative stereotypes of rural people, they address the importance of exploring definitions of "rural" and "rural literacies" according to rural citizens themselves, rather than outside, urban observers (3). As 14 of 18 of the songwriters and performers of the songs in this study hail from geographically-designated rural areas or small towns, Donehower, Hogg, and Schell’s study offers potential motivation for why these songs are so preoccupied with urban and rural dichotomies and definitions of what is rural.

Generally, this study is more concerned with the cultural connotations of words rather than their literal definitions. While the songs themselves will provide the insight into popular definitions of these terms according to country music artists, it might be helpful to review general usage of the key vocabulary within this study. In accordance with the connotation of
common usage, the words "country" and "rural" are culturally interchangeable. In geographical terms, both may refer to regions with low population density or the lifestyle and culture associated with living in these regions. The inhabitants of these areas traditionally gained their income primarily from agriculture or in some other fashion from the land. While the term "country" traditionally carries a connotation of open landscapes primarily used for farming or ranching, rural refers to any wild, lowly-populated area (of any sort of region or characteristics— from woodlands to desert) (Cromartie). Statistically, rural regions are defined by the United States Department of Agriculture as areas with population densities between one and 999 people per square mile and by the 2002 Farm Bill (P.L. 107-171, Sec. 6020) as an area other than a town with a population of greater than 50,000 inhabitants or the urbanized areas contiguous to such a town. Again, while these are suitable working geographic, economic or political definitions, a cultural definition may be connected to population numbers but is not contingent upon them. Dictionary.com defines rural as: of, pertaining to, or characteristic of the country, country life, or country people; rustic: rural tranquility. Such a subjective, metaphysical definition is more appropriate to this study, as it relies on ideas and perception over tangible qualities. With this understanding, this study will use the terms country and rural as interchangeably.

In regards to the terms "urban" and "city," I concede the validity of the Census Bureau’s definition of an urban area as a central city (and any suburbs) whose core population is equal to or greater than 50,000 with a population density of about 1,000 persons per square mile (census.gov). Therefore, the terms "city" and "urban" are similarly interchangeable as are "rural" and "country" in both in geographical and cultural context.
The use of the term "small town" is much more qualitative and subjective. While "rural" and "country" may be synonymous, particularly culturally, for the purposes of this study, "small town" denotes something just subtly different by primarily referring to the cultural attributes and social relationships within the town center. Rural citizens most likely conduct their business in the small town and may associate themselves with it. Also, the small town lifestyle may include many activities conducted in rural areas. Therefore, this paper recognizes that, culturally, the three terms are inextricably linked. Joseph Bensman and Arthur J. Vidich, in their book *Small Town in Mass Society: Class, Power and Religion in a Rural Community*, explain that small towns’ self-definition of themselves as country, rural and small town springs from a perception of their denizens (both the in-town and beyond-city-limits dwellers) as "plain folk" and fundamentally different from "city people" (30). The reasons for these classifications will be explored in greater detail in the literature review but it should be noted here that no unified agreement exists on the specific cultural qualities perceived as belonging to any of the above terms. A central concern of this study is to investigate what similarities and variances of these definitions can be found in select popular country music lyrics over the past decade.

Country music journalists and critics are beginning to take notice of presence of the theme of rural identity within popular country music, with varying degrees of approval. Jonathan Keefe, a critic for *Slant* magazine, denounced the theme as "an interminable series of rote lists of rural-ish points of reference that Nashville's unambitious go-to songwriters have been attempting to pass off as songs for the past few years." In regards to the presence of this theme in "A Little More Country Than That," Karli Justus, a journalist for the country music blog *The 9513*, gave the song a positive review for its melody, its nicely-integrated
pastoral nostalgia, and even for its straightforwardness, but dubbed its final verse "dangerously alienating." Like Schell’s comments, these critiques seem to imply a problem with oversimplification in definitions of country.

Through an analysis of six popular American country music songs on Billboard’s Hot Country Songs chart, I explore how their lyrics concerning rural life offer personal definitions of rural identity and set up similar rural and urban dichotomies. I argue that if the select songs analyzed from the presence of this theme should indeed classify as rebellion, it is crucial to consider, if only to speculate, the potential motivations from related social and cultural trends in mainstream American life. Furthermore, the manner in which these songwriters and performers intertwine lyrical and musical rhetorical strategies in the construction and delivery of these songs to communicate messages is significant, particularly when comparing the commonalities between these elements and the persuasive strategies of protest and propaganda music. Conclusions to these issues could lead to better insight into the dynamics of rural America’s social and cultural unrest. A more in-depth study of these songs in regards to how protest and propaganda music works to galvanize communities of people might reveal how pervasive this sentiment is among these songwriters. This study merely notes that scholars agree this is often a goal or by-product of protest music and if these songs fit the framework of that genre, the potential exists for them to share that relationship with community building; however, this study does not seek to explore that relationship or prove it with any certainty.

Definitely, I argue that the theme of rural identity and "otherness" presently exists within select samples of popular American country music at this time. Further, I suggest that these songwriters and performers use some rhetorical strategies of protest and propaganda to
express to their audience passionate messages about rural pride and urge sustainability. This study not only seeks to further dissolve the boundaries of protest and propaganda music’s commonly-associated antiwar fences, it also delves into a genre of music and a form of sociopolitical rhetoric sparsely explored by researchers of popular music. While rural rhetorics and literacies have been a subject of study, music has not been equally examined. Therefore, its application to rhetorical studies in the composition classroom could prove beneficial for qualifying and interpreting sources of rural rhetoric and examining musical texts.
There is ample research on the general history of the country music genre, music’s persuasive strategies, and the protest and propaganda music of the Civil Rights and anti-Vietnam war movements, but very little exists on fringe classifications of protest or the influence of music on societies outside of social movements. Researchers do not shy away from analyzing mass media and music as a socializing force, however. Song lyrics have been recognized as an aspect of popular culture capable of reinforcing, forming or guiding the values and attitudes of their audiences (Jaret and Boles 257). Most researchers agree that this power is bidirectional, with the audience both influencing and being influenced by the lyrics (Jaret and Boles 256). Karen Saucier Lundy suggests that country music, although just as influential as any other form of music, is less studied for its influence on social behavior due to its cultural stigma (213). These findings regarding the cultural power of mass media (specifically music) reinforce my suggestion that the economic and cultural trends affecting rural life are credible as potential motivations for the existence within this genre of the theme of defining rural identity and rural-versus-urban dichotomies. Because these trends are credible catalysts, they are worthy of exploration.
COUNTRY MUSIC’S OVERARCHING THEMES

When a hillbilly sings… what he is singing is the hopes and prayers and dreams of what some call the common people. ~Hank Williams

In exploring country music’s present preoccupation with defining the rural and comparing it to the urban, it is sensible to begin with the very name of the genre: country music. Jock MacKay points out that the very title of the genre advertises it as music with a preference for the rural and small town way of life, for which we can take for granted an emphasis on clichéd associations such as simplicity, self-reliance, and communities of trustworthy family, friends, and neighbors (292). MacKay claims that country music depicts an ideal life as simple, humane, natural, and, most importantly, rural (292). To fully understand this genre’s current themes and their influences and impacts, it is beneficial to understand its history.

As mentioned previously, country music as a genre took its first breath in the rural regions of the southern United States (Smith 165). Statistically, southern states are still mentioned more than other states in country music lyrics and issues concerning rural life still dominate the genre’s thematic structure (Smith 165-166). This distinctively rural rhetoric is charged with the tension created between the flourishing urban society in America and its diminishing rural counterpart (Smith 166). It began as an outlet for expression of the everyday experiences of poor Southern whites, specifically; although today, research shows it speaks to and is listened to most often by America’s middle-class blue-collar workers (rather than the extremely impoverished or extremely affluent), and particularly those living and working in rural areas (Buckley 31). George H. Lewis, in his essay "Duellin’ values: Tension, Conflict and Contradiction in Country Music," notes that scholars who have analyzed
country music lyrics of the twentieth century list among their preoccupations steady themes and motifs of home and family, patriotism, work, love, liquor, and nostalgia for good old days (208). Lewis explains that country people’s relationship to the urbanization and modernization of America has always been and continues to be the central theme in country music, and reciprocally, assumedly a central concern to country music’s audience (219). Several scholars have made attempts to identify and classify the inherent themes of this genre. John Buckley does so succinctly, and what I think is all-inclusively, in regards to country music from the 1920’s through the mid nineties. Buckley determines the eight themes of country music to be as follows: satisfying love relationships, unsatisfactory love relationships, home and family and familial relationships, the country and rural life, work, individual worth, rugged individualism, and patriotism (24-33). Although artists present these themes in new ways and in new settings, they never fall off the thematic spectrum (25). The presence of these themes within the songs in this study supports his claim.

Analyzing country music lyrics is a delicate surgery for which its history and cultural influences must not be ignored, as the genre is not as simplistic as one might predict in relation to its value system. There is a difficult patchwork of ideology to navigate… perhaps as a result of its candid nature. Lewis claims that country music is riddled with tensions from changing social expectations, conflicts from the clashing perspectives of differently socialized people (particularly rural versus urban peoples), and contradictions in the form inconsistencies within a value pattern in the lyrics (209). This does not necessarily denote hypocrisy. In fact, Lewis claims these tensions, conflicts and contradictions add to the genre’s authenticity and reliability as a window to real culture, as these are, once again, the honest struggles of the "common man" (211). Although these dualities may result in, say, for
example, a love for home, family and a wild night life, country music’s core ideology reflects the traditional values of its agrarian roots (Lundy 213). Such holistic portrayals allow for ideological and behavioral variances within the scope of the common man narrative.

Even after the genre’s evolution from the linear storyline ballads of its eighteenth and nineteenth century infancy into the commercialized "hillbilly" radio music of the early twentieth century, it mixed with other musical genres only to tell the same story of the everyday life of Mountaineers, small farmers, craftspeople, laborers (Akenson 45). All of its artists, from Jimmy Rogers to the Carter family, and all of its audience were rural and poor (Akenson 46). Although country artists had always written and sung about the comparative advantages of farm versus city life, the social and technological changes beginning their surges in the ‘50s brought greater tensions to the country life and a louder voice to this theme (Lewis 208). The social upheaval of the ‘60s brought what Buckley refers to as a particular "shrillness never heard before [from the genre]" (30). The ‘70s brought the first blast of national popularity to country, and blossomed what is often pejoratively referred to as "countrypolitan" music (Jaret and Boles 258). Sung by the likes of Barbara Mandrell and Kenny Rogers, this new version of country took on pop rhythms and garnered crossover appeal (Jaret and Boles 258). This spawned the backlash known as the Outlaw Country rebellion, led by Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Johnny Cash, and Hank Williams Jr., and later the music of the neotraditionalists of the late ‘80s and the ‘90s, such as George Strait and Randy Travis (Jaret and Boles 258). These outlaws and neotraditionalists returned to themes, sounds, and story formats of early country (Jaret and Boles 258). Since then, there has been a tug-of-war between pop country and more traditional country styles. This can be
seen as an extension of the warring cultural influences on the genre: the mainstream urban and the marginalized rural.

What seems most significant is that throughout all of these stylistic shifts, one story reappears throughout the years and within all styles. The classic incarnation of the rural versus urban struggle is the saga of the country man displaced in the city, seeking economic opportunity, missing the mores and terrain of his homeland terribly, and finally returning to the bosom of his rural hearth and home (MacKay, Lewis, Smith, Jaret and Boles). Similarly, in the aforementioned Rascal Flatts’ song, "Mayberry," the narrator must flee the chaos of the city for the sanctuary of the rural mountains. The theme of asserting rural identity and the rural struggle against urbanization endures.

In 1994, Tony Scherman, another essayist, claims that modern integration of pop and soft rock into country music has left the whole genre out of touch with its original country roots and ignorant and apathetic of authentic country (55). He writes "Country music was born of the trauma of rural people’s adjustment to industrial society, but that fight has been fought…" (55). But has it been fought and the rural citizens surrendered? Popular country music lyrics over the past six years suggest otherwise. An obsession with defining and separating what is true country from what is urban and fake country fills contemporary lyrics. As a fan and conscientious observer, I would estimate that this sentiment of needing to save what is rural from some sort of encroachment by what is urban is just as popular and passion-filled a topic in country music as it was during the genre’s inception. In some ways, it has simply taken a new spin. There is still a sprinkling of songs like Montgomery Gentry’s "Daddy Won’t Sell the Farm" (2000) that tells the story of a farmer standing his ground against the “urban storm” of shopping malls and housing developments threatening to
envelop his farm, and Alan Jackson’s "I Still Like Bologna" (2009) that praises modern technology, so long as it does not infringe on the joy of the more important, natural pleasures of the country life. However, the modern battle in country music’s rural-versus-urban war appears to be less about physical encroachment and more about the social and cultural impacts of the changing times.

I have observed a heavy concentration of very popular songs focusing on rural cultural identity and unrest. My investigation into contemporary popular country music revealed that songs covering the theme of rural life and cultural identity and unrest not only exist, but are being created by country artists in greater numbers than I first speculated. Their rhetoric focuses on the preservation and sustenance of rural landscapes and lifestyles, on the unique attributes of rural lifestyle and values, and also on the dichotomy of rural life versus urban life. This is the new saga of the struggling and frustrated rural man and woman. I suggest that the lyrics actually rebel against and reject the mainstream by promoting rural lifestyles and values over their urban counterparts. This results in passionate, upbeat anthems to the progressively marginalized culture of rural America.

Such a pro-rural ideology would explain why popular country songs are so preoccupied with rural place names and imagery. MacKay contends that country music is more preoccupied with its artists’ regions of origin than any other musical genres (293). He explains that a strong pride of place is found in their lyrics (293). Rather than the most successful, bustling, economically lucrative regions, it seems to be the most remote, desolate and unemployed regions that evoke the strongest pride (MacKay 293). In the songs involved in this study, mainstream America’s worst stereotypes for these regions are embraced and praised by the artists as trophies of their cultural purity. This also brings into question
whether the songwriters are oversimplifying their own culture and the rural/urban divide and ignoring the diversity of various rural lifestyles. On the other hand, it also addresses the larger issue of whether or not the labeling of certain associations as clichéd or stereotypical affects their validity.

One might also argue that this intense loyalty to America’s rural regions and the broad lyrical attention to their characteristics are merely corporate-minded artists and producers pandering to the preferences of a market audience. Although song lyrics and their audiences have a duel-influence relationship, published interviews and autobiographies of country music’s writers and performers reveal the honesty behind their craft (Akenson 31). Most report living in rural southern regions and feeling most comfortable there, as opposed to in urban areas (Akenson 31). In fact, a great deal of the country music stars residing in Nashville choose to buy farms outside the city instead (Akenson 31). Charlie Daniels has been quoted saying that even if he was given a million dollars a year to live tax-free in a big city, he would refuse; "I’d be selling my soul to do it" he said (Akenson 31). Alan Jackson admits to drawing from his own past when writing "Small Town Southern Man." He told Country Weekly magazine, "Wherever you go, there are rural people that are working for a living and raising families. They all have the same qualities and goals as a small town Southern man" (Horner 14). Of the 18 writers and performers of the songs in this study, 14 grew up on rural farms and in small towns. As I will explore and explain in this study, the inspiration they pull from their rural upbringings is evident in their songwriting, selections, and performances. While Jackson’s statement overreaches in its assumption that all rural people share the same lifestyles and qualities, it is evident that he speaks from his own experience of rural life and what he has personally observed as being the norms of that
culture. This study analyzes how Jackson and his fellow country artists interpret the rural and seek to communicate their perceptions and experiences concerning this topic and connect with those of their audiences.

Since research reveals the country music genre is traditionally populist in nature and reflective of lived experiences, it is sensible to assume the lyrical theme I have identified in popular American country music is connected to and possibly a response to the economic and cultural trends researchers have identified in rural America and the changing dichotomy between urban and rural cultures. Bill C. Malone believes country music reflects the mores, values, and struggles of its audience in such a way that it serves not only as a mirror for their life, but a way of life itself (Malone Country Music USA 359-61). Under this assumption, it might help to analyze more in depth the issues affecting rural lands and citizens in order to draw possible motivations for certain rhetorical strategies. What are the specific catalysts and to what extent are these lyrics a response to them are other questions this study addresses.

RURAL AMERICA’S STRUGGLES

No matter how urban our life, our bodies live by farming; we come from the Earth and return to it, and so we live in agriculture as we live in flesh… To live at the expense of the source of life is obviously suicidal. ~Wendell Berry

Since the most pressing issues facing a society are likely to have an impact on the themes expressed in its art, connections can be made between the roots of this lyrical theme in popular country music and the economic and cultural changes in rural life. The quote above
from Wendell Berry comes from one of his many nonfiction works on the detriments of the loss of family farms in America.

The nation’s evolution from small to corporate farming, the growth of urban sprawl, and the urbanization, modernization, and globalization of America are major factors affecting the land, economy, and society of its small towns and rural regions. One may even perceive them as direct or indirect threats to the existence of small towns and rural communities and the sustentation of rural and small town culture. Jennifer Sumner, in her research into the sustainability of rural communities, points out that although globalization has been powerfully devastating for many communities around the world, rural ones are the most sensitive to its impacts due to their low population numbers, isolation, and lack of resources as compared to urban communities (3). As technology and globalization bring an end to farming’s days of supporting America’s economy, it also brings an end to rural life (Kelsohn preface). The two are inextricably linked. Farms become fewer and larger; the large ones root out the small, and the arms of urban and suburban communities stretch out into the countryside (Kelsohn 25). In 1790, the U.S. was primarily agricultural: in 1880, half of the country farmed; by 1920, only a third of the country farmed (Kelsohn 25). But it was not until recent decades that American agriculture has made the leap from threatened and vulnerable to critically endangered.

When the agriculture boom in the early ‘70s was followed by a bust in 1977, rural hardships were catastrophic and, with the growth of technology and global economic initiatives, rural areas have been in decline (Danbom 253-254, 262). Both modern, commodity, and grassroots movements sprang up to aid farmers, such as the American Agricultural Movement that organized farmers for protests and tractorcades, although strikes
were a financial impossibility for independent farmers (Danbom 264). In the ‘80s, government programs like Payment-In-Kind and the Conservation Reserve Program actually paid farmers to take their land out of production, and large-scale farmers were helped over small-scale farmers (Danbom 266). In the twenty-first century, issues such as the growth of fewer and larger farms, shifts in production toward supply chains, environmental pressures from urban and suburban interests in agricultural production practices, competition from global markets and changing food consumption patterns, continue to plague and destroy independent farmers (Kelsohn 18). Danbom explains it best as he says that over the course of time "farm people had gone from majority, to minority, to curiosity. Even in the countryside farmers were becoming anomalous" (266). With motivations such as these, rural citizens may rightfully feel threatened and possess a desire to assert their presence and identity.

The aspect having the biggest impact on rural communities today is the prevalence of large, corporate farms and decline of independent ones and the small businesses that serviced them (Kelsohn 25). Michael Bosc explains that the presence of corporate farms does not sustain small communities because this is contingent upon population size in an area, not the number of acres farmed (Bosc 55). The old saying "when you scratch a farmer, the rest of the community bleeds" stresses the interconnectivity of small towns to agriculture. The death of agriculture in an area often produces a domino effect, closing schools, churches and local business and the local tax base with it, as Bosc puts it "like a combine through a cornfield," with an average of every five to seven farms taking one local business with them (Bosc 52). Jacqueline Edmondson, in her book *Prairie Town: Redefining Rural Life in the Age of Globalization*, highlights the government’s international trade policies and subsidy
programs that unfairly favor large, prosperous farms as a primary reason why America’s food growers are going hungry themselves (24). These detrimental forces culminate in what Michael Jacobsen, professor of social work at University of Iowa in the ‘80s, termed the "rural ghetto," impoverished pockets of unemployment and despair (Davidson 52). As of 2002, there are 316 farming-dependent counties (where 20% or more of economy is farming) in the U.S., while in the majority of rural areas only 8% of the workforce now farms (Kelsohn 22). From 1970 to 2006, employment from agriculture in U.S. dropped from 15% to 7% (Brown and Kandel 76). Communities are losing other historic sources of employment, such as manufacturing, due to outsourcing to low-wage workers overseas (Brown and Kandel 76, Kelsohn 18). Others are being kept afloat by retail trade, service, sales, and those that can be used as commuter towns, retirement towns or as outdoor sporting locales have a stronger chance of survival (Brown and Kandel 76 and 97, Kelsohn 18). In short, others like Jacobsen saw the bigger picture of the farm crisis as a rural community crisis.

The Nexus of Place, Purpose and Identity

Frustration, fear, and desperation grew in rural areas. The decline in agriculture and the small business that served them is shifting a once resourceful, entrepreneurial rural America to one of mostly wage-earning, manufacturing, and service sector employees (Kelsohn 25). This has a detrimental psychological effect on rural citizens. Danbom explains the emotional distinction of farming as lifestyle and culture rather than merely career, "It is unfortunate when anyone loses a job or business, but a farm is also a home, often put together painstakingly over several generations. Thus, losing one’s farm is losing one’s home, and its
loss frequently represents a betrayal not only of one’s children but of one’s parents and grandparents as well” (262). Osha Davidson recalls that in the onslaught of the farm crisis, small town Americans "feel they are going down the tube, that neither the government nor anyone else in high-tech America gives a damn" (52). This spawned hate groups and led to alcoholism, nervous breakdowns, and suicides (Dandom 264, Bosc 56). Just as the country songs of the ‘70s and ‘80s expressed the cultural tension aroused by rural citizens moving to the cities for employment opportunities, the influx of urban and suburban residents to rural and small towns creates a similar kind of tension, as many rural areas have now become cultural collision zones.

The most undeniable, visual manifestation of the urban conquering of rural America is the loss of agricultural and sparsely populated land each year to urban development. The modern phenomenon known as urban sprawl brings housing developments, shopping centers and fast food chains into areas predominately run by small, private, specialized businesses. The National Resources Inventory records that about 2.2 million acres of land were developed between 1992 and 2002 alone. Although many rural communities are being sustained by this influx of economic growth by urban commuters, retirement migration, and natural-amenity-related growth, the interplay between these new neighbors can be strained, as neighbors with differing values and lifestyle expectations attempt to cohabitate the same countryside (Brown and Kandel 17).

With fluctuating economic status and new population demographics, the cultural fabric of rural America changed, and continues to change. What once was the heart of American culture has now become an increasingly marginalized subculture. Danbom explains that although economic survival is a priority for farmers and rural citizens alike, since the ‘80s,
they have been just as concerned about preserving rural culture (268). Although most enjoy the daily benefits of technology and have no desire to return to a pre-electricity era by any means, they could not view the relinquishment of certain aspects of rural life as a fair trade (Danbom 268). There is a tension-filled battle to modernize while remaining culturally traditional. Eric Ramirez-Ferrero suggests that while these people are not fundamentally opposed to technology or capitalism, as they utilize both, they are displeased with the rapid industrialization and bureaucratization of the modern era and the way it has affected the agricultural sector (168). The growth of these has been at the expense of the traditional social and cultural community-building activities of rural and small towns (Ramirez-Ferrero 169). For example, rural citizens may view television and cinema as forces threatening to eliminate the motivation to spend quality time outdoors or to hold town social events (Ramirez-Ferrero 170). Technological advancements in farm equipment eliminate the need for families to farm together, thus transforming the family-farming lifestyle into simply the patriarch’s career (Ramirez-Ferrero 170). These notions may be both misled and problematic; however, whether or not these fears are justified is less important for the purposes of this study than the perception’s popularity and power among rural Americans.

The consumption of rural culture by the dominant modern urban culture could evoke the type of resistant and defensive posturing I have noticed in popular country music lyrics. Ferrero believes that rural citizens have internalized their struggles, causing "depression-individual and collective, crisis in families- violence and alcoholism, loss of relationships, health, land, inheritance, tradition, status, self-esteem, vocation, lifestyle, culture, symbols, hope, faith in the system" (174). He also believes that the majority of farmers have remained silent in their struggle, as he believes is characteristic of vulnerable men (as the majority of
farms are male) (176). But it is not the nature of all men to react with silence. I believe rural America’s male music artists are encapsulating this sentiment in various levels of unassuming to aggressive lyrics. Although this theme is not exclusive to male country artists (Miranda Lambert’s "Famous in a Small Town" and Kelli Pickler’s "Small Town Girl" both did well on the charts), my analysis will detail indicators of agrarian fidelity and territorial, alpha-male aggression that might explain why so many male country songwriters and performers are broaching the topic of rural American culture.

*Melding Myth and Reality*

The culture to which many of these rural citizens so passionately cling may be, in fact, only part reality and part myth. Jean Richardson believes this agrarian myth of pastoral landscapes and neighborly families rooted in pure values is still alive and well in America (8). For urban America’s limited understanding of rural realities, Richardson simply blames nostalgic, over-romanticized media portrayals (8); however, I believe the concept of rural cultural reality is more complexly interwoven within the rural psyche. Although the demonization of urban areas as social and moral wastelands and the anglicizing of rural areas flattens and oversimplifies reality, this polarized view of urban and rural flourishes, perhaps for its simplicity, perhaps because people enjoy it. While the human penchant for polarization damages authenticity, the practice of classifying and romanticizing can be alluring. This rhetoric may even have the power to overinflate the attributes of these areas in the minds and hearts of actual rural residents. For example, whether or not they take this view of rural America as gospel, many people develop such an attachment to rural areas that they suffer the economic hard times in order to remain living in this environment. In an
attempt to cling to their homeland and culture, these people adapt by, ironically, altering their
lifestyles: adopting do-it-yourself mentalities, utilizing trade skills and temp work during
periods of unemployment, and supplementing regular food sources with hunting, fishing and
gardening during hard times (Brown and England 326-328). The rhetoric of the popular
country music analyzed in this study includes elements that speak to these specific conditions
and mentalities.

In regards to the popular comprehension of the definition of rural and the characteristics
of rurality, depictions are varied, often hazy, and frequently contradictory. Sociologists agree
that no international consensus on these definitions currently exists (Brown and Kandel 11).
The studies reviewed here have certainly established that the concept of rurality has to do
with more than quantitative data and also defines itself by qualitative factors such as
sociological and private psychological perceptions. The realities of a region’s relationship to
employment from the land (farming, mining, forestry, etc), open landscapes, and low-density
habitation and development certainly affect classification, but do not always trump emotional
qualifications (Richardson 11-12). In this way, the stereotypical polarities of rural and urban
associations have infiltrated the American psyche to an extent that alters logical
classifications of people and places. Simply put: perception is everything. This leads to
anomalies of statistically urban or urban fringe settlements not being classified this way by
residents or visitors due to social, communal "feelings of ruralness" and the presence of
perceived rural values (Richardson 4). This equation operates inversely for statistically
micro-politian but socially urban communities as well (Richardson 12). This phenomena is
most common in regards to statistically urban settlements nestled within a nest of rural ones
(think: a county seat that serves as a hub for several statistically rural surrounding regions)
Certainly, with constant economic, geographic and demographic changes in these areas, the new boundaries and definitions of rurality are more intriguing than ever before.

**Rhetoric of Sustention**

Analyzing media depictions, such as those of country music, is an effective means of decoding rural sentiment, as they are one example of what Small Town, America is saying about itself. In *Rural Literacies*, Donehower, Hogg, and Schell speak of rural America’s confusion, struggle for identity, and scramble for sustainability in the whirlpool of modern assaults. To get a foothold to brace for battle, societies must first understand the nature of their identity and allegiance; rural citizens must understand who they are and what they are struggling to sustain. For this, Donehower, Hogg, and Schell address the importance of investigating definitions of rural and rural literacies as defined by rural citizens themselves, rather than outside, urban observers (3). Rather than allow rural America to be defined by the Census Bureau, that defines it by its opposite—urban, or by politicians’ and the news media’s oversimplified red-versus-blue-state jargon that ignores the pluralistic, diversified elements of rural culture, Donehower, Hogg, and Schell suggest letting rural America speak for itself (2). A comparison of the terminology of and about rural America, as observed by Donehower, Hogg, Schell, and several other scholars, reveals evolving definitions. This provides great insight into the potential psychological viewpoints belonging to the artists or the audience of the songs in this study.

For instance, changing conditions are affecting how rural Americans are viewing their neighbors, themselves, and the land on which they live. Jacqueline Edmundson, in her
monograph *Prairie Town*, relates sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies’ definitions of community and society to the changing dynamics in rural America (63). Tonnies describes "community" as organic, intimate and rooted in traditions and mores, while "society" is mechanical, transitory public life that tends to trend toward superficiality (Edmundson 63). He feels that communities naturally flourished in agriculture-based rural areas and society is stronger in industrial, urban areas (Edmundson 63). When anthropologist Eric Ramirez-Ferrero conducted his field research on the restructuring of rural communities, he determined that technology has severely altered the concept of community for rural residents (170). He argues that farm technology reduces community size by eliminating the need for hiring extra hands and that televisions have reduced people’s need and desire to organize the type of gatherings that nurture community life (170). According to Tonnies’ classifications, Ramirez-Ferrero’s observations indicate that as rural areas modernize, their community systems are evolving into smaller versions of urban societies.

Other common designations are changing also. Ramirez-Ferrero also noticed that, in the minds of rural citizens and farmers, pressures from competition from the expanding global economy are replacing the typical definition of "land" as home and heritage with its more modern definition as a tool or commodity for economic enterprise (170). He believes this type of competition fuels an individualism that could also play a part in the decay of the rural community (170). Farming’s physical, temporal and emotional requirements and the inability to disconnect its social and economic ties have always made it a lifestyle more than a career, and to some, even a culture unto itself. But modern economic concerns are altering associations with farming as well. A finance-driven businessman is replacing the nostalgic image of the humble steward of the land supporting his family and community (Higbee 79,
Raminez-Ferrero 170). Terms associated with rural people in general have always been an ambiguous mix—ranging from defenders of morality to redneck barbarians. In the wake of economic changes, America has now also come to know rural citizens as exporters and victims: exporters of their natural resources, commodities, services, and educated youth and victims of unrestrained globalization (Raminez-Ferrero 170). The three schools of thought on what to do about the cultural crisis in rural America are to assimilate rural people culturally; to integrate them physically by abandoning rural and small towns; or to strive toward the separation and preservation of rural culture: including customs, language, oral histories and historical particularities (69).

Despite the marginal success of the first and second options above (cultural and physical urbanization) at assimilating rural Americans into the majority culture, differences still exist. Bolstered by the urban-versus-rural divide, the general perception of rural people and places as "other" persists (Donehower, Hogg, and Schell 15-16). Whether this works to rural America’s detriment or advantage appears to depend on how and to what extent both rural Americans and outsiders embrace it. Both Edmundson and Donehower, Hogg, and Schell claim that those wishing to preserve the uniqueness of rural culture from the norming process of cultural imperialism will have to adopt a rhetoric of sustainability (106-107, 23-24). This might involve rural America defining itself by its own terminology, utilizing traditional rather than neoliberal sentiments, avoiding typical rural stereotypes and advocating regional pride and cultural separateness (106-107, 23-24). Donehower, Hogg, and Schell emphatically warn against the dangers of accepting popular stereotypes and perpetuating the idea of rural America as homogenous and monolithic (30 and 45-54). They believe that exposure to the multi-dimensional aspects of rural life and culture will foster clearer
understanding to eliminate continued stigmatization from urban and suburban Americans and will help policy makers to make better-educated political and economic decisions regarding rural regions (30). Meanwhile, as the majority of the mass media appears torn in its depictions of rural Americans and their struggles, rural America may be speaking up for itself, just as Edmundson and Donehower, Hogg, and Schell recommend.

I argue that the lyrics from the songs in this study offer an initial opportunity for observing an example of rural America defining itself, its struggles, opinions and aspirations. Although critics could argue that it does not since the music is produced by a major industry, the majority of the songwriters and performers of these specific songs hail from rural towns themselves and make no secret of their tendencies to pull inspiration from their own experiences. A song’s meaning surely begins with its writer. Should its performer be a second party, his or her selection of the song stems from one of two places: an emotional connection to the song and its message, or an unemotional, profit-driven intuition that the song will sell records. A songwriter holds the intellectual rights to a song from its conception and will then have it registered or recorded to secure this, although he or she the songwriter may sell the mechanical rights to producers and performers (Pollick). If a composer is also the publisher of the song, he or she may retain the mechanical rights in order to exercise more control over the song and the way the performer handles it (Pollick). Performers (especially those holding mechanical rights to a song) can affect song meaning through a myriad of style variances in tone, pitch, phrasing, rhythm, pace, and other elements of delivery (Shepherd 142). While there is a striking absence of scholarly research on why and how performers select songs (possibly because each performer’s selections are so subjective and individualized) common logic suggests that if the performer has a similar background,
lifestyle or views as the writer, with characteristics of these included in the lyrics, we can assume their interpretations of the song’s meaning are perhaps not identical, but similar.

Rural and small town America’s public personae ranges from the reviled backward hillbilly and redneck stigma, to a harmonious pastoral paradise harboring America’s last vestiges of community and moral fortitude. David L. Brown and Louis S. Swanson found that with the majority of America living in cities, most form opinions about rural America not from direct, personal experience but through popular media: literature, art and music (2). When we form our opinions through an entertainment medium, true nature may differ wildly from our perception, but that does not make the repercussions of these perceptions any less powerful. As major, top-selling artists within the music industry, and as rural and small town sons, the singers and songwriters in this study have the power to shape and redefine what is rural, country, and small town within the perception of mass audiences according to their own experiences and understanding. Steven A. Smith explains this influence as an intrinsic value of music due to its emotional nature (what he refers to as a connection to one’s soul) tapping in to listeners’ sense of identity through childhood memories and other personality-shaping experiences (172). Although more subtle and less sophisticated than other methods of influence, country music’s persuasive strategies can shape the nation’s perception of a region and that region’s own self-image. Despite expanding urbanization, Smith feels that country music can do as much as any medium of communication to maintain the distinctive values of rural America in the face of what he calls "oncoming cultural homogenization" (172). The economic and cultural issues affecting rural American life may certainly influence the intense present interplay within the urban-versus-rural debate dialog in the lyrics of popular country music; however, rather than speculating too wildly on the intent and
motivations of the artists, my primary concern is the mere context of the lyrics and music and their implications in relation to their historical and social positioning. Concerns about the artists’ backgrounds and motivations are secondary. In this study, I examine the rhetoric of six popular country music songs from the past six years for their treatment of the preservation and sustenance of rural landscapes and lifestyles, on the unique attributes of rural lifestyle and values, and also on the dichotomy of rural versus urban culture.

Each of these songs poses a definition of country. Most either openly assert or subtly imply a rural-urban dichotomy. The select songs for analysis include:

- "Small Town Southern Man" (2007) written and performed by Alan Jackson
- "Mayberry" (2004) written by Arlos Smith and performed by Rascal Flatts
- "Way Out Here" (2010) written by Josh Thompson, David Lee Murphy and Casey Beathard and performed by Josh Thompson
- "Small Town USA" (2009) written by Brian Maher, Justin Moore and Jeremy Stover and performed by Justin Moore
- "How ‘Bout You?" (2006) written by Brett Beavers, Eric Church, Brandon Church and performed by Eric Church

MUSIC AS PROPAGANDA AND PROTEST

The young were not loyal to flag, country or doctrine, but only to music.

~Frank Zappa, 1967

Musicians have utilized music’s strong persuasive capabilities to galvanize all types of groups. It has frightened political and religious leaders for centuries; Plato even called for its prohibition (Denisoff Sing a Song IX and 19 and Knupp 377). Over centuries, people have both demonized and ignored music’s persuasive capabilities, but its positive and powerful ability to affect people and fuse communities warrants attention. Eyerman and Jamison
believe music is at the heart of human culture and community (173). Because it is full of interpretive symbols and imagery, it can carry old traditions and rituals and convey multiple meanings through creative, pathos-driven compositions (Eyerman and Jamison 45-46). This allusive and interpretive nature may be the reason music reaches people on a passionate level that simple preaching cannot. Eyerman and Jamison say songs, for all their use of emotional appeal, are logical and rational at their core because they are purposefully contrived using tried methods of composition and performance (discussed in Chapter 2) to convey the shared ethics and emotions that bind listeners (and perhaps the artists also) to their respective cultures (161). In other words, they may be intellectually-contrived weapons of emotional manipulation.

Social movements are an excellent example of the power of musical rhetoric. A song used as an anthem for a social movement can articulate the commitment that solidifies members’ emotions and the movement’s ethical purpose and can have a strong effect on the movement’s longevity and direction (Eyerman and Jamison 161-162). Protest and propaganda music fit together well with social movements, although they do not need this association to retain their classification as protest or propaganda.

Protest often takes the shape of marches, strikes, riots, and picket lines. Notorious dictators used clever propaganda to garner the allegiance of millions. Despite certain negative associations, music as protest and propaganda also has a long history of advocating justice and equality. Every major movement in American history has been accompanied by its own brand of protest and propaganda songs. Denisoff defines propaganda music as songs "designed to communicate social, political, economic, ideological concepts, or total ideology, to the listener" (2-3). The very first propaganda songs were hymns that brought
congregations together and reinforced their religious beliefs (Denisoff *Social Change* 20). Essentially, propaganda songs are all variations of the same "us" versus "them" sentiment meant to propagate held beliefs (Denisoff *Social Change* 21). They may imply disapproval or objection of "them," but protest songs are more so the anthems of negative objection (Denisoff *Social Change* 21). Denisoff’s formal definition of a protest song is a socio-political statement that creates awareness of an issue and offers a solution that is against the status-quo; however, songs addressing social or political problems without offering solutions may be classified as protest songs designed for the already converted (26). Denisoff does not think that songs that are played on national radio stations and embraced by the masses qualify as protest because their popularity insinuates alignment with mass cultural opinion and the status quo (*Social Change* 35). I disagree that this popularity renders them incapable of non-conformist content and attitudes, as it often becomes popular to be progressive and buck tradition, and from these rebellions, new norms are formed. Furthermore, as the definitions of protest and propaganda do not classify them as strictly minority opinions, neither should Denisoff’s classification of protest and propaganda music limit itself to those borders.

Denisoff reports that the 60’s-era folk-style propaganda songs had one or more of these six primary goals: to arouse outside support for a social or political movement or ideology, reinforce values of current members, create and promote cohesion of members, recruit new members, invoke pro-active solutions to a real or imagined social phenomena, and call attention (usually emotionally) to a problem or discontent within a society (2-3). Denisoff organizes propaganda music into two camps: rhetorical and magnetic forms (*Social Change* 5). Magnetic songs recruit new members and create group solidarity for current ones, while
rhetorical songs only strive to describe some social issue (Denisoff Social Change 5-6). Rhetorical forms can also boost morale and create cohesion among members, but do not recruit new members (Denisoff Social Change 5-6). Rhetorical songs fit the definition of protest better because they are often negative and oppositional by nature (Denisoff Social Change 5). However, the lyrical content is not the sole determining factor in a song’s qualification as protest or propaganda.

A song’s melodic and rhythmic aspects can be just as instrumental in creating and conveying its message. While a simplified melody and rhythm aid the accentuation and clarity of vital lyrical text, the powerful energy and meaningful symbols of rock and jazz genres can be rebellion in and of themselves (Denisoff Social Change 2). Jazz, for instance, even when void of lyrics, conveys an ideology of rebellion in its very composition (Miller and Skipper 36). Jazz music’s bold, aggressive "squawks, screeches and moans" evoke militant and rebellious sentiment as they rebel against traditional styles of composition (Miller and Skipper 36). A rhetorical analysis therefore should not ignore the non-verbal messages and associations inherent within the musical composition.

The Civil Rights Movement’s protest songs also utilized both musical and lyrical elements in meaning making. The most influential song of the Civil Rights Movement, "We Shall Overcome," derived much of this influence from its origin as a black spiritual (Eyerman and Jamison 2). Martin Luther King, Jr. praised the lyrics for promoting strength in numbers and giving hope to activists (Denisoff Social Change 4). But the associations of the song’s history and melody were what allowed it to touch people on multiple levels of feeling, spirituality, and ideology (Eyerman and Jamison 2). The song was first used to advocate workers’ rights during the labor movement in the early twentieth century and then
repurposed for the civil rights cause in 1947, where it achieved highest acclaim (Eyerman and Jamison 3). Since then, its associations have allowed it to become an anthem for oppressed peoples around the world because it derives its value as protest from many other elements besides its lyrics alone (Eyerman and Jamison 3). It is reasonable to say, however, that protest music reached its heyday in the Vietnam-Era.

While protest and propaganda music covers the spectrum, from feminist to environmental movements, its most popular associations are with the anti-war movements. A history professor at the University of Texas, Jerome L. Rodnitsky, in his research on the Vietnam era of socially-and politically-ripe lyrics, "The Sixties between the Microgrooves," proclaims that the protest and propaganda music between the years 1963 and 1973 were inextricably tied to the social changes of the era (105). This is why historians often refer to it as "the Age of Protest" (Rodnitsky 119). These songs were pacifist and highly-critical of the Vietnam War and the politics of the older generation in power. They varied from specific lyrics such as those in Bob Dylan’s "Masters of War" and Phil Och’s "Draft Dodger Rag," to existential and vague lyrics with cross-over appeal to multiple movements, as in John Lennon’s "Imagine," Barry McGuire’s "Eve of Destruction," and Peter, Paul and Mary’s "If I Had a Hammer" (Rodnitsky 105-110). These songs and their hippy counter-culture spawned a conservative backlash exemplified in the country music of the time, such as Merle Haggard’s "Okie from Muskogee" and Ernest Tubb’s "America: love it or leave it," and other songs that supported the war effort, traditional values and lifestyles (Rodnitsky 112-113). I believe both the anti-war songs and the pro-war anti-protesters songs of the ‘60s era prove that popular music can merit progressive status as protest and propaganda.
Although protest songs are typically identified as promoters of social change, I believe the song selection for this thesis evokes an ethos and pathos in strong opposition to certain social changes in a similar manner to popular country music of the ‘60s conservative backlash. The songs in this study express dichotomies between misled urbanites and their virtuous rural counterparts that closely mirror the ones made by Haggard, Tubbs and their contemporaries. Obviously, this theme originated in popular country music long ago, and since sociologists and anthropologists qualified those hits as protest and propaganda, I suspected that the songs chosen for my study could as well. Through an investigation into the rhetorical strategies of popular protest and propaganda music from the Age of Protest and an analysis of how the songs I selected from contemporary popular country music utilize these methods, I will reveal how the various songs do or do not classify as protest or propaganda music. My conclusions will make a case for the expansion of popular conceptions of contemporary models of protest and propaganda music. This study also offers insight into the sociological discourse emerging from and about rural America through the lens of entertainment media.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing… In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be disentangled, nothing deciphered; the structure can be followed… at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning (Barthes 148).

In his essay "The Death of an Author," Roland Barthes conveys his musings on how critics’ preoccupation with authorship cripples literary study by confining interpretation within the walls of intention and closed explanations. I agree with Barthes, insofar as I also believe that once a text leaves the hands of its creator and enters those of its audience, a myriad of interpretations can be applied to a text. The opportunities are only limited by the imaginations of the audience members themselves. Debates such as this continue concerning to what extent an artist has control over the interpretation of his or her art and to what extent the audience controls the interpretation. Only direct interviews with artists can reveal their true intentions and it is difficult to measure a song’s full effect on its audience. I believe that music, as a form of art, is subjective by nature; however, to remove the author
completely, as Barthes insists all modern readers must do, is to declassify writing as a medium of communication, to strip all art (music included) of its communicative abilities. The power to communicate profound and complex meaning may be music’s strongest attribute. Prominent scholars of art and sociology such as Eyerman and Jamison contend that art, as exemplary action, is a form of communication that is both self-revelatory and political in its need for an audience to observe and react to its vision (172). This places music, and all elements involved in the building of cultures, under the classification of communicative action.

This study cannot and will not attempt to definitively identify the artists’ intentions behind these songs, nor will I claim to determine these songs’ effects on how or what their listeners believe. Instead, I will analyze the music and lyrics for prevalent themes, rhetorical tools and interpretive meanings and relate these findings to relevant issues in rural America. I will make inferences based on potentially connected social, political and economic motivations, songwriter interviews, and similarities to characteristics of protest and propaganda music.

Throughout this study, I focus on the following two central questions and extended considerations:

1- Through a combination of their lyrics and music, what perspectives do these songs communicate to listeners in regards to rural versus urban dichotomies and the definition of rural culture?

a- What insight does their treatment of these themes offer into America’s rural literacies?
2- How do the use of rhetorical elements and the potential messages created correspond to protest and propaganda music, as compared to the characteristics of 1960’s protest and propaganda music identified by Ralph Knupp?

a- What might this correspondence reveal about this genre’s contribution to the sociopolitical dialog of contemporary American life?

These lyrics and tunes incorporate propaganda strategies similar to those of protest music and selective, ritualized musical traditions in order to commentate on the current state of rural culture in America. In order to understand how they work, I will analyze the lyrics and music separately and then how they work together. Similarly, I will analyze each song individually and then consider them collectively as part of an ongoing conversation about America’s rural community within the country music community.

While it is possible to analyze the songs for their elements and even speculate on creative intent, sadly, there is a stark absence of listener data that prohibits this study from incorporating audience interpretation or message effectiveness into this discussion.

Central Research Questions

This study includes analysis of seven American country music songs released between 2004 and 2010 that deal with issues of rural American culture. Each of these songs ranked on Billboard’s Hot Country Songs chart. The analysis will examine both the songs’ lyrical and musical elements, so as not overlook the songs’ non-spoken communication medium.

As mentioned, this examination has two main concerns: 1) How do these songs’ music and lyrics treat the topic of rural culture, its definitions, and potential influences on and threats to this culture (including economic threats due to shifts in the global economy and
America’s political policies, cultural threats from the loss of small communities and rural cultures due to the technologically-driven growth of a mass "global tribe" pop culture, and geographical threats from the loss of land and resources due to urban sprawl) and 2) how do the definitions and dichotomies created and the delivery of these ideas fit the criteria of protest or propaganda music?

In order to meet the criteria for protest and propaganda, the songs must employ each of the following rhetorical strategies:

1) direct lyrical references to the theme (facts, events, conditions) or ambiguous inferences to the theme

2) persuasive appeals (lyrical or musical) to listeners’ experiences and social conditionings

3) reliance on pre-existing in-group loyalties

4) potential attempts either to galvanize existing beliefs or persuade to new ones

The analysis may show that the employment of these strategies on the treatment of these issues does not fall within the classification of traditional protest or propaganda music; however, it may still identify subjective undertones and intense preoccupations with these themes that may evidence partisan opinions.

As mentioned previously, the music and lyrics of these selected popular country music songs appear to employ elements of protest and propaganda music in order to create definitions of rural people and culture and often to create polarizing dichotomies of rural and urban characteristics and values. These songs may or may not do this in an attempt to label urban culture as an oppressive, malignant force. My findings will provide significant insight into why these songs may choose to embrace both negative and positive stereotypes of rural people and lifestyles. In order to better understand the essence of these strategies’
effects on the songs’ potential meanings as well as the complexities of the songs’ treatment of this theme, it is useful to separate the lyrics and music into separate categories for analysis.

It is important to note again that the songs selected for this study are merely a sample from the contemporary popular country music genre. Furthermore, they were not randomly selected. Because they were carefully selected, these songs all speak out about rural concerns and identity. Most were also written and/or performed by artists from rural areas who have been outspoken about their allegiance to rural land and culture. The objective of the study is not to determine whether certain themes are growing in popularity or changing ideologically within the country music genre. The objective is merely to identify that some popular country music artists are indeed engaging in discourse concerning the themes concerning rural identity and struggle, to analyze how they are doing so, and to investigate why they are doing so at this time.

A combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis will examine the techniques of the lyrics and music and what kind of messages they could be sending. Following Ralph Knupp’s philosophy concerning studies into protest music strategies, mine will also begin with a microscopic analysis of the protest songs and move to generalizations of the movement and inferences concerning social issues surrounding the songs. This should allow the songs more liberty to speak for themselves, while making secondary all speculation into contributing factors.
Textual/Lyrical Analysis

This study looks at seven popular country music songs covering a seven-year span between 2004-2010. These songs include lyrical and musical elements including lyrics, rhythms, tones (pitches and timbers), and melodies. I analyzed the lyrical and musical components of these songs separately in order to dissect their treatment of rural culture and definitions in comparison to urban culture and then make a holistic analysis of how these elements work together to form a message of propaganda or protest.

Music’s ability to be both accessible and esoteric makes a powerful yet sensitive vehicle for protest and propaganda. While it can reach audiences in a deeply-moving manner, artists must use it carefully and avoid over-camouflaging their meaning. Irvine and Kirkpatrick, in their essay "The Music Form in Rhetorical Exchange," explain that when messages are "couched in music… listeners do not ordinarily anticipate persuasion and, as a result, [may not be] aware of its complete implications" (273). They identify seven variables affecting the communication and interpretation of a song’s message. These include 1) the ethical reputation of the source, 2) the nature of the instrument source, 3) the lyrical structure, 4) the melodic structure, 5) the chord structure and progression, 6) the structure of the communicative situation, and 7) the rhythm of the work (Irvine and Kirkpatrick 273). Even after the songs are divided into the two basic mediums—lyrics and music—the elements are further broken down into separate classifications of lyrics and parts of music, in which the above-listed qualities are identified and analyzed as well.
Although this type of analysis provides a dissection of the anatomy of these songs, it does not provide a framework for an examination of their utilization of the rhetorical techniques of protest or propaganda music. To discover such characteristics within the song lyrics, I employ the methods outlined in the protest music research of Ralph Knupp by analyzing each song for what he refers to as its "attitudinal profile" (381). This is created through polarities (negative versus positive, active versus reflective, critical versus praising, etc.) (Knupp 381-382). Knupp utilized quantitative methods to identify individual examples of each category he wished to examine and then analyzed these in content of the characteristics associated with their respective social movements (in his case, the Labor Movement and the Civil Rights Movement). From his research, Knupp identified the following heuristic generalizations of protest music:

1- Its effectiveness or usability is enhanced by a high degree of ambiguity.
2- It is effective when it appeals to a listener’s experience and social conditionings.
3- It often relies on pre-existent in-group loyalties for its persuasive power.

This provides a guidepost for determining the presence of protest or propaganda rhetoric. For the purposes of this study, I will employ the same classifications he used to categorize and analyze protest lyrics: emotive, simplistic and reactive. In order to cater all aspects of this specific theme to the fullest, it is useful to expand on these categories to include the examination of definitions and dichotomies. This ensures qualitative analysis and comprehensive coverage is given to the characteristics each song ascribes to rural America and the comparisons it draws to its counterparts. Qualitative research is also
provided through songwriter interviews and an analytical examination of the songs in context with the specific theme and in relation to the contemporary socio-political climate.

Expressive

Expressive lyrics communicate personal identification and multiple references to the speaker, listeners and opposition. Richard Gregg, in his essay "The Ego-Function of the Rhetoric of Protest," names the ability to stroke protest leaders’ egos as a key function of protest rhetoric (74). According to his theory, the communicator (singer/songwriter) of protest rhetoric directs the message primarily at himself, resulting in a message that is by greater percentage catharsis than communication (74). Under this theology, listeners who share the speaker’s ego-concerns will consequently feel spoken to.

In his work on the rhetorical dimensions of protest music, Knupp gives several reasons why protest and propaganda songs adopt this rhetorical strategy, including the desire of the "good guys" to praise themselves and bash their opponents, and for this alliance to assert the validity and importance of its existence and its distinctiveness from other cultures or societies, making these songs primarily in-group messages (387). Knupp goes on to explain that this ego-feeding and stroking results in songs imbued with repetitive self-references (387). He promotes that the songs’ level of personal expressiveness can be determined simply by counting the use of the personal pronouns I, me, you, we and us (387). Eric Church’s lyrics in "How ‘Bout You" include lines such as "I think we’re the chosen few," as the narrator speaks about his rural brethren. This line includes one personal pronoun, "I," referencing the singer/narrator, and another, "we," referencing his allied group. This line zings with pride and ego-feeding bravado, as Church incorporates the
biblical reference to God’s chosen people to imply that he and his country brethren have received the Divine seal of approval, if you will.

Expressive lyrics, once pinpointed and examined, will indicate to what level these country music songs employ protest music’s persuasive strategy of expressive, personalized, inter-focused language. This should provide a good measure of the songs’ levels of intensity, immediacy, and identification.

_Simplistic_

Simplistic lyrics persuade by remaining highly generalized, action-oriented, and present-focused. This type of lyric is more emotive than cerebral, more active than ideological. Knupp explains that a simplistic portrayal of the world cleverly allows a protest song to avoid boring and lengthy debates of specific political policies or historic events (386). Active, simple, accessible lyrics keep the listener engaged and entertained without feeling burdened or uncomfortably challenged by reality’s complexities. Josh Thompson, David Lee Murphy, and Casey Beathard’s hit "Way Out Here" includes several examples of simplistic lyrics, such as the lines: "We won't take a dime if we ain't earned it. When it comes to weight, brother we pull our own." Thompson, Murphy, and Beathard draw a portrait of the type of people living "way out here" in rural areas. Not only do they keep the action present tense to draw you into their ongoing saga, this portrayal of rural life utilizes the naivety concerning the complexities of social relations that Knupp discusses. In other words, in these instances these songwriters describe America’s rural citizenry as a monolithic tribe of honest, hard-working folks who refuse charity. This sweeping
generalization ignores the individual and the myriad of other values and lifestyles existing within rural America. It creates a simplistic hero-versus-villain dichotomy.

Simplistic lyrics are equally unlikely to discuss complexities of the opposing force. When the lyrics do mention or allude to the oppressive force or event, they usually confine themselves to similar "ambiguities, sweeping assertions and panoramic criticisms" in order to avoid muddling the line between the good guys and bad guys (Knupp 385-386). Providing this clarity, strength and confidence of opinion also enhances the song’s emotional power, while maintaining a present orientation that increases the song’s relevance and sense of intimacy and urgency (Knupp 385-386). Knupp explains the reasoning behind these techniques as an "attempt to evoke consciousness while circumventing intellectual activity" (387).

When attempting to locate these elements within actual lyrics, one may measure a song’s temporal orientation simply by counting references to the past, present or future actions or events. A count and analysis of the forthright human action (marching, driving, fighting, etc.) versus mental reflection (thinking, planning, evaluating, etc.) should reveal the song’s motivational potential for protest as well as its depth of intellectual concern.

Reactive

Reactive lyrics advance sentiments of criticism or praise regarding the song’s protagonists and antagonists. A very simple line of logic explains why these elements of criticism and praise are vital to protest and propaganda songs: movements require an adversary in order to warrant their existence and must engage in active, negative discourse against said adversary in order to maintain the existence (or at least the apparent existence)
of this enemy (Knupp 383). Sensibly, there is no need to spread propaganda if there is no perceived problem, anxiety, societal deficiency or other such oppressive force against which to protest.

While these lyrics are designed to share the artist’s reaction to all positive and negative components of a given problematic relationship, most protest songs concentrate on the opponent and are therefore more negative and critical (Knupp 383). So protest songs are likely heavily negative because they are primarily concerned with giving voice to a problem and spreading awareness about it rather than solving it (Knupp 383).

Creating an index of a song’s positive and negative sentiments is the first step in uncovering its interpretation of the problematic relationship, the current societal order, and the status of the movement. The second step involves an analysis of these sentiments in context. Favorable evaluations may include phrases such as "solidarity forever" and "a better day is on the way." Negative judgments may sound more like "impeach the president" or "times are tough." In "How ‘Bout You," Eric Church protests the nation’s current treatment of the working class with the lines: "Yeah, I wish Uncle Sam would give a damn/ About the man who's collar's blue." The negative, opponent-focused criticism in these reactive lyrics reveal Church’s apparent distaste for the present government-citizen relations.

*Definition and Dichotomy*

Through a mix of qualitative and quantitative analysis, I search for instances where the songs attempt to list characteristics of the rural and instances where they attempt to compare these attributes to those of the urban and perhaps identify each as a protagonistic
or antagonistic force. When the songs go so far as to engage in identifying an opposition, the source of their trouble, it is useful to analyze how they criticize and attack this adversary. Language that is polarizing and alienating plays a key role in forming the songs’ messages of propaganda and protest. The following lyrics from Luke Bryan’s lyrics in "What Country Is" give a succinct, specific qualification for what is "country": "It ain't a jacked up truck that's never seen a pasture. It's cars pulling over for a no-cab tractor… That’s what country is." The definition and dichotomy presented here draw a vivid line between authentic and imposture representations of "country" and provide insight into the artist’s position on the contemporary confusions surrounding rural culture.

Musical Analysis

Debate over music’s cultural and personal impact tends to turn folkloric concerning its almost mystical power over the human soul. Contemporary researchers are even delving into its physical and psychological healing abilities. In *Philosophy of the Arts: An Introduction to Aesthetics*, Gordon Graham proposes that since composers have, over the years, developed ways of prompting ideas of objects and feelings, that music is indeed a valid and versatile form of communication (88). Barbara Crowe, in her book *Music and Soulmaking*, even suggests that music possibly preceded language and, due to this versatility and complexity, actually transcends it (165). Ludwig Von Beethoven was once quoted as saying "music is a higher revelation than all wisdom and philosophy." Although, rather than getting carried away with popular, romantic ideas, such as subscribing to the notion of music as universal language, Graham argues that the music of individual cultures
possesses specialized, in-group meanings and heuristics (88). Music is therefore not universal, but specially-tailored to each culture.

It has been said that music has the power to emotionally transport you to another place and time. If this is true, it makes sense that a song may connect itself to older messages and events by incorporating a familiar melody from a past hit. Eyerman and Jamison contend that musical traditions are rich with imbedded social, cultural and political messages (39). They emphasize the presence of musical traditions not just as a part of an emotional heritage, but as a modern, ongoing, cohesive agent in identity-making and community-making (172-173). In other words, music, like clothes and dialect, contributes to an individual’s personal, subjective identity and groups’ collective identities (Eyerman and Jamison 30, 35). While they concede that these communities may be partially imagined, they are no less real in respect to their psychological, social and political impact (173). Since culturally significant meanings can be both intrinsic to and cryptically "couched" in music, as Irvine and Kirkpatrick discuss, it becomes crucial to examine a song’s musical elements just as thoroughly as its lyrical texts. This study dissects the seven popular country songs for each of the following components and the choice of instrumentation used to create them:

*Rhythm*

Rhythm is the orderly flow of music (Hoffer 9). This is made up of the beat, meter and tempo (Hoffer 9). The beat is the pulse, often created by a drum (Hoffer 9). Meter is formed by grouping the beats into a pattern (Hoffer 9). The tempo is the speed of these
beats (Hoffer 11). For the purposes of this study, the tempos are qualified using their common Italian monikers, rather than by metronome.

*Tone (dynamics and timber)*

The dynamics of a piece of music are the levels of loudness, and are measured in decibels (Hoffer 23). Music’s tone quality is referred to as "timber" (Hoffer 23). This is often referred to as its "color" and may be equated to the use of color in a painting (Hoffer 23). Each instrument possesses its own timber and different instruments playing pitches in concert create different timbers (Hoffer 23). These classifications are made based on an unfixed, aesthetic quality. Tone color is often described in varying terms such as brassy, strident, warm, mellow, resonant, flat, etc.

*Melody*

These are distinguished by the pitch—the high and low sounds—of the music (Hoffer 15). These are made by the vibrations of the vocal chords or the strings or reeds of instruments (Hoffer 15). A group of pitches that works cohesively together forms what is known as the melody (Hoffer 15). This definition is based on aesthetic feeling; the pitches must "seem" to naturally belong together in a group (Hoffer 15). A harmony, on the other hand, is several pitches sounded in unison to complement each other (Hoffer 19). Another common usage for melody is the term "tune." This is the most memorable part of music, and often the part most tied to emotion (Hoffer 15). Consequently, melody holds the key for a songwriter to move an audience by pulling from musical traditions in its history to tap into its collective memory.
When the songwriter or performer chooses a rhythm, tone, melody or instrumentation that pulls from musical tradition, it adds meaning to the song’s message by tapping into the historical associations with that tradition. For example, a song with lyrics lamenting the loss of authenticity in modern country music may pull from early styles in the genre, such as the simple, three-beat rhythm, the use of stringed instruments used less frequently in modern country like the banjo or dobro, and a thicker Southern drawl in the vocals. This imbues the song with early country music traditions and keeps the musical content congruent with the lyrics. The traditional musical form may evoke within its listeners nostalgic feelings for "purer" times in the genre’s past.

Sellnow refers to music’s communication of such emotional content (as opposed to the conceptual content of language) as "nondiscursive symbolism" (117). While these symbols can be communicated from the artist to the listener, Sellnow distinguishes that music creates only an "illusion of life"; merely mimicking the human heartbeat, voice modulation, and emotional dynamics, music can simulate various levels of joy, rage, despair, nervousness, etc. (117). According to this definition, music can represent feelings, but not cause them. While this severely underrates music’s ability to serve as a vehicle for expressing emotion and to stir anew within the soul authentic emotion, Sellnow’s work does point to the subjectivity of meaning within musical interpretation. This makes clear communication elusive and concrete analysis impossible. For this reason, I examine the meanings of the lyrics and music separately and then determine if the findings are compatible when viewed holistically.

This study could potentially reveal significant information concerning current construction of cultural themes present within this genre. Country music is America’s most
popular radio format (Arbitron 14). The genre’s range of influence includes national yearly album sales in the 40 millions and a nationwide radio following of about 77 million listeners a week (BusinessWire, Arbitron 15), an exploration of its pertinent themes and communication techniques should be valuable. Hopefully it will shed light on the genre’s contribution to the present cultural conversation in America. Findings concerning the selected songs’ qualification for inclusion in the canon of protest and propaganda rhetoric should provide listeners with an idea of what types and levels of socio-political content and didactism to expect when they tune in to country radio.
“Homeboy”

The song lyrics of "Homeboy," written by Eric Church and Casey Beathard and performed by Church, while primarily anecdotal in nature, present a bold perspective on urban and rural cultural disparities in contemporary times and how they influence and affect these cultures' members. The song begins with a narrator recalling his brother's descent into hip-hop culture (an urban-based culture that originated in African-American communities in New York City's South Bronx) (Change and Herc xi). He mocks his brother's assimilation into this society by addressing him as "homeboy," a slang term coined by African-American members of hip-hop culture to refer to male friends from their neighborhood (Forman xix). Throughout the song, he negatively criticizes urban influences and praises the rural.

The descriptions of hip-hop's influence on the brother's appearance, personality, and actions are overwhelmingly negative. The song disperses elements of subjectively-offensive but relatively harmless fashion choices—such as the brother's new "hip-hop hat," "pants on the ground," fake gold teeth and tattooed neck—amidst recounts of more serious and illegal behavior: assault and battery of their parents and car theft. The narrator contrasts this by presenting the culture of the "little square town" as a savior from the gritty
urban streets and wayward lifestyle. After giving a quaint, agrarian description of their childhood and farm and construction employment, he proclaims that rural living "Ain't a glamorous life but it will keep you outta jail." Because living in a geographically rural area and engaging in a small-town lifestyle does not exempt one from committing crimes, getting arrested, or going to jail, this depiction indicates a strong bias influencing the narrator's perspective (and perhaps the songwriters' as well) toward the traits of rural culture.

Church's background and the sentiments he shared during personal interviews suggest that the views in "Homeboy" represent more than just the narrator's cultural dogmas. For starters, both Church and his co-writer, Beathard, hail from rural areas: Church from Granite Falls, North Carolina, with its humble population of 4,553 (US Census Bureau), and Beathard from Spring Hill, Tennessee, population 7,715 in 2000 (US Census 2000). Church has made a reputation for himself through writing and performing songs of this ilk. Another one of Church’s pro-rural compositions entitled "How 'Bout You?" also creates dichotomies between rural America and other cultures' people and customs. Its lyrics compare and contrast people with "baggy clothes" and rings in their noses, people with blue-blood trust funds, and Church's people, who have work-worn clothing and blue collars. While he does not acknowledge any positive qualities within the first two groups, Church exalts his people as honest, hard-working, patriotic, and "the chosen few."

Furthermore, away from the microphone, Church speaks rather openly about his opinions on country music's representation of rural Americans. In an interview with Country Music Television (CMT), Church states "Country music, the thing I love about it, more than any other music, it does represent real life and it represents Middle America better than any
format" (Shelburne). From this proclamation, one can deduce that he may intend his songs to be just as much social commentary as entertainment.

Church's goal in country music might very well be to stir up controversy by being openly rebellious and socially and politically divisive. For example, he was kicked off several tours, including the Rascal Flatts tour, for being too loud, offensive and outspoken for their image (Wilcox, Sanders). In another interview with CMT, Eric explains the dismissal: "I got fired because I'm a guy who's going to tell you what I think. I'm going to rub you the wrong way. That's just me—me being authentic and maybe abrasive, but again, I stand up for what I believe in" (Sanders). This exhibits Church's ambition to make a statement regardless of the damaging repercussions to his career.

Church's background and openly-shared personal views involving rural cultural superiority over the urban, suggest "Homeboy" is likely not an isolated, fictional story about two brothers, but also a critique of contemporary rural and urban cultures. To build a persuasive argument, Church pulls from common social conditionings by using popular stereotypes associated with each cultural group. He acknowledges only clichéd conceptions of the urban environment and hip-hop culture, demonstrated by his brother running the "dirty" streets and displaying violent, rebellious behavior. In contrast, he embraces only the positive stereotypes of small-town culture by highlighting an appreciation of life's simple pleasures, being centered on family values, and living within the natural settings of lakes and farms.

The heavy emphasis on so many of the superficial traits of each lifestyle, such as styles of dress, colloquial speech, recreational activities, and geographical surroundings, may signify that the narrator is as equally driven by aesthetic motivations as concern for his
brother's safety. Ben Foster, a music critic for the 1-to-10 Country Music Review, suggests this emphasis places the narrator's primary focus on a culture war rather than his brother's well-being, since the song's alternatives to hip-hop—a truck, a high-school flame, and an ice-cold beer—are logically inconsequential and ineffectual as crime deterrents. Foster claims, "In effect, all Eric really does here is say 'Don't be a city boy. Be a country boy'… nothing more than exalting one culture over another." This suggests a strong motivation to win back members for rural culture, rather than simply unadulterated concern for the wellbeing of those who drift from rural America's regional and cultural boundaries.

As the song progresses, it makes appeals to the wayward brother's sense of nostalgia and responsibility to lure him back. The narrator pleads with his brother to "come on home" to help him haul hay and to reconcile with their parents before their deaths. With each chorus, he beckons him to take up a "blue collar forty, little house, little kid, little small town story." Essentially, the song promotes returning to one’s roots.

Contrary to the lyrical recommendation, "Homeboy" musically strays far from its country music roots. The song builds into a heavy intensity more commonly associated with the rock genre and has pounding arena beats (the deep-bass, heavily-produced beats common to rock songs utilized at large arena venues, especially sporting events, that lend themselves well to bold, anthem-like lyrics). A hyperactive banjo and thickly-Southern-accented vocals jubilate alongside rock-inspired electric guitar riffs, dramatic drum crescendos, and even several harp glissandi. "Homeboy" also incorporates a heavy use of Auto-Tune as a voice-altering special effect (the singing-into-a-fan sound recognizable during the chorus and refrain). This device is common in rap and pop music genres and was made popular by such artists as T-Pain, Cher, and Britney Spears (Tyrangiel 2). All
this creates a musical culture clash in and of itself, interestingly juxtaposed to the one playing out within the lyrics. At points surrounding the chorus and refrain, the efforts of the thickly-layered production to harmoniously fuse these styles allows the music to dip into near cacophony. When viewed as a potential rhetorical device, however, such discordance galvanizes the lyrics' profession that certain conflicting cultural influences cannot cohabitate peacefully. Under this philosophy, the song would appear to be combating not a physical, but a cultural sprawl of urbanity.

While "Homeboy" identifies an antagonistic force and presents a resistance to it (suggesting protest), its alignment with the typical characteristics of protest music is surprisingly non-standard. Under Knupp’s classifications, 36 counts of personal pronoun usage qualify this song as heavily expressive. In terms of simplicity, while the majority of the action takes place in the present, there is a fair amount of memory evocation (recalling both his brother's recent rebellious behavior and their carefree childhood days) and future-based mental reflection (wishing and prophesying). The lyrics are a mix of generalizations and specifications, actions and reflections, and various temporal orientations. A strictly quantified evaluation may not characterize the song as predominantly simplistic. A more expansive explanation of the simplistic dimension of protest music elucidates protest songs’ reliance on naïve, over-simplified views of the world of social relations to meet their own rhetorical ends (Knupp 384). "Homeboy" utilizes extremely simplistic, two-dimensional near caricatures of urban and rural cultures, people and landscapes, in order to demonize the urban and anglicize the rural.

The majority of the song’s narrative is comprised of various reactions to the rebellious brother's behavior and the influence of the outside culture over him. Both Knupp and
Denisoff acknowledge protest music as songs that are rhetorically reactive to problems that the singer/songwriter has identified in society (Knupp 384; Denisoff, "Sing" 2-3).

"Homeboy" easily accommodates this requirement. A quantitative accounting of the song’s reactionary qualities found that, while "Homeboy" engages in numerous negative criticisms concerning the opposing culture, it devotes even more lines to making positive evaluations of the in-group culture. So it eludes Knupp’s qualification that reactionary lyrics must be overwhelmingly negative. Also, key phrases of negativity, such as the brother being "caught up in this mess," are countered by positive solutions, such as the brother's ability to return and "make it alright."

Throughout the song, the brother makes several unsavory decisions that adversely affect him and his family, but the narrator makes it clear that urban culture, not his brother, is to blame. He heavily criticizes his brother’s decision to be a cultural defector, but depicts the brother as a victim, not the opposition. The brother is in trouble because he is "caught up in this mess," but a rural lifestyle could "keep him outta jail." The presence of a clear antagonist also strays from Knupp’s observations of anti-Vietnam protest music in which the opposition, like the solution, is vaguely "out there" (383). The specific causes of his brother’s metamorphosis, such as an explanation of how or why he got interested in the urban culture, are never revealed, and any specific personal or celebrity influences are left a mystery. However, the song clearly identifies the culprit of the brother's demise as the negative influence of urban culture and lifestyle: displayed through elements of hip-hop culture and somehow leading to destructive, disrespectful, and illegal behaviors.

The clear identification of an antagonistic force and a solution means the song is not simply a "generalized, self-interested, solution-less criticism of the status quo" that Knupp
studied. This aligns it more fittingly with the songs of the Labor Movement, which were more engaged in the search for solutions (Knupp 383). Labor Movement song lyrics like "If we will, we can be free" and "I'm stickin' to the union… get you a man who's a union man" displayed greater optimism at the possibility of achieving solutions (Knupp 383-384). This song's solution is not "blowing in the wind" as in Vietnam-era protest music; it is clear: "Come on home." Returning to the rural region, re-entering rural culture and reconnecting with family is the solution. The praise of the home culture and the positive outlook on the future overshadow the song's criticism of the opposition and may denote the need for an altered and evolved approach in disseminating messages of propaganda to modern audiences. While the tone displays a markedly more positive tone than in older models of protest, this is likely a mere variation in message delivery rather than a lack of protest ideology.

While lacking faultless congruency with Knupp's classifications, it offers plenty of comparison with Denisoff's galvanizing "magnetic" protest specimens, designed to bond together members and attract new ones (Denisoff, "Sing" 60). Like magnetic protest songs, "Homeboy" includes resistant complaints, recruitment efforts, solidarity encouragement, value reinforcement, and solution suggestions (Denisoff, "Sing" 2-3, 60). Specifically, it criticizes urban influences and makes a case for rural culture’s desirability by accentuating its positive characteristics. For pre-existing members of rural culture, it flatters their habits and morality to reaffirm confidence in their value system. Finally, it offers a clear and simple solution to the problem of urban cultural influence: come home and re-assimilate into rural culture again. The only elements of Denisoff’s qualifications that this song lacks are those designed to gain outside support for its pro-rural cause, since "Homeboy" is
predominately an inside message. "Homeboy" meets all but one of Denisoff’s qualifications for protest songs with magnetic appeal. Since Denisoff and Knupp give different opinions on seeking outside support being an essential goal of protest music, this deficit should not be the deciding factor in excluding "Homeboy" from the realm of protest.

Besides pulling from old associations from urban and rural stereotypes for persuasive appeal, Church also utilizes musical associations. Church's lyrical reference to the boy's "pants on the ground" borrows the ethos of the anti-hip-hop song by that name that gained viral internet notoriety in 2010 after "General" Larry Platt performed the ditty on the Atlanta auditions episode of American Idol, Season 9. The song espouses comedic yet blatant criticism of young urban hip-hoppers. It pokes fun at their habit of wearing baggy clothing and fashioning their pants to sag low and reveal their underwear (perhaps done in retaliation to the standards of respectable dress belonging to a white, middle-class morality against which they seek to rebel). The lyrics scold hip-hoppers and ask them to stop making spectacles of themselves: "Lookin' like a fool with yo pants on the ground, With yo gold in yo mouth, Hat turned sideways… hey, get your pants off the ground." Similarly, Church’s narrator calls for his brother to pull up his literal and metaphorical pants and denounce hip-hop culture.

Within musical composition of "Homeboy," a strategic choice of percussion elements may have been fashioned to appeal to listeners' memories and sense of nostalgia. The drums lead into the chorus with a roll-off strikingly reminiscent to that of a high school marching band’s snare drum roll-off heard during half time performances across the country. This could evoke positive associations with small-town flavor by conjuring images of high school football games on Friday nights filled with hometown pride and
community bonding. This type of in-group message might reinforce feelings of solidarity and garner support for an ethos that vilifies the urban culture and anglicizes the rural one.

"Homeboy" still contains a message of protest, regardless of missing one of the standards for protest music for both Knupp and Denisoff’s standards (in that it lacks the extreme level of negativity and efforts to gain out-group support). When viewed on national level, opposition to urban culture from the rural minority is an act of resistance qualifying as the spread of propaganda. Although not identical to the kind of the anti-Vietnam and Labor Movement eras, "Homeboy" is divisive and polarizing and identifies urban culture as a negative influence and a threat to rural culture. It contributes to the notion of rural culture as a moral haven and offers definitions for it. And while the narrator seeks reconciliation with the brother, he is decisively uninterested in conciliation between rural and urban culture. The intense preoccupation with definition-making and social and geographical line-drawing denotes a passionate involvement in a potential culture war. The divisive manner in which the song presents these views suggests an ideology of protest and propaganda.

"Mayberry"

"Mayberry" was written by Arlos Smith and performed by the popular country trio band Rascal Flatts. Released as a single in 2003, its narrative is set in present time and discusses the problems with habits of modern society. The song uses America’s agrarian mythology to embody the utopian ideal of small-town American life. The lyrics embrace the myth of the utopian small town lifestyle and endorse them as historical reality. It mourns the fictional television town of its namesake. Free from serious crime, danger, or behavioral
ugliness, Mayberry is the fictional small town in rural 1950s North Carolina where Sheriff Andy Griffith and his dim-but-trusty deputy Barney Fife kept guard over the sleepy hamlet. In this picturesque setting, Andy and Barney learned gentle lessons about life, love and public service. Mayberry is often lauded as a utopian ideal of morality and family values (Kelly 101). The song laments the disappearance of the town Mayberry as if its attributes actually existed in society's recent past. It counters depictions of modern, urban society with those of yesteryear's small-town society, drawn from elements of The Andy Griffith Show and so-called "memories" of an earlier period of the narrator's life. The fact that this was only ever a fictional television show highlights the notion that the narrator may be romanticizing the memories of his small-town history. In the dreamy, intoxicating practice of waxing nostalgic, his emotions may be blurring the lines between a romanticized fictional existence and historical reality.

The portrayals of the urban and the rural are basically calm versus chaos. The first verse accuses the modern times' fast pace of causing the increase in natural disasters. City life is repeatedly described as noisy, worrisome, and straining. The narrator finds peaceful relief through escaping the urban for the rural. He says "above the noise and city streets my worries disappear." Conversely, the narrator exalts his small-town past as a time and place where life was pleasantly simpler, slower, and richer in cultural and societal values. He speaks of Mayberry as a real place existing in an actual past (hence he misses it). This was a superior time and place with a small-town culture rich in family and community fellowship, where simple pleasures and individual human beings are valued, as shown in lyrics such as "Sitting on the porch drinking ice-cold cherry Coke" and "Where people pass by and you call them by their first name." His comparisons insinuate that the urban,
industrialized, rushed culture no longer values the individual or takes time for the simple pleasures. In short, it no longer nurtures the human soul or the earth.

The dichotomies created concerning humanity and nature point to potentially polarizing and extremely biased messages of propaganda. The narrator pulls from pre-existing stereotypes favoring small-town culture to persuade listeners of its superiority. First, it portrays urban culture as an assault to humanity. In the opening verse, the narrator explains the current condition of urban society, saying, "And we can’t slow down ‘cause more is best/ It’s all an endless process." This type of lifestyle, often referred to as a "rat race," indicates society’s preoccupation with business success over personal fulfillment. This line of reasoning lends itself well to the propositions presented both in Donehower, Hogg, and Schell’s *Rural Literacies* and Edmundson’s *Prairie Town*. Both propose theories suggesting globalization and rabid capitalism weaken humans’ connection to the earth and each other as much as it unifies them, and makes them busier and business-oriented rather than family-focused (Edmundson, Donehower, Hogg, and Schell). Therefore, globalization, industrialization and perhaps capitalism (in the references to endlessness and importance of progress) are responsible for spreading urbanization and ending Mayberry.

By contrast, "Mayberry" paints rural culture and settings as a haven for the Divine. As the song moves toward its end, the narrator speaks of climbing high up on a mountain, "above the noise and the city streets," to look out of "God’s window." (Nature’s vantage points with pristine views of the landscape are commonly nicknamed “God’s window.”) Although urban society has abandoned nature, the narrator receives and answers its call when he "hear[s] this old earth shouting." The attribution of a sentient force and Divine
presence to rural environments may be an attempt to impress the notion that God, or at least
goodness, exists more often in rural rather than urban settings.

The song’s depiction of rural culture is openly, wittingly romanticized reality. In this
version of 1950s small-town America, there exists more interpersonal communication
(people know each other’s first names) and greater value is placed on the individual rather
than numbered workers. Small-town Americans appreciate simple pleasures, such as ice-
cold cherry coke, and family (shown through quality time that Opie and Andy spend
fishing together). Communing with nature is crucial and leads to connection with
something larger, perhaps a Divine force. Mayberry’s rural people also seem to possess a
greater freedom of being. For instance, the dirt road the narrator travels in his dream is not
listed on a map. The mention that in pre-urbanity "Sunday was a day of rest," has religious
undertones suggesting that rural people of the past were perhaps more devout, and it also
implies that the culture respected the limits of the human mind and body and the needs of
individuals as breakable, emotion-driven humans, rather than working machines for
productivity.

This song’s upbeat, cheerful music may cause an initial impression of happiness and
contentment with the world. But couched in a deceiving melody lie expressions of
discontent and non-conformity. The abundance of criticism and striking dichotomies
pertaining to the past’s glory and the present’s deficiencies delivers a non-progressive and
certainly disgruntled world view.

In terms of fitness for protest standards, the repetition of dreaming and reminiscing
prevents "Mayberry" from maintaining a simplistic viewpoint. However, its wealth of
cathartic personal expression, self-expression, and overwhelmingly negative evaluations of
the present adhere nicely to Knupp’s qualifications of expressive and reactionary lyrics. Like the protest songs in Knupp’s study, "Mayberry" engages in a heavy amount of discourse about the opponent while avoiding identifying it directly. The negative assessments far outweigh the positive and it remains a generalized assessment, in that it lacks specific examples of historical events. Instead, it employs emotionally-provocative rhetoric to engage the listener in the tension of the urban culture. It uses dizzying, exhausting descriptions pertaining to spinning, strain, fast pace, lack of rest, endless process, progression, and noise. This rhetoric results in an urban setting that seems a nonspecific blur of frantic movement. And the narrator foresees no end to the spin.

This song has more in common with the Vietnam-Era protest music of the '60s than with the Labor Movements songs, in that it is lyrically nihilistic. The nature of the song is, at its core, a lamentation (such as "On the eve of destruction" or "I feel like I’m fixin to die"). The "felt need, social anxiety, or a perceived state of relative deprivation" is present, the presence of a problem and an adversary are vaguely acknowledged, but it gives no solution or alternative to the sad state of present affairs (Denton, Smith, and Stewart). Like much of the Vietnam-era protest music, it is reacting to the world, but not acting. Although "Mayberry" allows that the remaining natural spaces can provide temporary reprieve – symbolically and physically high above modern urbanity – it ends in a defeatist goodbye to the dream of yesterday’s small-town culture. Not only does this song fail to offer a solution for reforming modern urban culture, it does not even advocate the sustention of small-town life outside of the city. The narrator clings to the last vestiges of the natural world in his "escape" time on the mountain, but he does not suggest that one can move out of the city, end cities, or change cities. By the end of the song, in the bridge, he dreams
about passing a father and son with their fishing poles walking down a dirt road (just as Andy and Opie did in the show) and gives his farewell to the Mayberry life. The earth is shouting, but he does not suggest we help it.

The musical composition of "Mayberry" pays homage to its lyrical content in an unexpected manner. In fact, a hasty comparison of the lyrics and music may make the musical choice seem a bit perverse. Although the lyrics express the superiority of rural culture and its esteem for folk music – "sittin’ on the porch… pickin’ on a six string" – the song only sparingly uses old-time country music instruments, such as the acoustic guitar and banjo. One might think a song grieving the death of a beloved culture would adopt a somber tone. The tunes of the golden age of country music (think Hank Williams "I’m So Lonesome") with their slow, haunting melodies and individual note emphasis would fit better with this song’s message. Instead "Mayberry" is a perky song with a heavily-produced sound involving both mixed acoustic and electric instrumentation. The repetition of "bye, bye" and the narrator’s profession that he wakes up every time he tries to turn back indicates that although he mourns the old ways, he is moving forward.

The music mirrors the lyrical journey in its incorporation of old musical styles within a decisively modern composition. The chorus’ peppy scat "bada bada badadada," harmonized by multiple band members, recalls the barbershop quartet a capella groups of the ‘40s and ‘50s (the era of Andy Griffith’s Mayberry). Through incorporating elements of traditional country music and 1950s-era a cappella and pop, the Rascal Flatts members tip their proverbial hats to an older, more rural culture. But they are more fully embracing music’s modern, urban future. Their pop-music sound (with backup singers echoing the main vocalist’s loftiest statements a-la boy-band style, and the fast-moving harmonies and
sixteenth note background textures supporting the tenor solo) embraces the smooth boy-band styles made popular in the ‘90s by acts such as "The New Kids on the Block" and "The Backstreet Boys" and blends it with the modern Nashville brand of country. The resulting cross-over sound has gained popularity with the young, emerging generation (Dicaire 4). But it is heavily criticized by traditionalists who do not approve of its departure from its country roots (Lewis 309). Traditionalists advocate a revival and sustention of traditional country styles—coincidentally, the same type of people who might not agree with saying goodbye to the dream that was Small Town, America (Lewis 309). "Mayberry" may lyrically and musically provoke nostalgia and espouse propaganda of small-town culture’s superiority; however, its nihilistic outlook ultimately fails to fight against urbanization, and chooses to accept it instead.

While not maintaining strict adherence to Knupp's qualifications, it displays Denisoff’s criteria for magnetic protest songs. Its criticism of the modern, urban lifestyle highlights a social problem. The use of "we" promotes solidarity with listeners and attempts to gain support by presenting the problem as common to them as well. The repeated romanticizing of small town culture may serve to compliment small town listeners and reinforce confidence in their value system. Again, while the resolution in "Mayberry" cannot solve the problems caused by increased modernity and urbanity, it promotes saying goodbye to small town culture, regulating it to the past and learning to cope with the present. This song’s relationship to protest music is therefore visible, albeit unconventional.
"Way Out Here"

"Way Out Here," written by Josh Thompson, David Lee Murphy, and Casey Beathard (all hailing from small-to-moderate sized towns in rural areas) and performed by Thompson, is an exercise in defining rural people and their culture (Neal, BMI, Erlewine). In the laundry-list fashion favored by other songs in this study, it provides a string of habits, symbols, and associations to define people that live "way out here." The audience can infer that the geographical location of "way out here" is a rural location far removed from the sphere of physical or cultural urban influence. The lyrics also mention that these people have a "backwoods" lifestyle: a term commonly used to describe sparsely-populated areas far from cities (Merriam-Webster). Other terminology and stereotypical associations within the lyrics support the notion that these are rural people that are highly defensive of their region and culture.

Through a biased, generalized, and simultaneously ambiguous and overly-specific set of definitions, "Way Out Here" paints a portrait of the ethical and emotional characteristics of rural people. The portrait is not necessarily flattering. With what sounds like indignation in his voice, Thompson belts that his rural people have burnt necks, dirty trucks, and dirt roads. They smoke, drink, chew tobacco, and fry their food. Because their environment is as untamed as they are, the dirt roads dirty their trucks and the lack of leash laws allow their dogs to run loose. The lyrics portray rural denizens as a wild tribe of gun-carrying, gun-using people who are as fiercely passionate about their lifestyle as they are fiercely independent. He paints a gritty portrait of a culture that seems unapologetically unclean, unhealthy, and unsafe. While such descriptions may be unappealing and perhaps even alarming to some listeners, Thompson proclaims them in a manner that insinuates he
believes they are admirable. At times unabashedly crude, the lyrics suggest that while their
culture might not be popular with the masses or conventionally stylish, people "way out
here" are proud and unflagging.

While the lyrics do not engage in evaluations of an adversary, and so do not form overt
urban-versus-rural dichotomies, there are several contradictory dichotomies fused within
the definition given of rural citizens. They are presented as both proud and humble,
fighters and peace-lovers, law-abiding patriots and vigilantes, hard-working and hard-
partying. The lyrics both reiterate and confuse existent beliefs by fusing the existence of
two contradictory stereotypes into one culture.

For part of the characteristics, the writers pulled from the American mythology about
agrarian peoples mentioned earlier. As in the old stereotypes, these rural people have
religion; their houses "are protected by the good Lord," and they pray for peace. Some of
their other associations coincide nicely with the typical associations of religious persons,
such as being honest and hard-working (demonstrated in the lyrics as them breaking their
backs, pulling their own weight, and not taking dimes they did not earn). They also have a
strong reverence for the past and strong community solidarity. This reinforces the
idealistic view of rural peoples—particularly the rural farmer, but also blue-collar worker.
As an American icon, they are a model of patriotism (it is usually they who end up fighting
overseas). So again, they are "all-American" to the root, and throwbacks to a time when
this historical figure rose out of the dust of middle-American prairies, the muddy red clay
of southern cracker farms, and the sooty underbelly of Appalachian coal mines. Secluded
in their own environment, these people run things the way America's forefathers did. The
narrator's declaration that he would like to see the country run "like it used to be, oughta
be, just like it's done way out here," insinuates this way is superior to contemporary politicians’ methods.

The integration of a second set of characteristics akin to "Honky-Tonk" culture offsets (and arguably usurps) the noble agrarian construct. The lyrics portray religious ethics existing seamlessly within rural people alongside contradictory, far less conservative traits. Despite Christianity's existence within this culture (an influence that often promotes a peace-loving philosophy) the narrator warns that rural people will not hesitate to shoot and kill trespassers. He proclaims they have a "fightin' side" and intermingles their righteous traits with revelations that they are also ruthlessly territorial, armed, and lethal. As their spokesman, he responds to those who find fault with and concern themselves with rural people's "backwoods" lifestyle (urban citizens, perhaps) with an aggressive "you can leave us alone." One could infer from these messages that these rural citizens are proud of their rural-ness, content with their lifestyle, highly clandestine, and not in the mood to be bothered. In addition, this could be demonstrative of two possible inferences: that rural people are aggressively protective of their homes and families and will go to any length to defend them, or that they are so perturbed with urbanites that they desire (or at least would not hesitate) to kill them if provoked.

The linkage of their dual modes of home security in the lyrics "Our houses are protected by the good Lord and a gun" presents a curious reconciliation of their religious dogma and homicidal tendencies. They may be bolstering their vigilante method of home and culture protection with the same religious faith that would seem to prohibit it. God blesses them by protecting their homes, which requires that He approves of them and their lifestyle. In this way, He favors and aids their cause. By evoking an Old-Testament version of a
vengeful God and placing Him on their side of the confrontation, this rhetoric venerates their actions and glorifies their culture.

Not only does this song force irregular reconciliation between opposing ideologies, but it implies that this meld of the noble agrarian and rebel redneck icons and country clichés is an ideal state. Knupp references Carroll C. Arnold’s essays on political and social criticism to explain why listeners may accept such contrived social realities; Arnold explains that "in-groups tend to share special patterns of values and to have consensus about 'how things are' and 'what goes with what’” (Knupp 388). They also have special language by which to communicate about these shared notions called "rhetorical shortcuts" (Knupp 388). Unlike deliberative public discourse, in-group messages do not need to excuse or qualify such assertions, and so allow for the use of agreed-upon two-dimensional stick figures within their communicative circle (Knupp 388). For this reason, the song’s list of either trite or overly-general characteristics may not affect its acceptance or resonation among rural listeners.

In the effort of definition and image creation, "Way Out Here" utilizes various artists, brand names, and music references and their respective backgrounds and representative philosophies. The chorus name drops John Wayne, Johnny Cash, and John Deere in reference to rural people’s identity—what they are "about.” These branded icons have the ability to speak volumes about a culture's habits and philosophies. Regarding these references Thompson professed during an interview with The Boot "you don't have to wonder what they stand for" ("Josh Thompson"). But these references can result in a high level of ambiguity concerning the specific aspects of these brands that the culture embraces. While not a founder, Johnny Cash was associated with the Outlaw country
movement and developed an outlaw image (Edwards 30, 40). He created music infused with rock and roll that belonged to the Rockabilly country subgenre (Edwards 35, 62). He was best known for his masculine bass-baritone voice and songs about falling on the wrong side of the law (Edwards 35, 66). John Wayne was perhaps best known for his toughness, patriotism, and hard-nosed vigilante characters adventuring in the Wild West (Davis 8, 72). However, both men had complex personal lives and left behind diverse works of their respective art forms, from which one could pull a variety of projections and associations. The reference to John Deere is a bit easier to decipher, as John Deere is historically the most popular and recognizable name brand of tractors in America. This alludes to the agricultural heritage of rural areas and hints that many of the people "way out here" may be farmers. To glean identifiers from all three of these icons and their respective associations, one must coalesce some of rural culture's spectrally-oppositional elements.

"Way Out Here" utilizes the electric guitars and strong backbeat characteristic of rock styles. These elements are played alongside references to a tough actor and alternative-country artist, thus infusing rough-edged musical traditions with a rebellious, outlaw mentality. The acoustic guitars, organ, and pedal steel guitars keep the song drenched in traditional country music styles, perhaps to evoke nostalgia and elements of pride and integrity among listeners. The hard rock elements bring the song into the edgier modern era of country, despite the slow pacing. The songwriters may have used rural-complimentary lyrics and a slow, easy rhythm in an effort to downplay the potentially passive-aggressive motivation behind the songwriting and to retain marketability. Despite these efforts, however, the song still exudes the rebellious, polarizing feel of country music's more politically-divisive songs, like Merle Haggard's "Okie from Muskogee."
The song's ambiguity compounds with the lack of direct antagonist criticisms. Although the narrator directly addresses an antagonist as "you," the lyrics never clarify its identity. As is common to protest lyrics, the identity of the ambiguous opposition manages to remain vaguely "out there" even though the narrator directly threatens it repeatedly (Knupp 383). Although it is possible to view the threats as directed toward a merely hypothetical "you," used rhetorically to illustrate another aspect of these people’s culture, another plausible interpretation is the presence of an intended and specific "you." The lyrics implicate that this antagonist has developed a critical, meddlesome attitude in being concerned with these people's "backwoods way of living" and threatens them in some manner, perhaps by physically trespassing or simply through cultural criticisms. The extreme retaliatory threats indicate this adversary must pose a considerable threat to rural people, either to their physical existence, cultural existence, or both. Again, this rhetorical device only translates well among in-group listeners.

The abundance of clandestine references requires inside knowledge of the culture. The lyrics' overtly aggressive messages only expand the chasm between insiders and outsiders. Playing like a long reaction to a bit of negative criticism, "Way Out Here" expresses immense approval of the rural people and culture and engages in protest music's "world of discontent" concerning its opposition (Knupp 378). Knupp's research shows that inwardly clannish and outwardly polarizing elements such as these, "too negative and ambiguous to be directly attractive to anyone other than movement members, polarizing toward others," suggest the song is concerned with the social relationships among people more than with matters of content and ideology (387). This makes such a song an "assertion of existence and importance on the part of the protestors" (Knupp 387). Protest songs will sacrifice
persuasive appeal to outsiders in this way in exchange for expressiveness and in-group communication (Knupp 387). According to Knupp's findings, this song's use of the heavily expressive words "we," "us," and "our" (there are 41 self-references total) augments this purpose as well (387). Overall, "Way Out Here" possesses many important qualifiers for protest music, but lacks several others (such as a hearty amount of discourse criticizing an opponent).

The song’s inferred purpose is to serve as a reaction to negative criticism concerning rural culture, or at least to warn against an attempt to criticize it. As a result, its rhetoric is purposefully aggressive and therefore unlikely to gain outside support. Its message to stay away does little to attract new membership. While this eliminates a likeness to Denisoff’s magnetic classification of protest, it maintains similarities with the rhetorical form (Denisoff, "Sing" 2-3). "Way Out Here" provides insight into a social discontent between rural culture and a less "backwoods" one disapproving of the lifestyle, and perhaps seeking to invade or change it. Although listeners are never shown the direction, it points a critical finger using the word "you." It also may be attempting to sway public opinion concerning rural culture by listing its attributes and explaining, rather firmly, that rural people are proud of them and not interested in becoming less "backwoods." Under Denisoff’s rules, even though the song does not fit all the qualifications, it must still be considered protest and/or propaganda due to its efforts to change public opinion (Denisoff, "Sing" 61).

"Way Out Here" is a fusion of contradictions sending a unified message. Culturally, its fusion mix of righteous agrarian and sinner rebel belongs to both cultural traditions and to neither. Musically, its mix of country and rock belongs to both musical genres and to
neither. As an amalgam, it professes the existence of a flawed but proud people prepared to defend a seemingly marginalized, criticized, and endangered way of life.
CHAPTER 5
GOOD COUNTRY PEOPLE: UTOPIAN PORTRAITS

“Small Town USA”

Justin Moore featured "Small Town USA" on his debut album. He co-wrote the song with Brian Maher and Jeremy Stover. In 2009, the song became Moore’s first number one hit. This perky anthem celebrating small town life promotes adhesiveness to and pride in a small town and its culture. Initially, "Small Town USA" details the narrator’s personal experience, but then attempts to broaden its scope to include all small towns in America (as the title implies). To do so, it presents the narrator’s town as a model for the quintessential American small town. The song implies that the narrator’s experience serves as a generic template for all small town experiences throughout the nation.

Unfortunately, the song provides intricate details that over-specify the model and make problematic its suitability as a generalization. At other points, it includes widespread ideals that are too broad for small town culture to claim exclusive ownership.

The lyrics are highly expressive and cathartic. The heavy use of personal pronouns (mostly "I" and "me") serves the ego-feeding function of protest music (Knupp 386-387). It also promotes solidarity of the narrator with small town citizens through use of "we" (Knupp 387). Moore’s background and interviews convey that his lyrics promoting rural life may indeed be self-expression of his personal convictions. Moore confided to Josh
Armstrong of *The Boot* that his move to Nashville to pursue music inspired the song because city life made him homesick for his small town. Moore was raised on his family’s Arkansas farmland where he helped care for their cattle and pastures (The Valory Music Co). On their land sits the road sign enumerating the Poyen population tally of 272 (The Valory Music Co). He remarks about his background that "The only things that really mattered were sports on Friday night, God and family, and that's about it. It's a good way to grow up. I'm still scared of my mom and dad, and my grandpas are my heroes" (The Valory Music Co). He seems to genuinely believe in the kind of pro-small town messages his song expresses.

Whether he seeks to simply convey his personal love of rural culture or to spread pro-small town propaganda to the unconverted masses remains a mystery. Nonetheless, the song employs numerous rhetorical elements commonly utilized by protest music for their persuasive potential: in particular, strategic musical traditions and rural society’s (the in-group’s) pre-existent beliefs and loyalties. Through these clichéd positive stereotypes of country life, listeners hear once again that small town denizens are hard-working, hard loving, proud people who value family, religion, and the simple life. They live separated from even any mention of the urbanizing, globalizing, money-run world outside rural America’s borders. Like many other songs in this study, this song gives nod to the romantic portrayal of the virtuous American farmer and serves to bolster cultural pride in rural America.

Two points in the song strengthen its persuasive abilities by giving reasons why small town life is favorable and virtuous. First, the narrator describes the small town experience as "a simple life" full of community. He calls it a place where "everybody knows me and I
know them." The significant succeeding line "and I believe that’s the way we were supposed to live" carries significant weight because it demonstrates his reasoning behind the love of his small town. He holds an ethical conviction that people were meant to live in cohesive communities replete with personal relationships amongst all townspeople.

Sensibly, the smaller the town (and population number) the easier it is to know everyone in it. The narrator also says "we [small town residents] break our backs to earn a buck, we never get ahead but we have enough." He implies throughout that financial success does not hold ultimate significance within small town culture. His people find worth in simpler, more emotional, community-centric experiences. As previously mentioned, this aligns with the iconoclast of virtuous, hard-working, non-superficial rural Americans.

The song does not give many direct, concrete examples of small town life’s superiority, however. While the lyrics brim with definitions of small town culture, they fail to mention precisely why these elements are favorable or preferable to other lifestyles. Rather than qualify or rate the list, the narrator only says that he enjoys its items. Dan Millikin from Country Universe gives a colorful anecdote to explain what he sees as shortcomings to approach, "Moore… is like that guy who calls you from inside the party to let you know how awesome it is without actually explaining what’s going on. It’s not that you don’t believe him; it’s just that he never explains why you should happen to care" (Millikin).

When listeners have nothing for comparison or reasons why the cultural elements are beneficial, the list of country-isms seems to fall flat. Everything becomes a generality. For example, the specific benefits of living in a close community remain unnamed. Had he elaborated on these benefits, he could have increased his chances of selling the small town lifestyle to skeptical outsiders inexperienced in the joys of socially-cohesive communities.
Protest music sacrifices outward sympathy and appeal for inside inspiration (Knupp 388). This song’s construction also supports exclusivity and self-interest.

The cohesive meaning of "Small Town USA" is an in-group message designed for listeners who already understand the joys of country life. Its rhetorical design may not recruit new members to the culture. This song defines small town life as a place where everybody knows each other, a place whose people spend Saturday nights drinking beer, listening to Southern rock music, and riding down dirt roads. It is a place where Sunday mornings are full of grace (insinuating it might be set aside for religious worship).

Simplicity, blue-collar work ethic, and close-knit community: his prosaic list of country habits and mores nurtures a connection with those who share in them, but outsiders may not understand the meanings or associations, or may even have opposing ideas about their merit. In his music review, Milliken says it was "written solely to appeal to a demographic of people who also live in small towns and can relate to surface-level ideas like ‘everybody knows me and I know them’ and ‘give me a Sunday morning that’s full of grace’." For example, as people from many environments also enjoy beer, without a preconceived understanding of context and associations, a man simply pointing out that he enjoys a "six-pack of Light" is not a sufficient cultural identifier for listeners.

Some of the persuasive techniques that this song shares with studied protest music would suggest its suitability for this pursuit, but its deficits in antagonist identification and criticisms call that distinction into question. Along with their high level of cathartic expressiveness, the simplistic lyrics remain active, present-focused, and generalized (in terms of their portrayal of all characteristics as nationally common to small towns). Even the song’s upbeat, optimistic viewpoint can be acceptable, due to its similarity with many
labor movement songs. Although it identifies a struggle within small towns, "we never get ahead," it counters with "but we have enough" and with small town life "I’ll be okay" indicates that although times are hard, small town people endure. Like Labor Movement lyrics, these speak of survival and positivity. This song overflows with positive evaluations, such as: "I’ll be just fine," "I love this place," "wouldn’t trade one single day," "we have enough," and "I’ll be okay." While people leaving small towns may have served as an antagonistic force, he goes on to state that it is not a problem for the future survival of small towns because those wandering citizens "come right back." Therefore, it lacks dichotomies or negative reactions to an antagonist.

Any mention of an oppositional force or an explanation that outside forces hold antithetical opinions would have solidified a direct likeness to protest music. In a time where people outside and even inside the small town culture may abandon it or criticize it (MacKay 285), the narrator promotes pride, adhesiveness, and appreciation of small towns and their attributes. Rather than voice complaint about these criticisms or retaliate with some of his own, the narrator merely acknowledges that other people criticized and left the small town ("other people called it prison" and "I saw people leave") but his only response is "I never wanted any part of that." Perhaps in an effort to demonstrate his chivalry and strong moral fiber, he rejects the opportunity to admonish these people and agrees to disagree. As the narrator pulls from listeners’ already-ingrained beliefs about their culture and environment, both the positive attributes that are often romanticized and the negative ones that are often criticized, listeners require an ingrained knowledge of the culture’s adversaries to understand his zeal in proclaiming its worth. Through his own opinions and actions, the narrator promotes ceaseless residence in Small Town, USA and unabashed
pride in its culture. The emphasis that he is personally proud of something others keep putting down feels like encouragement to listeners to stay in their small towns and be proud, to stand up for who they are and not be shamed. He promotes in-group allegiance.

Moore’s thick vocal twang (a vocal attribute characteristic of rural, particularly Southern, regions and reminiscent of a plucked bow string) augments his country persona, and perhaps his persuasive appeal to listeners as well. His distinctly country accent adds perceived credibility to his pro-country message. As the narrating voice, a generic or other-regional accent might incite listeners to question his supposedly rural background and, by extension, his knowledge on the subject. For audience members who share his rural background, the vocal attributes of this accent may increase their ability to identify with him. The common trait helps make him a part of their group. Steve Leggett of Allmusic describes him as having "a ready-made image. He was that good kid from a small town with a rowdy heart of gold who just happened to be able to sing about it." This audibly reinforces his message that it is favorable to stay true to one’s cultural roots.

The narrator also makes verbal references to other musicians to help him paint a picture of small town life and philosophy. During each chorus, he alternates the name of the artists or songs that soundtracks his small town, Saturday nights. Interestingly, he does not use famous classic country artists, but Outlaw Country and Southern rock legends. He says his Saturday nights are spent with the banal redneck activities of drinking beer, riding dirt roads, and listening to Southern rock anthems with his "baby." The artists’ reputations speak to the narrator and his friends’ interests and philosophies. He first names Hank Jr. (Hank Williams, Jr.) as his Saturday night artist of choice. Hank Jr. made a name for himself in the ‘80s when he departed from his father’s iconic legacy of traditional country
and began his career of hard-edged rock-influenced Outlaw Country (Malone, “Don’t” 144). His rowdy image reinforced his redneck lifestyle songs about partying, having one-night stands and being "whiskey bent and hell bound" (Malone, “Don’t” 145-146). The narrator next references fringe country artist David Allen Coe. Another rebel in life and music (having spent time in prison before stardom), Coe garnered a notorious reputation in the ‘70s and ‘80s for his comedic and often profane lyrics (Malone, “Don’t” 140-141). His sound derives from blues, rock, and country influences (Malone, “Don’t” 140). Both Hank Jr and Coe bucked Nashville’s alleged conservatism and the wholesome image it favored (Malone, “Don’t” 141). Finally, the narrator gives tribute to the southern rock anthem "Sweet Home Alabama" by Lynyrd Synyrd. Although the band gained fame in the ‘70s, this politically-outspoken, pro-South song’s fame has not waned, but has achieved anthem-like status amongst Southern rock fans (Dorman and Odom 181-203). Moore spoke about the musical influences of the overall album to which this song belongs, saying "Lyrically it's pretty old-school country and melodically it's a little more Southern rock edge" (The Valory Music Co). This particular song off the album possesses the opposite: the slow, loping melody and acoustic instruments (rhythm guitars and piano, a prominent organ) of more traditional country sounds, with lyrics favoring Southern rock themes.

Like "Way out Here," this song fuses traditional country and Southern rock elements to create a new sound. Unlike neo-traditionalist style, these compositions infuse a higher degree of edgy ‘80s and ‘90s rock influence (Lewis 306). Similarly, the lyrical message merges a rebel redneck persona with the devout agrarian stereotypes. Both are popular with rural culture; however, their contradictory philosophies are not commonly associated as reconcilable, but as belonging to either the more conservative or more progressive sides
of rural culture (Malone, "Don’t" 143-144). The lyrics express the belief that it is favorable to embrace both: to "take back" characteristics that are less-exalted on a national level (and often exploited as hurtful accusations) while simultaneously proclaiming the positive ones. The compound philosophy denotes a potential shift in rural culture emerging from the roots of Small Town, America’s past, an amalgamation of the positive and negative stereotypes. This would suggest that rural America’s separate factions are united (at least within Moore’s generation) under a common flag. "Small Town USA" makes it seem as though the new ruralist is one with the positive stereotypes of the traditional agrarian icon and the rowdier, more-controversial stereotypes of the labor-class honky-tonker. "Small Town USA" promotes both the positive and negative historic associations with small towns. The harmonious co-existence of these within its lyrics and music presents the image of a strong, modern cultural presence.

“Small Town Southern Man”

Set in the American South, in a rural farming community, "Small Town, Southern Man" draws a blueprint of a typical life for a farming man living in an agrarian environment—his joys, struggles, traits, and aspirations. Written and performed by Alan Jackson, the song employs country music’s classic story-telling style to present an ode to small-town men through the life narrative of one. Jackson vacillates between recounting specific characteristics of one farmer’s life to forming generalizations about all Southern, small-town men in the chorus.

Jackson may have intended these generalizations to reach even farther. Jackson told Country Weekly that while the song actually holds many similarities to his own father’s
life, it is not solely a tribute to him (Horner 14). Jackson sought to expand the scope to
encompass all rural people who grew up as he did (Horner 14). He explains, "Wherever
you go, there are rural people that are working for a living and raising families. They all
have the same qualities and goals as a small town Southern man" (Horner 14). While some
might view this as a sweeping stereotype, it is the world view and philosophy Jackson
believes in and sought to share in "Small Town Southern Man." Confident his listeners
would share or enjoy his perceived truth, his label released this song in November 2007 as
the lead single from his album Good Time. The song reached #1 on Billboard Hot Country
Songs charts in March 2008. The song appeals to the audience’s social conditionings to
sell the validity of this romantic stereotype. It reinforces the notion of the small town
family farmer as a pillar of blue-collar virtue, Christian family values, and good work ethic.

The plausibility of Jackson’s desire to impress these viewpoints through his song is
supported by his personal life and quotes. Raised in Newnan, Georgia (population 293)
Jackson gives back to his hometown frequently and has spoken openly about his rural
lifestyle and mission to speak to and for the rural people and their experiences in the
modernizing world (Loncaric Miller, Horner). His neo-traditional musical style supports
his old-fashioned philosophies. As mentioned earlier, country music’s neo-traditionalists
reject the modern infusion of pop and hard-rock styles into the genre (Malone 418). Their
sound emphasizes the instrumental background and a traditional country vocal style that is
heavily accented and unadulterated by electronic manipulation (musicbase.org). His 2000
cover hit with George Strait "Murder on Music Row" mourned purity of older country
styles and lamented their absence in modern songs (Malone 417-418). Similarly, "I Still
Like Bologna," which Jackson also wrote and performed himself, praises the virtues of
rural culture, saying technology is welcome, but not in exchange for simple pleasures. Jackson’s background, viewpoints, and commitment to traditional music and blue-collar themes make him a likely source of pro-rural propaganda.

In "Small Town Southern Man," Jackson chronicles a farmer’s life span—beginning with his birth and closing at his death. The first verse says the man was born to a farmer in a small, Southern town. It establishes his roots and pedigree with the lines "Like his daddy’s daddy before him/ Grew up working on the land." This relays to the listener that his upbringing was formed from old traditions and a lifestyle passed down from generations. The song goes on to tell that he fell in love with and married a small town woman and describes this as a "natural" way of life for a lucky small town Southern man. Again, we see Jackson incorporating his personal perceptions and bringing the one-man narrative into the spectrum of all rural men.

The song goes on to say the farmer and his wife begot a large family of five children. In a house he built himself, the man raised them with "words of love and understanding." Jackson again broadens the range of his definition. Although the chorus uses the singular pronoun "he," it takes on the feel of the "everyman" stick figure for all rural men. The man bowed to Jesus, stood for Uncle Sam, loved only one woman, and, being proud of what meager means he had, understood that his life’s worth was found in the family he raised "on the ways and gentle kindness of a small town Southern man." The qualities Jackson ascribes to the general rural man are faithfulness, patriotism, fidelity, pride and humility, and devotion to hearth and home. This certainly appeals to the romantic vision of small family farmer in American folklore. Such flattery might feed the egos of rural listeners because, although it does not encompass the whole of the rural experience, it accentuates
the positive stereotypes. Despite the sweeping generalizations, non-rural listeners may still find the song palatable as a positive foil to the less-flattering American stereotypes perpetrated globally (i.e. "the ugly American"). By keeping the lyrics positive and palatable, Jackson may be able to appeal to the loyalties of both rural and non-rural Americans.

The third verse broaches rural America’s struggles. The farmer’s calloused hands and determination to hold on to his lifestyle and land nearly cripple his over-worked body. Jackson again opens the definition to say "you can break the back but you can’t break the spirit of a small town Southern man." Rural people, like the song’s sample man, are full of perseverance for their diminishing way of life. Without delving too far into economic or political causes, the lyrics demonstrate the physical and cultural fallout of the pressures on rural America, particularly small family farmers. This merely implies that the current conditions put a strain on rural economies and make it hard for rural people to carry on fiscally or, by extension, physically. Although their way of life is under attack by current conditions, the emphasis here is that they, like the farmer in the song, maintain a strong spirit and give their all in an attempt to uphold this lifestyle.

While the tone appears celebratory, by the end, the song resembles a lamentation. It may desire both admiration and pity. Death finally "comes calling" for the honorable family man. In his final moments, he comforts his family with news that angels have arrived for him. He tells them not to cry because he knows he is blessed and that "God has a place in Heaven for a small town Southern man." These lyrics strongly appeal to the perceived moral superiority of the rural lifestyle. Jackson implies that keeping strong religious, patriotic, and familial values and being a hard-working steward of the land is a
virtuous and worthy path. Jackson reaches beyond discourse on small town people’s
culture to include a blueprint of their souls. By nature, he implies they are self-sacrificing
for their families, land, and lifestyle. They have unshakeable spirits and work ethics, and
strong religious faith. Most importantly, they are blessed by God and have a place reserved
in heaven. While the song may not insinuate that this culture is superior to others, it
certainly holds it in seemingly irreproachable esteem.

Jackson accompanies his praise of this fading lifestyle with a musical tribute to earlier
times in country music as well. His neo-traditional composition incorporates traditional
country elements such as a slow fiddle and pedal steel-guitar, an acoustic guitar lead, a
string bass, and acoustic rhythm guitars to back-up the lead. The chiming sounds of a
Fender Rhodes can even be heard (an electro-mechanical piano popular until the ‘80s and
often dubbed "a pianistic counterpart to the electric guitar") (Adler). A fiddle is strummed
like a guitar in certain parts. The moderate tempo supports a fairly buoyant melody; the
musical throwback and the lyrical journey serve as a type of precursory wake for rural
culture and its traditional country music.

The mix of general and specific characteristics complicates this narrative as an analogy
for the national rural experience. The creation of an "every" rural man employs specifics
that prohibit a universal application. The retroactive nature of the storytelling also keeps it
from meeting Knupp’s qualifications as simplistic; it is more reflective than active. A
heavy use of personal pronouns means it is expressive enough; however, it neither
identifies an antagonist nor engages in negative criticisms about an opposition. The only
reactive, negative sentiment concerns the farmer’s struggle to financially support his family
and sustain the lifestyle passed down to him through generations of his family. The lyrics
only state that "years wore out his body" and he had to "give it all to keep it all together and keep his family on his land." Besides the hard years, it names no other direct culprit for the farmer’s struggles. Listeners must only infer the identification of the oppressor. This song displays an interest in only two of Denisoff’s goals: a desire to reinforce the value structure of pre-existing members and create moral unity and uniqueness in its world view ("Sing" 60). So while "Small Town Southern Man" indulges in plenty of pro-rural propaganda, it contains nothing directly identifiable against which to protest.

Jackson’s background and viewpoints contain potential incentive to create protest on behalf of the hard-working rural man; however, with only a shadow of an oppressor rather than a clearly-identifiable villain, "Small Town Southern Man" lacks the most foundational element of protest. At best, it could be interpreted as a character study to spread awareness of rural people’s virtues and struggles.

“A Little More Country Than That”

"A Little More Country Than That," written by Rory Lee Feek, Wynn Varble, and Don Poythress and performed by Easton Corbin, features a neo-traditional musical composition within which a narrator unwraps the elements of his country persona. Using a stream of romantic, pastoral images, the narrator defines his idea of country as he defines himself. Throughout the song, the narrator speaks to his female love interest, as he endeavors to reassure her of his fitness as a suitor by way of his country credentials.

His first attempt to define the essence of country-ness (and himself) begins down a rural dirt road. He conjures images of potholed dirt road and a creek bank with "cane poles catchin’ channel cat." He applies the social conditioning that country people, living far
from modernity out in nature, still enjoy outdoor endeavors such as hunting and fishing. These are activities that have fallen out of favor with modern society due to the lack of necessity for food acquisition (the modern popularity of grocery stores) and modern political objections; therefore, they have become "country" customs. The narrator may use scenic imagery to note that he spends time out in nature. This associates him with the positive moral virtues commonly associated with the agrarian of American folklore, such as being honest, hard-working, and less superficial (Brown 29; Greeley 185). Again the agrarian icon influences the American psyche and holds the allure of the all-natural, back-to-basics lifestyle (Brown 29). The narrator takes the associations of these decisively rural and picturesque images and graphs them onto his personae. He then adds that he is even more country than these elements.

The narrator asks the girl to imagine a small town "with an old hound layin’ out in front of the courthouse while the old men chew the fat." Here the narrator gives a nod to the stereotype of small towns as sleepy, laid-back locals lacking the hustle and bustle of the city streets. The courthouse scene is quiet, which alludes to the notion that small towns have less crime. The use of animals, particularly dogs, is another popular motif in country songs (Malone, “Don’t” 22-23), connecting to the agrarian concept of rural people being closely bonded to nature. The old men chewing the fat plays to the perception of the importance of community-building in small town life; people are supposedly more social and more involved with each other on a personal level. No one is in a hurry, not even the dog. Life seems peaceful in Small Town, USA.

The narrator goes on to tell his love interest that if she wants to settle in town or in the suburbs (signified by "in a school zone") then she is "way off track." Women pushing to
relocate to suburbia create opposition and conflict, as the narrator rejects the inclination for
people to move out of the countryside and into these areas. This passage is the closest
thing to a negative criticism found in the song. With one quick statement, his don’t-fence-
me-in sentiment professes his devotion not only to his country personae but also a physical
devotion to rural regions. In his rejection of urban and suburban communities, he adds that
life there includes having "the doors locked and alarms on." A lack of locks and alarms in
the country could insinuate that rural regions are safer, more trusting or trustworthy. His
version of rural America is free, but not wild.

As the narrator launches into the song’s chorus, he explains the motivation behind this
slideshow of country clichés is to ensure that his girlfriend understands who he is and what
she is getting "under this old hat." He seeks to embody a multitude of positive agrarian
stereotypes. The mere mention that his hat is old very subtly implies that he is not
superficial. Perhaps he is more concerned with the sentimentality or functionality of his
clothes than with having new, fashionable items. Again, he may be appealing to the
listener’s social conditioning concerning the old agrarian icon, as a country man’s hat may
serve a primarily utilitarian function (farming or other blue-collar attire). He could also be
insinuating that he is a humble person of meager means.

In a more direct profession of his relationship-worthy attributes, he proclaims that he is
more country than the type of suitor who would cheat on her. He puts a cultural twist on
the characteristics of fidelity. The link between fidelity and being culturally country again
paints the rural as a haven for America’s moral values, and portrays rural people as its
gatekeepers. The troublesome result of this sentiment is that, by extension, those separated
from what is country are then somehow less safe from immoral behavior (at least in terms
of fidelity). Toward the end of the song, he re-emphasizes this pairing, saying that although she has received "those three words" (presumably "I love you") and they "fell flat," his profession of love will not. He may be proposing marriage or he may be merely reassuring his love interest that she made the right decision by saying yes to an earlier proposal when he professes "this ring ain’t something that I mean to give you and then take back." For both cases, he attributes his superior virtue to his country-ness. For him, being country equates to being a man of your word and possessing the toughness and tenacity to stick with a commitment.

The song repeatedly propagates positive stereotypes about rural culture through allegorical implications. This method does not require explicit, forthright (and therefore potentially off-putting) declarations. Nostalgia is another persuasive device used to reach listeners emotionally. The narrator tells his fiancé to think of "a Hank song from days gone." Hank Williams became an iconic country artist during the genre’s first surge of national popularity, while it was still embracing its "hillbilly" image and producing traditional sounds (Escott). Unlike his son, Hank Jr., who made a name for himself within the rock-infused Outlaw Country style, Hank Williams, Sr. created haunting country classics that have become a cornerstone of country songcraft—a taproot, if you will, for today’s neo-traditional artists (Escott). For one to say he is more country than a song from the most revered star of the genre’s golden era is a high-handed compliment, dubbing one’s self as something traditional, old-fashioned, deeply-rooted. The narrator may be attempting to confirm the purity of his country roots by making another comparison to how he is like the old ways of all things rural.
The music of "A Little More Country Than That" reinforces its lyrical messages. As the song’s own steel guitar ride plays, the narrator compares himself to a Hank song with "a steel ride that’s so strong it sends chills up your back." Its music remains consistent with the lyrical profession of adhering to old-fashioned roots. The heavy use of traditional country instruments like the steel and acoustic guitars and the fiddle adds perceived truth to the lyrics. The clean, stripped-down production allows the string instruments to stand out, instead of crowding them with layers of electric guitars, bass, and various other musical effects common to rock and pop styles. With its easy, rolling melody and measured, mid-tempo pacing, "A Little More Country Than That" is a throwback to the yesteryear of the musical genre. These are attributes characteristic of the musical compositions from country music’s early, golden era and are highly lauded by neo-traditionalist artists and fans. By encouraging nostalgia among country music purists—and so promoting feelings of trust and unity—the compatibility of the music and the message may be viewed as a persuasive rhetorical tool to convince listeners of the validity of the lyrics’ various messages.

Corbin’s vocal styling alone is strongly redolent of an older artist and could be viewed as an instrument of persuasion. Critics and fans frequently compare Corbin’s vocal timbre to that of the iconic neo-traditionalist George Strait, often-hailed "King of Country" (Keefe). Critics at Slate magazine commented on the similarity, stating that “…Corbin sounds like a young George Strait to a distracting degree. In playing up that similarity, he suggests that, if you're going to be derivative, at least have the good sense to drink from the well of someone widely hailed as a genre legend" (Keefe). His intentional or coincidental imitation of Strait may attract listeners with a borrowed likeability, as the song’s narrator does with his pastoral images and Hank Williams references.
Corbin’s vocal resemblance to Strait may also imbue him (and the song) with Straits favorable qualities (his stardom, legacy as a founding neo-traditionalist, and commitment to music that is personal, straight-forward and rooted time-honored country sounds) (Bego 3-6; Lewis 309). Strait is also known for his scantily-produced, man-and-his-guitar style concert performances (Bego 2-3). Although Corbin (an agribusiness major raised on his grandparents’ farm near rural Trenton, Florida, population 1,617) has plenty of country credentials, he would still stand to gain quick credibility as an artist by linking himself to the likes of Williams and Strait (US Census Bureau). The name-dropping and imitation could reinforce his efforts at a traditional sound and image. When Slant magazine writes "At a time when so many new country acts are drawing their inspiration from stale ’80s arena rock and early-’90s adult contemporary drivel, newcomer Easton Corbin stands as a refreshing change of pace," it explains why this persona effectively appeals to some country aficionados (Keefe). With borrowed authenticity from Williams, Strait and a string of clichéd country images, Corbin and "A Little More Country Than That" could dramatically appeal to listeners that also find him refreshing in his new old style.

The lyrics never insinuate anything about rural America diminishing as a geographical region or culture. The narrator never presents the cultural activities, landscapes or mores as endangered; however, he always asks his fiancé to imagine, picture or think of them, rather than telling her to see or experience them in person. Listeners receive information that the essence of these elements thrives within the narrator’s being. And because he is even more country than the most quintessential, foundational country things, country is alive and well. Therefore, sustentation of rural culture is important within this song, but not as a movement
in urgent need of action (as for an endangered species); it is simply an internal continuation already taking place to the narrator’s satisfaction.

The lyrics imply much about rural culture’s superiority. The verses depict country life as scenic, peaceful, safe, not too industrialized, and a place where people still attain their food first-hand from nature. The lyrics depict traditional country music as chilling and emotionally connective with listeners. Then the song begins to push the boundaries of the old truisms from which it pulls. Not only does it deem the "country" as a haven for utmost honesty, safety, trustworthiness, and loyalty, it gives "country" the distinction of being the owner of these virtues. Rural America is not the world’s sole proprietor of these traits, but the song alleges that these virtues are somehow synonymous with being country.

"A Little More Country Than That" also suggests that there may be something even more country than the already hyper-clichéd images it evokes, although the narrator never explains or describes what that “more country” is like, exactly. While the agrarian icon of American folklore does, by extension, loan its virtues to this genre (or rather this genre borrows from it), the country has never owned exclusive rights to America’s morality. This song suggests that the more country one is, the more honest and loyal one is—as if to suggest these traits always sat comfortably on the country side of the cultural spectrum. This further implies that the farther you travel away from the country end of said cultural spectrum, the farther you travel from honesty and loyalty. Be it on geographical or cultural terms, the opposite of country would be urban. There are, of course, dangers in saying that whatever is not country must be its logical opposite. One could then make the assumption that what is urban is, by default, the farthest from honest and loyal: dishonest and disloyal. Suddenly, giving oneself a musical pat on the proverbial back becomes a much more
polarizing, divisive, and stigmatizing act. It then becomes an under-handed political statement, whether the speaker intended to offend or not.

This seems like an unqualified leap to make until one attempts to view the same type of argument within an already-acknowledged controversial sphere, such as race. Song lyrics proclaiming "I’m not the kind to two-time; I’m a little more white than that" would undoubtedly stir controversial waters and injure emotions of non-whites. Listeners would swiftly identify the song as an under-handed insult to the white race’s commonly-associated opposites. In regards to race in America, the opposite of Caucasian includes a myriad of options; in regards to physical determiners of rural, there are generally only two other options: urban and suburban. Whether or not urban qualifies as the cultural opposite of rural remains debatable. Exploring definitions of rural and urban within various spheres can uncover the existent subjective understandings and the methods their believers use to propagate them.

The narrator’s ambiguous ethical and cultural measurements render him unable to precisely define himself. His attempts use similar but inferior (and ultimately insufficient) examples. This is an un-definition, if you will, because he never fully identifies what he is, only what he is more than. The ambiguity may work to the narrator’s advantage by adding depth to his alleged country-ness. If nothing exists that is as country as he (which could convert his "I’m a little more country than…" to "I am as country as…"), then he must exist on a new, mysterious level. Nothing as country as he has ever existed before now. This frees listeners’ imaginations to ascribe to him any personally-determined pinnacle of country-ness they might conjure. Knupp maintains that this quality augments persuasive ability and that popular protest songs "thrive on ambiguities, sweeping assertions, and
panoramic criticisms rather than on specific issues, policies, and arguments" (384-385). Once again, generalizations serve to strengthen the song’s persuasive appeal.

So it can be determined that this song’s lyrical and musical content is of pro-country propaganda and promulgates it to listeners with aid from the following rhetorical devices: nostalgia, generalizations, stereotypes, emotional appeals, and historic cultural conditionings that pull from the audience’s collective memory. In relation to this persuasion and propaganda as protest, it lacks many of protest music’s essential criterion. While bursting with personal expressiveness, the lyrical composition lacks adequate simplicity and reactiveness. Much of the action takes place within the imagination. And instead of engaging in critical discourse about an opponent, favorable evaluations of the country’s superiority monopolize the lyrics. These in-group messages reinforcing social conditionings could help the narrator sell himself as a suitable mate to his fiancé; they could help Corbin sell himself as a traditional country artist to his audience, and help the songwriters sell country culture as a moral haven. The lyrics do create the alternate, over-simplified reality that Knupp mandates for protest construction. Sweeping assertions are present (and flawed, of course, since they are heavily generalized and stereotypical). It is not, however, a generalized, solution-less criticism of the status quo. For one, it lacks a problem needing solving.

Although Knupp says the opposition in protest music is often vague, it is exceptionally elusive in this song and never expressly stated. The narrator does convey distaste for school-zoned, alarms-on living and resistance to move into such a suburban-esque area, but any substantial adversary or oppositional sentiment in "A Little More Country than That" must be read into the text. Because it primarily praises rural culture, any criticisms of the
urban or suburban are obscurely couched in positive rhetoric. Its tenuous relationship to protest music, however, should not diminish its valuable contribution to contemporary pro-country propaganda.
CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

Americanism means the virtues of courage, honor, justice, truth, sincerity, and hardihood – the virtue that means America. ~Teddy Roosevelt

Interpretations of the Rural

When an artist of any kind expounds an interpretation of a culture using a mass media outlet and receives popular national reception, it is crucial to examine that interpretation. The art can yield profound anthropological and sociopolitical insight into the culture. Even such an humble art form as country music can speak to, for, and about a culture in ways that merit scholarly attention. The potential messages, motivations, and effects of these presentations should be examined as cultural representations. Although the songs in this study illustrate their comparative concentrations and potential effects, it is useful to examine and divulge the key concepts that artists are using to describe rural lifestyle and preferences for such a lifestyle. This research illustrates that contemporary country music songs continue to engage in expressions of rural identity and experience. A core significance of subjectively recreating and evolving traditional definitions of rural identity remains constant and is evident in these songs. The songs’ subtle-to-obvious revelations of
cultural tensions within the rural and between the rural and urban offer new and useful commentary to the dialog surrounding rural literacies and sustention.

Although not every song creates an us-versus-them dynamic, they all present varying images of a blue-collar, hard-working rural America. This study has concluded that contemporary country music still engages many of the original motifs and values it did in the early days of its inception. As stated previously, research acknowledges that country music has been projected towards the American working-class underdog since its beginning (MacKay 285). To that effect, the songs in this study articulate the constructive nature of the working man. Church’s reference to the benefit of working a "blue-collar forty" directly reflects this ideal, not to mention the fact that every song exhibits similar representations and expresses them as a clear preference over non-rural lifestyles, actions, and interests.

Using music as the medium for this message allows the performers and writers to reach a large audience in a short amount of time. The popularity of country music has the potential to appeal not only to today’s ruralites but also to those who yearn for a more agrarian way of life. Music has the advantage of being widely accessible, and almost all genres are available at the end of an FM dial. Each artist has the ability to reach out and build up a following that speaks to the power of their self-expression.

Self-expression may be the most crucial factor when it comes to the importance of music to rural culture. Jaret and Boles suggest that song lyrics, specifically, are an aspect of popular culture capable of reinforcing, forming or guiding the values and attitudes of audiences (257). Audiences have a tendency to be attracted to music expressing values that they would express themselves if given the same platform (Jaret and Boles 257). These
themes must be congruent with the core values of rural culture (or at least congruent with how the culture’s members would prefer to the described) or else the artists may incite a back-lash from their intended audience. Therefore, the method of message delivery also influences reception. Eyerman and Jamison concluded from their research that using rhetorical devices such as word choice, tone, and catchy hooks, the singer and writer are able to gently persuade, evoke a sense of nostalgia, and boost morale (163). This was all too apparent in popular forms of protest and propaganda music, but the themes of these six songs, combined with their popularity on Billboard’s Hot Country charts, show that there is a direct and large audience embracing pro-rural messages. As important as the presentation of rural culture and its influence on the masses, it is important to understand that these songs were written and/or performed by artists with rural backgrounds, and so may qualify as examples of rural self-expression.

The analysis has shown that each of these songs has direct expression of the preferred role of rural traditions by the artists. They may each illustrate them a bit differently, but all share a similar core value that can be broken down into adversarial and non-adversarial views. Church, Rascal Flatts, and Thompson’s songs fall on the adversarial side, as they are trying to protect a person, way of life, or rural idea. Jackson, Moore, and Corbin’s songs share a romanticized ideal that, at its core, expresses a belief that rural lifestyle is superior to other lifestyle options.

**Highlights of Definition Making**

In their attempts to define "rural," "country," and "small town" people, places and ideologies, the songs in this study employ a variety of ambiguous, non-exacting rhetorical devices. Similes, metaphors, figurative language, and branding form a collage of rural
images and associations. It is almost as if the artists’ own culture possesses a certain je ne sais quoi not even they can isolate and identify.

In "Way Out Here," the application of the three Johns—Wayne, Cash and Deere—to define what rural people are "about" does as much to confuse as to clarify. Ultimately, they only stand as examples of some things that some facets of rural people like. Because these brand names presumably possess conceptualized meaning within rural culture, Eyerman and Jamison’s research into music’s use of traditions says they are cultural artifacts—tools useful for the formation of a collective identity (43). However, these names contain such a myriad of associations that their mention only incites more ambiguity.

All six songs embraced similar surface-level ideas (small town scenes, country hobbies) in conjunction with snippets of what they deem rural ideologies (such as the emphasis in "Small Town Southern Man" on God and family, the political philosophy in "Way Out Here"). The artists are all cherry-picking their preferred cultural artifacts to throw into the rural cultural stew, if you will. While the songs form a patchwork of snapshot-like images of rural people and places and compile lists of beliefs, interests, and habits, a clear, comprehensive definition remains elusive. The nuances and variances inherent in cultural existence complicate the creation of a consensual academic definition.

The analysis also shows that these songs should not be viewed as flawless, unbiased specimens of rural people’s environment and experiences. Rural people, places and experiences are so diverse that it would be hard for any source to do this. Certainly, no song will ever be long enough or complex enough to accurately encompass the entire depth and breadth of rural culture(s); however, these songs do present a small but valuable window of insight into contemporary rural Americana. Due to music’s expressive and
subjective nature, the view is of course biased, generalized, and at times, ambiguous. The depictions are likely neither unanimously true nor false. The characteristics of rural, small town people and places that they present all exist on some level, be it in factual, statistical reality; in personal, perceived experiences; or simply ingrained in the collective imagination of many American minds as a result of centuries-old popular culture’s pro-agrarian propaganda. Even in their truest forms, these characteristics still will not be universally, timelessly accurate for all rural citizens.

Too many of the songs, "Way Out Here," "Small Town Southern Man," "Small Town, USA," and "Homeboy," contain lyrics presenting rural societies as monolithic, which they are not. If instead one were to approach these lyrics as depictions of rural experiences and issues—agreeable or disagreeable, physical or purely psychological—as simply elements that rural people are exposed to, rather than the common cultural mores and norms of all rural people, then these songs would attain more validity as a representation of rural America. In other words, rural citizens are exposed to all these elements, be it through lived experience or through dealing with them as sympathetic or adversarial stereotypes. As studies of cultural elements that rural people are exposed to, the songs develop greater worth as contributions to rural literacies.

Although the songs do not present flawless anthropological paradigms, they do offer meaningful insight into rural communities. Evidence from the interviews and personal backgrounds of the songwriters and performers shows that many of these artists view their songs as at least partially autobiographical. Quotes from Jackson’s interviews stating such motivations as "he had it in his mind to portray the kind of simple, well-meaning people he grew up around" suggest these songs may contribute to how rural people see themselves,
would like to have other people see them, or even how they romanticize themselves by embracing and reusing the same folkloric archetypes that the outside world does ("Alan Jackson Lives Out ‘Small Town Southern Man’").

These songs’ high degree of popularity among listeners within a pluralistic rural culture poses an interesting question as to why diverse people chose to engage in professions of solidarity—be it for the emotional payoff of a sense of belonging, nostalgia, regional pride, or other reasons. Eyerman and Jamison’s research suggests that belonging to musical traditions such as this allows audiences admission into what Benedict Anderson calls "imagined community" and satisfies people’s need for group belongingness (29). Although these traditions and communities spring from imagination at the root, or germination rather, they affect very real emotion, reaction and rational change (Eyerman and Jamison 30). Therefore, they do offer insight into the psyche of potential sects (albeit heavily clichéd ones) of rural citizens and the hot-button issues and turbulent, defiant emotions bubbling to the surface of today’s socioeconomic climate.

Reconciling Inner-Cultural Dichotomies

The six songs present two disparate versions of rural people through the use of the rebel-rousing honky-tonker and the virtuous agrarian holy-roller images. Each song finds its own way to isolate or reconcile these images with each other to form their vision of the rural citizen. For instance, in Jackson’s "Small Town Southern Man," the small town man exhibits more mature, family-oriented behaviors than Justin Moore’s small town man in "Small Town USA." Moore’s man focuses on partying on Saturday nights, riding dirt roads, drinking beer, and hanging out with a love interest by his side that he calls "baby" (rather than identifying their relationship as a committed, marital relationship). This aligns
more with honky-tonk mores discussed in Chapter 1. These ideological variances are not unusual within contemporary country music; the glorification of casual romance and the desire for a stable, committed marriage often co-exist even within the same song (Lewis 105). While Jackson’s small town man adheres more closely to the virtuous agrarian icon, Moore’s embraces the country outlaw image of Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Hank Jr. and others. Jackson’s narrator’s life centers on hard work, family, and religion. Moore’s man may be blue-collar, but Jackson’s still farms in Small Town, America. These men share commonalities in their faith and their love of the small town environment and a simple existence; however, Moore’s is considerably more modern and youth-like and appears more lenient in his religious mores.

The beer drinking and party-filled half of Moore’s narrator’s weekends juxtaposed to the grace-filled second half creates a Saturday night-Sunday morning dichotomy that traditional conservative Christian fundamentalist standards may find contradictory and hypocritical. In a classic example of why singer-songwriter Kris Kristofferson calls country songs "walking contradictions," "Small Town USA" illustrates the popular tendency in country music to fashion the importance of work and religion seamlessly alongside exaltations of a rowdy nightlife (Lewis 105). Moore fuses the traditional and progressive, conservative and rebellious stereotypes into a new, modern ruralite quite commonly found in contemporary country music.

"Here" displays a particularly interesting hell-raiser and Christ-follower combination. The heavy connotations of religion and divinely-supported vigilantism cast a shadow over the lighter, good-ol-boy traits, such as loving alcohol and Saturday nights, smoking, drinking, and living a seemingly carefree, less-restricted lifestyle. Donehower, Hogg, and Schell claim that this dual rural stereotype of the pioneer and the barbarian thrives in realms from popular media to education (45-46). Other popular country artists have recently tackled this inner-cultural dichotomy. Miranda Lambert’s "Heart Like Mine," which reached number one on Billboard’s Hot Country Songs chart in May 2011, depicts Christian holy-rollers criticizing a Christian honky-tonker who decides Jesus would understand her tattooed, smoking, wine-drinking ways (Billboard). The songs in this study similarly fuse dichotomies into the definition of rural citizens.

The country artists’ manifestations of these rebel-angel hybrids, formed through a combination of two-dimensional stereotypes, may be their best attempt at rounding and humanizing rural people and culture. Country artists present these as complimentary dualities, rather than nullifying. The meld of personality traits that these six songs present illustrates a proud but humble sense of self within rural people. Thompson sings about rural people as both fighters and prayers for peace, patriotic and vigilant. Thompson, Moore, and Church all croon about country people that are a mix of hard-working and hard-partying. Even the songs’ musical compositions blend traditional country music instrumentation styled with rock beats and electric guitars, to create an amalgamated and complimentary medium for their two-prong dogma. In "Duellin’ Values: Tension, Conflict and Contradiction in Country Music," Lewis quotes the work of culture scholars who claim that appearances of these "points of contrary tendency," also referred to as "polar
oppositions," occur within every culture, and indeed within every soul (Lewis 107; Erikson 82; Swindler 131). The resulting tensions are said to imbue the culture with a richness and the power to satisfy members’ wide spectrum of needs (Lewis 107; Swindler 131). The presentation of the noble agrarian and redneck rebel as a melded figure illustrates the theory that potential tensions between the more conservative and the more rebellious sects within a culture can reconcile to strengthen rather than divide it.

*Exploring Social Sustainability*

The songwriters incorporate strong cultural tensions within the lyrics and music of these songs that insinuate an existing culture clash between rural and urban America. Whether they intend this struggle to depict happenings only within the boundaries of their narratives or to extend beyond remains subject to listener interpretation. But each provides some grounds for how urban culture takes rural sons and daughters away from their homeland—robbing America’s rural areas and small towns of their workers, caretakers, and lovers.

Each song presents its own suggestion for how small town places and people might be endangered. In "Small Town USA," listeners again hear of a hard-working small-town people who "break their backs" for a buck and cannot get ahead. In "Small Town Southern Man," the farmer’s overworked body struggled to maintain ownership of the family farm. People living "Way Out Here" have only hard-earned dimes and drive unpaved roads like the ones in "A Little More Country Than That." "Homeboy" admits a blue-collar existence is not a glamorous one, and in "Mayberry," small towns have already become a thing of myth and memory. All six songs either clearly state or imply (through descriptions of the environment that small town) that country people struggle financially under the tough
economic conditions of rural America. At the very least, the songs describe these small towns and rural areas as lacking a great abundance of material fineries, sending a message that these areas do not possess opportunities for financial success. The songs say that to compensate, small towns offer an environment rich in personal, emotional, and spiritual treasures. This supports the earlier presumption that economic pressures lay at the root of any potential fear of cultural imperialism. It is important to note that although economic hardships are recognizable, the songs do not emphasize desire for abundant wealth. Whenever they mention financial strife or gain, stability takes precedence over abundance.

These songs proclaim the small town man’s primary concern is making enough money to remain in the rural environment that he loves. The narrator in "A Little More Country Than That" sets boundaries with his fiancé to inform her of his intense attachment to the country and his aversion to leaving it. He describes his fiancé’s potential attraction to an urban or suburban-style neighborhood as a threat. His quick and assertive rejection of the area suggests that her desire for him to leave the countryside would create discordance within the relationship, perhaps even severe it.

Other identifiable threats range from abstract to physical. In "Mayberry," small, rural towns have already faded from existence, as the narrator only mentions them as in history or in television stories. And aspects of urbanization (globalization, industrialization, uncontrolled capitalism) may have been responsible for Mayberry’s disappearance. "Way Out Here" credits a seemingly individualized human threat to rural people and places—a potentially physical predator afoot who is critical and disapproving of rural lifestyle. This unidentified adversary must pose a considerable threat to their culture’s existence or
perhaps somehow to their personal existence, as it is so intense that rural people must retaliate with deadly force.

Criticism and/or rejection of a rural lifestyle, from within and without the region and culture, antagonize the characters in these songs. Characters in "Homeboy" and "Small Town USA" speak openly about disapproving of peoples’ choices to leave rural life. "Small Town Southern Man" and "A Little More Country Than That" identify forces that may try to urge or force a country man off his homeland. "Mayberry" reveals the pain of a rural heart displaced in urban environs. Rejection of rural regions and culture is something to which the narrators cannot relate. They defend their homeland and culture and sometimes even attempt to dissuade those attempting to abandon it, such as in "Homeboy."

The threats in "Homeboy" arise from the cultural spread of urbanity, rather than physical intrusion. Other popular country songs do address pressures from urban sprawl, such as "Daddy Won’t Sell the Farm," in which an "urban storm" of housing units, shopping malls, and rush hour traffic encroaches upon an old farmer’s agricultural land and his new neighbors complain about his lifestyle. "Homeboy," however, lists the cultural changes the brother undergoes—from his fashion choices to his value system. Hip-hop culture seemed to mysteriously sneak in and grab this younger brother. It lured him and then changed him, pulling him away from his roots, his family, and his original identity. The "square" small town could not compete with the rebellious and dangerous hip-hop appeal. If the songwriters intended "Homeboy" to appeal to listeners’ common experiences, then it could be labeling the popularity of hip-hop culture and its negative influences (as no positive aspects were discussed here) as a modern threat to rural culture.
Claims of the superior quality of rural regions and culture and the benefits of living within them resound throughout these songs. “Small Town Southern Man” simply asserts that the rural, small town lifestyle was the man’s preference and he fought to sustain it. The other songs ("Homeboy," "Way Out Here," "Small Town USA," and "Mayberry") venture beyond to explicitly state or subtly imply that rural culture is better, healthier, and "the way we were supposed to live." They suggest that there is in fact and right and a wrong way to live. They make passionate pleas against what they depict as urbanity’s destructive impacts on nature, humanity, and rural regions and culture. They present rural culture as a positive alternative.

All six songs link the existence of this culture to its rural environs. The characters cannot simply adopt country characteristics to assimilate into this culture; they must transplant themselves to the physical landscape, because the songs depict rural culture as immovably rooted there. The narrator in "Homeboy" does not simply plead with his brother to abandon urban styles and behaviors, but also tells him he must "come home." The narrator in "Mayberry" does not pause on a city bench to take a break from the fast pace, but climbs a mountain "above the noise and the city streets." Because the culture is inextricably entwined within the landscape and composition of small towns and rural countryside, the implications of what is country and small town extend beyond the superficial descriptions determining their definitions and into the sphere of geography. This explains why the characters express such passion, defensiveness, and loyalty for their places of origin.

All the songs’ (except "Mayberry") expound a central ambition of the narrator and/or his fellow citizens to continue living in the rural countryside and small towns. They may also
desire to praise and protect these areas, but five out of the six songs contain lyrics articulating desire to remain in rural, small town locals. This supports music scholar Jock MacKay’s belief in country music’s exorbitant preoccupation with place (293). The narrator in "Way Out Here" will fight to defend it; the narrator in "Small Town Southern Man" worked hard to keep his family on it; the narrator in "Small Town USA" never wanted any part of leaving it; the narrator in "Homeboy" warns his brother he will regret not coming back to it; and the narrator in "A Little More Country Than That" says he is way too country for suburbia and his fiancé would be "way off track" to want them to move there. The narrators’ home region seems to play an intricate role in the formation of their personal and cultural identities. This is far from unheard of among rural people. When anthropologist Eric Ramirez-Ferrero interviewed rural farm families, he noted a deep, passionate bond between these families and their land that they often described in biological terms, such as saying the dirt flowed through their veins (78). The limited focus on these regions could of course potentially limit appeal to a broader audience.

Some of the artists may underestimate their own emphasis on the connection between land and lifestyle. Concerning the explicit targeting of one geographic region in "Small Town Southern Man," Alan Jackson conveyed that "there are people in New York State and Oregon and Southern California… they're not always small-town, but they are rural people and around outskirts of major cities and everywhere that are just regular working people that are the same as a small-town Southern man" ("Alan Jackson learns mass appeal"). Perhaps there are a variety of people from various walks of life who can glean identifiable sentiment from Jackson’s song; however, this does not erase the fact that his lyrics never explicitly stretch to envelop them. On the contrary, Jackson gives these traits
and experiences an origin, a home. These songs are not titled "Simple, Hard-Working Man" or "Family Values, USA." Easton Corbin does not repeatedly croon "I’m a little more trustworthy than that." While the writers and performers may desire elements of the songs to appeal to people outside rural, small town areas, the lyrics remain extremely region-specific. The key, unifying root of country-ness only draws sustenance when emerged in rural environment and culture.

The narrator in "Mayberry" oddly ignores the option of returning to a small town to live or building a permanent home on his mountain-top escape. This potentially decreases listeners’ ability to sympathize with the narrator and complicates the song’s message concerning rural and urban worth. The lines "I wake up every time I try to turn back" could be interpreted as him coming to his senses, realizing small town Mayberry was a nice dream but has no place in the present. He complains about the prevalence and dangers of urban America’s rabid capitalistic ideology and prioritization of progress over nature. He says he hears "this old Earth shouting," yet he does not suggest people help it or themselves. He participates in short reprieves, not rebellion and offers no solution, only a defeatist goodbye. The narrator does not acknowledge the possibility that people could end cities, change cities, or move out of them. Donehower, Hogg, and Schell call this "abandonment rhetoric," because it gives up on the possibility of sustaining or preserving rural lifestyles (169). These "narratives of rural decline" (messages that claim unstoppable forces are destroying rural America) are themselves aiding the elimination of rural areas because their portrayal of them as lost causes affects attitudes, actions, and even political policies (169). Taking into account that the songwriter, Arlos Smith, grew up in a rural town, one could conjecture that he may feel it is a romantic, idealistic lifestyle that either
does not exist anymore (even in the remaining vestiges of rural regions) or that it was only ever a lovely dream (one people came closest to attaining before modernization and industrialization completely consumed rustication and community) and it should be compartmentalized as nostalgia and bid farewell. He condones mourning it but condemns turning back, thereby engaging in abandonment rhetoric and capitulating to the very progress he so heavily criticizes.

**Investigating Cultural Tensions**

"Homeboy" and "Mayberry" present similar rural and urban dichotomies that essentially extol the virtues of the rural while condemning the vices of the urban. The differences between the rural and urban are highly oversimplified and polarized. Using this selective sharing, many elements of each culture are ignored.

Both songs highlight rural regions as natural, spiritual refuges rife with community and simple pleasures. Combined, the songs present rural areas as places where familial and communal relationships are nurtured: families help each other, work and relax together, and everyone is on a first name basis. They are places with a high degree of interpersonal communication that value the individual and respect the limits of the body and spirit, because the slow pace allows time for rest and renewal. People take time to enjoy simple pleasures—be it sitting on a porch swing or by a lake, with an ice-cold beer or an ice-cold cherry coke. This nourishing and nurturing imagery extends beyond just human relationships and into man’s relationship with nature. Within both songs, the natural environment can heal and renew the characters. Mountain tops, farms, lakes, and rural areas heal the damage the urban life has done. The mountain top in "Mayberry" helps the
narrator escape the noise of city streets; lakeside relaxation and farm work in "Homeboy" hold restorative powers for the narrator’s brother. In addition, the songs’ statements that rural, small town people keep Sunday full of grace and as a day of rest imply loyalty to religion; suggesting, as "Mayberry" does when it claims the earth speaks through the trees and the mountaintop is "God’s window," that not only are rural people devout, but that God lives among them in these natural, rural areas.

Both songs characterize urban influences as dangerous and destructive. In "Homeboy," urban hip-hop culture led the brother to theft, violence, disrespect, and superficiality. "Mayberry" faults urban society’s fast, spinning pace for natural disasters and the narrator’s anxieties (shown through his need to escape to the mountain). In both songs, the noisy, gritty streets are unnatural and foster detrimental lifestyles and living environments. The earth even shouts in protest. From the brother’s fake gold teeth and vulgar clothing to the busy city’s inhumane work requirements in the name of progress, urban culture plays the villain. By contrasting these polarized extremes of urban and rural characteristics, these songs promote rural superiority and build a case against living in urban areas or assimilating into urban culture.

*Relationship to Protest-Propaganda*

Only "Mayberry" and "Homeboy" engage in the cornerstone requisites of protest music agreed upon by both Knupp and Denisoff. They both reveal a problem and criticize a vaguely identifiable antagonist. Protest songs must be "rhetorically reactive to perceived problems" (Knupp 384). While the other four songs contain numerous elements of protest as identified in research of Labor Movement, Civil Rights movement, and anti-Vietnam songs, the dearth of these essentials means disentitlement of this commission. "Homeboy"
and "Mayberry" possess nearly every major and minor distinction both Knupp and Denisoff uncovered for lyrical and musical protest rhetoric. At first glance, these songs may also seem dubious and unconventional examples of protest music; however, a deeper analysis reveals the critical and polarizing opinions existing beneath their deceptive veneers as apolitical, feel-good chart-toppers.

An examination of their combined quantitative and qualitative protest determiners revealed a strikingly faithful adherence to standard models of protest rhetoric. Besides identifying a social problem and engaging in heavy amounts of negative criticisms concerning this opposition, both "Mayberry" and "Homeboy" create polarizing and divisive dichotomies between rural and urban environments and cultures. Their biased representations create a battlefield of cultural discrepancies that reveal the social anxiety and perceived states of deprivation and discontent that Knupp says fuel protest songs’ motivation to create the various features of their contrived social realities (378, 382). In creating these realities, both songs utilize pre-existing stereotypes, social conditionings, and in-group messages familiar to rural people. Their promotions of value reinforcement and nostalgic appeals to rural aesthetics and traditions gain listeners’ trust and encourage feelings of solidarity; through what is essentially flattery, this enhances their messages’ persuasiveness (Eyerman and Jamison 42). Quantifiably, both sets of lyrics rate nearly equally expressive and reactive (meaning they contain cathartic personal expression and primarily negative evaluations of the current state of affairs) (Knupp 382, 387). The lyrics in "Mayberry" are simplistic in that they are highly generalized and action-oriented; however, while much of the song takes place in the present, the chorus lines are past-focused and the overarching theme is one of nostalgic dreaming. Similarly, the lyrics in
"Homeboy" contain a mix of temporal orientations; while they are predominately present-oriented, the first and second verses recall past events. Musically, both songs incorporate the banjo and some acoustic guitar accompaniment in order to pay homage to traditional country instrumentation within overwhelmingly modern styles ("Mayberry" embraces pop country, while "Homeboy" creates a country-rock fusion). Through the combined efforts of their compositional elements, these songs sufficiently meet Knupp’s protest music standards, as well as key qualifications established by Denisoff.

Although they share many elemental similarities, "Mayberry" and "Homeboy" fundamentally differ in their respective protest formats: with "Mayberry" utilizing a format similar to Knupp’s findings on anti-Vietnam protest and “Homeboy” sharing attributes with Labor Movement songs. "Mayberry" reacts to oppositional forces with discontent but never overcomes the lyrics’ nihilistic attitude crouching within the melody’s perky façade. The song ends with no resolution to its growing problem of industrialization and inhumane progress-chasing. "Homeboy" offers a clear, viable solution to the negative impact of urban influence: come home. Its strong defiance offers hope and opportunity for a positive future. These characteristics align them with fatalistic anti-Vietnam music and hopeful Labor Movement music, respectively.

Although they meet the necessary qualifications of protest, both songs, due in equal parts to their natures, contents and deliveries, stretch the boundaries of the traditionally-accepted realm of protest music. While they do not redefine protest, they certainly test the parameters of the definition. Knupp and Denisoff frequently refer to protest music as most effective when linked to identifiable, established social movements (383, 822). While this study speculates on a potential rebellion and its aggravating factors, none of the songs—
including "Mayberry" or "Homeboy"—has ties to a pre-existent, widely-known social movement. Denisoff’s research points out that many forms of protest and propaganda attaining a high level of popularity with large audiences, Top Forty type songs, are often not associated with social movements ("Protest Songs" 822). He also argues that while rhetorical protest songs are not overtly connected to a larger social movement, they should nevertheless be considered protest-propaganda ("Songs of Persuasion" 584; Sounds of Social Change 18). Like "Mayberry" and "Homeboy," Denisoff says rhetorical forms of propaganda songs are highly cathartic for the artist, characterized by “individual indignation” and offering political messages designed to change listeners’ opinions (Sounds of Social Change 18). They primarily focus on lifestyle and world view (Denisoff Sounds of Social Change 20). Both "Mayberry" and "Homeboy" use methods to sway listeners’ opinions that include attempts to either recruit or gain support— "Homeboy" through its consistent call home and "Mayberry" through its use of "we" to present the narrator’s problems as common to all listeners. While the definition of what constitutes as political or apolitical concerning social and cultural issues remains debatable, both songs comply adequately to this protest standard.

The other four songs in this study lack sufficient identification and criticisms of a problem or antagonist. Although it behooves protest music to maintain a certain level of ambiguity, potential protest messages within these four songs are obscured to the point of arguable nullification within the realm of engaged, purposeful protest. This is not to say the songs lack the presence of any problems. Each mentions some negative force impacting rural citizens— economic struggles for farm families in "Small Town Southern Man;" people leaving or criticizing the town in "Small Town, USA;" potential mates
desiring to live in the suburbs rather than the country in "A Little More Country Than That." Although these antagonistic forces permeate the rural lifestyle enough to inspire the artist to seek expression, the narratives portray them as insubstantial by minimizing their negative effect on rural people. Within these songs, these forces present problems that ultimately hold no power to demoralize the rural spirit or dissuade the rural citizen to abandon his rural home or ways.

"Way Out Here" falls short of the distinction of protest in its failure to create criticisms and focus its aggression toward an antagonist; however, it exists near the borderline between propaganda and protest due to its militant expression of social discontent and the inferences listeners might make as a result of certain connotations. The majority of the lyrics concentrate on an exposition of who rural people are and where and how they live. The lines "if it’s our backwoods way of living you’re concerned with, you can leave us alone" suggest that definition-making may be a reaction to negative criticism. If this is so, the song attempts to change public opinion, which is an essential goal of propaganda music (Denisoff *Sounds of Social Change* 18). Should these naysayers be the same as those he warns may meet "the good Lord and a gun" if they show up unwelcome, the song would then begin to hold more in common with protest rhetoric; however, as is, the lyrics make no direct connection to these forces on their own. Due to the hyper-ambiguity, the narrator could just as easily be sending his warning to random trespassers or burglars. Listeners can only confidently determine that "Way Out Here" is passionately and defensively pro-rural.

These songs’ tenuous relationship to protest music should not diminish their valuable contribution to rural citizens’ self-defining rhetoric and contemporary pro-country propaganda. Each of these four, "Way Out Here," "Small Town USA," "Small Town
Southern Man," and "A Little More Country Than That," emit pro-rural rhetoric and ideology using methods that may persuade audiences to these beliefs or galvanize existing beliefs. They all use selective, pre-existing stereotypes, clichés, and social conditionings surrounding rural people and places. Most of these pull from the flattering attributes of agrarian mythology and/or honky-tonk stereotypes that augment efforts to form a positive image of rural America.

A listener familiar with country music styles will note that these songs’ musical compositions support their lyrics. "A Little More Country Than That" and "Small Town Southern Man" both use primarily traditional country instruments, loping rhythms, and "twangy" vocals to augment the old-fashioned virtues and images presented in their narratives. These songs add credibility to their lyrical messages by pulling from older musical traditions, as musical traditions have the ability to create and bond listeners’ collective memory and identity (Eyerman and Jamison 2, 35, 42). "Way Out Here" and "Small Town USA" heavily infuse rock elements alongside country guitars and vocals to support both the hard-working and free-spirited personas of their characters. Having the musical composition mirror the lyrical message may signal the listener that these songs contain trustworthy messages, thus rendering more effective any attempt at ideological indoctrination.

Because the songs present their persuasion in the form of in-group messages, they may only serve to bolster rural egos, rather than gain outside support or recruit new ruralites. In particular, the militant warnings in "Way Out Here" and the vainglorious self-promotion in "A Little More Country Than That" may ostracize outsiders. All four songs’ high-level of self-expressiveness through the repetition of pronouns such as "we," "I," "our," and "us"
could make non-rural listeners feel excluded. Denisoff claims that a primary function of persuasive songs is the formation of these “we” feelings that promote solidarity in the group to which the song is directed, and in serving this function, any negative affects on non-adherents are inconsequential (‘Songs of Persuasion 583-585). The persistent use of rhetorical shortcuts through name-dropping actors, artists, television shows, name brands and songs associated with small-towns and country people requires an inside understanding of their cultural, political, and even religious associations (Knupp 388). These methods hold the potential to incite cultural unity by promoting nostalgia, trust and confidence (Arnold 191; Knupp 388). One definition of propaganda is "publicity intended to spread ideas or information that will persuade or convince people" (Ehrlich 718). While these songs clearly intend to disseminate certain information about rural culture, whether or not their approach will effectively promote understanding or influence outside public opinion is questionable. Their rhetorical shortcuts and sweeping generalizations, while considered generally acceptable to in-groups, may appear confusing or logically incomplete or even false to outsiders (Arnold 191). As stated previously, protest music commonly sacrifices outside support for in-group communication by these very methods (Knupp 387; Arnold 191). When the propaganda stands alone without protest messages, as it does here, such methods of persuasion have as much potential to repel listeners as to attract new pro-rural ideological converts.

Sociopolitical Discourse on Rural America

It could be said that these artists are trying to give a face to a ghost, metaphorically speaking. They appear to be attempting to define intangibles—the qualities and feelings
that encompass their culture—and capture the essence of being in a certain type of place, doing certain kinds of activities, among people with a certain set of values, and the emotional aura created in those moments. Such intangibles are difficult to communicate fully and accurately. In this way, culture is an elusive concept, maybe even beyond definition. Modern humans study physical, tangible artifacts (pottery, drawings, weapons) of ancient cultures and use them to make assumptions about the psyche of a people. But these elements are merely puzzle pieces of a larger, holistic understanding that outlanders cannot fully grasp. It could be said that the core of a culture is an awareness within the minds of its people, and the intangible, aesthetic qualities that feed it. Influenced by their own experiences and perceptions, these country artists convey rebellious, self-confident commentaries on the definition of "country," "rural," and "small town." The messages within each of these songs depict a rural people and value set proudly and decisively marked as "other" from the mainstream American population.

It seems these artists make attempts to legitimize their way of life through the persuasive messages in their lyrics and music. I believe they speak to the members of the group as well as the outsiders to promote cultural pride among the in-group and defend rural culture to outsiders. The union of redneck rebel and virtuous agrarian characteristics within the lyrics of many of the songs, accompanied by a fusion of rock and traditional country sounds, implicates a cultural amalgamation of rural culture’s positive and negative stereotypes. Three of the songs ("Way Out Here," "Homeboy," and "Small Town USA") unite the once-separate factions of rural America under a common flag, creating a vision of the new ruralist as possessing the positive associations of the traditional agrarian and the rowdier, more-controversial behaviors of the labor-class
honky-tonker. These lyrics and music appear to reclaim the elements of rural culture often criticized on a national level and exploited as harmful stereotypes and affirm them as acceptable, desirable traits. The other three ("Mayberry," "A Little More Country Than That," and "Small Town, Southern Man") reinforce traditional positive associations with rural culture by emphasizing that rural people and places maintain their virtue even during a time when they are faced with pressures from cultural and financial changes and hardships. These efforts support the possibility for rebellious motivations behind their compositions, as well as a desire to legitimize rural lifestyle in the face of adversity or criticism.

Recommendations for Further Study

This analysis was confined by a limited scope, six songs, within the country music genre. A narrow focus aided thorough revelations of the nuanced complexities of these specific songs’ treatment of the themes, although it limited the consideration of the findings as discoveries about the overall music genre. Expanding the examination to include a significantly larger number of songs within specific time periods would help achieve a greater holistic understanding of the genre’s relationship to the issues surrounding rural identity and modern influences on rural culture.

Additional research may include an analysis of the more obviously political country songs that focus on the statistical loss of land to urban sprawl and the end of agriculture as a way of life as a result of urbanization, globalization, the spread of corporate farming and industry. Songs such as Montgomery Gentry’s "Daddy won’t sell the Farm," Neal McCoy’s "Last of a Dying Breed," and Craig Morgan’s "International Harvester"
concentrate on the fiscal and physical threats to rural culture. Comparing the rhetoric of such songs to the findings in this study would broaden our knowledge of the perceptions and interpretations of these issues and how the political and cultural elements intertwine.

While the absence of artist interviews and listener data allowed for an unadulterated examination of the songs’ full potential for message meanings and motivations, they would provide useful insights. An analysis of interview responses, however, should consider the inherent marketing and public relations risks artists may assume in revealing, highlighting, or overemphasizing politically or culturally divisive elements in their music. A greater wealth of research into audience response and interpretation for all music would be invaluable. More research is needed into the specifics of how and why certain songs attain the highest level of popularity, and on what level they resonate with listeners and why. This would provide clearer insight into the communication between artist and audience. As it is, there are many knowledge gaps in the communicative circle of the artist, message, medium, and audience.

In terms of this study’s contribution to the study of composition and rhetoric, as mentioned previously, the origins of the songs in this study qualify them as models of rural rhetoric and windows into rural culture and literacies. In an age where progressive pedagogies glean musical specimens from popular culture in an effort to provide a bridge to poetry studies, teachers have utilized rap lyrics to garner the attention of inner-city students. A rhetorical dissection of country music lyrics may provide the same benefit for rural students and open exploration into more personal interpretations of the rural culture and its literacies, as Donehower, Hogg, and Schell encourage.
Conclusion

While merely two of the six country music songs suitably qualified for protest music as outlined by prominent scholars, all contained variations of pro-rural propaganda. Each song provided unique elements for its definition of contemporary rural culture, while still sharing a common core allegiance to the virtuous agrarian of early-American folklore. Similarly, within the musical composition, there appeared to be a collective understanding of the rhetorical elements that might achieve nostalgic appeal. While the direct source of cultural tensions or threats remained either elusive or open to interpretation, I argue that a strand of propaganda defending rural culture and advocating its sustentation drove the musical and lyrical rhetoric of all the songs (with the exception of the quasi-defeatist elements in "Mayberry"). These songs’ socially-aggressive, politically-timid propaganda provides evidence of country artists’ deliberate or inadvertent engagement in contemporary dialog surrounding the ethnographic, geographic, theological and political divisions in American culture. Their messages dabble in socio-politically rich content, and sometimes cross the line into complex sentiments of anti-urban protest. While these songs can certainly be enjoyed on a less-complex level for their aesthetic qualities alone, they also prove that specimens of country music’s traditionally populist roots still occupy the airwaves and contain diverse and complex ideologies beneath often unassuming and carefree veneers.
LIST OF REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A

SONG FACTS AND LYRICS
(Lyrics were transposed from the official album recordings.)
"Homeboy"

Written by: Eric Church and Casey Beathard
Performed by: Eric Church
Released: February 28, 2011
Length: 3:49
Label: EMI Nashville
Producer: Jay Joyce
Released as a CD single from the album Chief
Album certification: Gold
US Billboard Hot Country Songs chart peak position: 13
US Billboard Hot 100 chart peak position: 53

Lyrics:

You were too bad for a little square town,
With your hip-hop hat and your pants on the ground,
Heard you cussed out mama, pushed daddy around
Before you tore off in his car

Now here you are running these dirty old streets
Tattoo on your neck, fake gold on your teeth
Got the hood here snowed, but you can't fool me
We both know who you are

Homeboy, you're gonna wish one day,
That you were sittin' on a gate of a truck by the lake
With your high school flame on one side, ice cold beer on the other
Ain't no shame in a blue collar forty,
Little house, little kid, little small town story
If you don't ever do anything else for me, Just do this for me brother,
Come on home, boy.

I was haulin' this hay to Uncle Joe's farm,
Thought of us barefoot kids in the yard,
Man, it seems we were just catchin' snakes in the barn
Now you're caught up in this mess

I could use a little help unloading these bales
I could keep you pretty busy with a hammer and a nail
Ain't a glamorous life but it'll keep you outta jail,
Not worry us all to death

Homeboy, you're gonna wish one day,
That you were sittin' on a gate of a truck by the lake
With your high school flame on one side, ice cold beer on the other
Ain't no shame in a blue collar forty,
Little house, little kids, little small town story
If you don't ever do anything else for me, just do this for me brother,
    Come on home, boy,
    Come on home, boy

You can't hold back the hands of time,
Mama's goin' grey, and so is daddy's mind
I wish you'd come on back and make it all right
    Before they're called home, boy

Homeboy

Come on home, boy

Homeboy

Come on home, boy
"Mayberry"

Written by: Arlos Smith  
Performed by: Rascal Flatts (Jay DeMarcus, Gary LeVox, Joe Don Rooney)  
Released: December 29, 2003  
Length: 4:32  
Label: Lyric Street  
Producer: Mark Bright, Marty Williams, Rascal Flatts  
Released as a CD Single from the album *Melt*  
Album certification: 3x Platinum  
US Billboard Hot Country Songs chart peak position: 1  
US Billboard Hot 100 chart peak position: 21  

Lyrics:

Sometimes it feels like this world is spinning faster  
Than it did in the old days  
So naturally, we have more natural disasters  
From the strain of a fast pace

Sunday was a day of rest  
Now, it’s one more day for progress  
And we can’t slow down ‘cause more is best  
It’s all an endless process

(well) I miss Mayberry  
Sitting on the porch drinking ice-cold cherry Coke  
Where everything is black and white (bada bada badadadada)  
Pickin’ on a six string  
People pass by and you call them by their first name  
Watching the clouds roll by  
Bye, bye

Sometimes I can hear this old earth shouting  
Through the trees as the wind blows  
That’s when I climb up here on this mountain  
To look through God’s window

Now I can’t fly  
But I got two feet  
to get me high up here  
Above the noise and city streets  
My worries disappear

(well) I miss Mayberry  
Sitting on the porch drinking ice-cold cherry Coke
Where everything is black and white (bada bada badadadada)
Pickin’ on a six string
People pass by and you call them by their first name
Watching the clouds roll by
Bye, bye

Sometimes I dream I’m driving down an old dirt road
Not even listed on a map
I pass a dad and son carrying a fishing pole
But I always wake up every time I try to turn back

I miss Mayberry
Sitting on the porch drinking ice-cold cherry Coke
Where everything is black and white (bada bada badadadada)
Pickin’ on a six string
When people pass by and you call them by their first name
Watching the clouds roll by
Bye, bye

Bye, bye (bye, bye) (bye, bye)

(na na na)
(bada da da da)
(nana nana nana)
(na na)
(nana na na na)
(nana nana nana)

(na na na)
(bada da da da)
(nana nana nana)
(na na)
(nana na na na)
(nana nana nana)
"Way Out Here"

Written by: Josh Thompson, David Lee Murphy, Casey Beathard
Performed by: Josh Thompson
Released: March 29, 2010
Length: 4:06
Label: Columbia Nashville
Producer: Michael Knox
Released as a CD Single from the album Way Out Here
US Billboard Hot Country Songs chart peak position: 15
US Billboard Hot 100 chart peak position: 85

Lyrics:

Our houses are protected by the good Lord and a gun
And you might meet 'em both if you show up here not welcome, son
Our necks are burnt, our roads are dirt, and our trucks ain't clean
The dogs run lose; we smoke; we chew and fry everything
    Out here
    Way out here

We won't take a dime if we ain't earned it
When it comes to weight, brother we pull our own
If it's our backwoods way of livin' you're concerned with
    You can leave us alone
We're about John Wayne, Johnny Cash, and John Deere
    Way out here

We got a fightin' side a mile wide but we pray for peace
    'Cause it's mostly us that end up servin' overseas
If it was up to me, I'd love to see this country run
Like it used to be, like it oughta be, just like it's done
    Out here
    Way out here

Cause we won't take a dime if we ain't earned it
When it comes to weight, brother we pull our own
If it's our backwoods way of livin' you're concerned with
    You can leave us alone
Cause we're about John Wayne, Johnny Cash, and John Deere
    Way out here

    Way out here

    We won't take a dime if we ain't earned it
    When it comes to weight, brother we pull our own
If it's our backwoods way of livin' you're concerned with
You can leave us alone
Cause we're about John Wayne, Johnny Cash, and John Deere
Yeah, John Wayne, Johnny Cash, and John Deere
Way out here

Way out here

Our houses are protected by the good Lord and a gun
And you might meet 'em both if you show up here not welcome, son
"Small Town USA"

Written by: Justin Moore, Brian Maher, Jeremy Stover
Performed by: Justin Moore
Released: February 10, 2009
Length: 3:41
Label: Valory Music Group
Producer: Jeremy Stover
Released as a CD Single from the album Justin Moore
US Billboard Hot Country Songs chart peak position: 1
US Billboard Hot 100 chart peak position: 44

Lyrics:

A lot of people called it prison when I was growing up
But these are my roots and this is what I love
Cause everybody knows me and I know them
And I believe that's the way we were supposed to live
Wouldn't trade one single day
Here in Small Town USA

Give me a Saturday night, my baby by my side
A little Hank Jr. and a six pack of light
An old dirt road and I'll be just fine
Give me a Sunday morning that’s full of grace
A simple life and I'll be okay
Here in Small Town USA

Around here we break our backs just to earn a buck
We never get ahead but we have enough
I watch people leave and then come right back
I never wanted any part of that
I'm proud to say that I love this place
Good ole Small Town USA

Give me a Saturday night, my baby by my side
David Allen Coe and a six pack of light
An old dirt road and I'll be just fine
Give me a Sunday morning that full of grace
A simple life and I'll be okay
Here in Small Town USA
Aw, yeah

I wouldn't trade one single day
I'm proud to say I love this place
Give me a Saturday night, my baby by my side
"Sweet Home Alabama" and a six pack of light
An old dirt road and I'll be just fine
Give me a Sunday morning that full of grace
A simple life and I'll be okay
Yeah, I'll be okay
Here in Small Town USA

Aw, yeah Small Town USA
"Small Town Southern Man"

Written by: Alan Jackson  
Performed by: Alan Jackson  
Released: November 19, 2007  
Length: 4:40  
Label: Arista Nashville  
Producer: Keith Stegall  
Released as a CD Single from the album *Good Time*  
Album certification: Platinum  
US Billboard Hot Country Songs chart peak position: 1  
US Billboard Hot 100 chart peak position: 42  
US Billboard Pop 100 chart peak position: 89

Lyrics:

Born the middle son of a farmer  
And a small town Southern man  
Like his daddy's daddy before him  
Brought up workin' on the land  
Fell in love with a small town woman  
And they married up and settled down  
Natural way of life if you're lucky  
For a small town Southern man

First there came four pretty daughters  
For this small town Southern man  
Then a few years later came another  
A boy, he wasn't planned  
Seven people livin' all together  
In a house built with his own hands  
Little words with love and understandin'  
From a small town Southern man

And he bowed his head to Jesus  
And he stood for Uncle Sam  
And he only loved one woman  
He was always proud of what he had  
He said his greatest contribution  
is the ones you leave behind  
Raised on the ways and gentle kindness  
Of a small town Southern man

Callous hands told the story  
For this small town Southern man  
He gave it all to keep it all together
And keep his family on his land
Like his daddy, years wore out his body
Made it hard just to walk and stand
  You can break the back
  But you can't break the spirit
Of a small town Southern man

And he bowed his head to Jesus
  And he stood for Uncle Sam
And he only loved one woman
He was always proud of what he had
He said his greatest contribution
  Is the ones you leave behind
Raised on the ways and gentle kindness
  Of a small town Southern man

Finally death came calling
For this small town Southern man
He said it's alright 'cause I see angels
  And they got me by the hand
Don't you cry and don't you worry
  I'm blessed, and I know I am
'Cause God has a place in Heaven
  For a small town Southern man

And he bowed his head to Jesus
  And he stood for Uncle Sam
And he only loved one woman
He was always proud of what he had
He said his greatest contribution
  Is the ones you leave behind
Raised on the ways and gentle kindness
  Of a small town Southern man

Raised on the ways and gentle kindness
  Of a small town Southern man
"A Little More Country Than That"

Written by: Rory Lee Feek, Don Poythress, Wynn Varble
Performed by: Easton Corbin
Released: August 4, 2009
Length: 2:45
Label: Mercury Nashville
Producer: Carson Chamberlain
Released as a CD Single from the album *Easton Corbin*
Album certification: Gold
US Billboard Hot Country Songs chart peak position: 1
US Billboard Hot 100 chart peak position: 42

Lyrics:

Imagine a dirt road full of potholes with a creek bank and some cane poles
  catchin’ channel cat
    I’m a little more country than that
Picture a small town with an old hound layin’ out front of the courthouse
  while the old men chew the fat
    I’m a little more country than that

I just want to make sure you know just who you’re gettin’ under this old hat
  ‘Cause girl, I’m not the kind to two-time or play games behind your back
    I’m a little more country than that

Think of a Hank song from days gone With the steel ride that’s so strong
  it sends chills up your back
    I’m a little more country than that

If you want a brick home in a school zone with the doors locked and alarms on
  girl, you’re way off track
    I’m a little more country than that

I just want to make sure you know just who you’re gettin’ under this old hat
  ‘Cause girl, I’m not the kind to two-time or play games behind your back
    I’m a little more country than that

Yeah, I’m sure that you’ve heard those three words from others but they fell flat
  But this ring ain’t something that I mean to give you and then take back
    I’m a little more country than that
    I’m a little more country than that
    I’m a little more country than that