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Hillbilly Bands: Southern Rock's Impact on Southern Identity in the 1970s

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HILLBILLY BANDS: SOUTHERN ROCK'S IMPACT ON SOUTHERN IDENTITY IN THE 1970S

By

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(Under Direction of Alan Downs)

ABSTRACT

Music has always been a conduit in which its artists are able to voice their views, influences, desires, and heartbreaks to a wide audience. Southern Rock is no different. The emergence and popularity of the genre in the 1970s is not a coincidence, but rather a reflection of the South during this time. The South as a whole was changing due to the passage of the Civil Rights Act, ending Jim Crow Laws and denouncing racial oppression throughout the nation. For the South, This meant drastic changes to their society and the slow recognition of the racially oppressive ideals that were rooted in both southern culture and politics. Many southerners felt lost during the 1970s, trying to find a balance between being proud of their southern heritage while also coming to terms with the negative aspects of that same heritage. The music of Southern Rock is a reflection of this, at most showing a desire to balance southern pride and socially progressive views, and at minimum giving southerners something that was theirs and was not rooted in racist and oppressive ideals. Through its political ties with figures like Jimmy Carter, the racially integrated nature of notable southern rock bands such as the Allman Brothers Band, and the various activist efforts of the musicians throughout the decade, southern rock did much to promote progressive ideologies in the South. However, to say the genre was "all in" on progressive ideologies demotes the complex nature of the genre. Notable acts such as Lynyrd

Skynyrd and The Charlie Daniels Band, muddied the waters of southern rock's progressive legacy, tying the genre to conservative ideologies in the South that have persisted in the modern age.

INDEX WORDS: Southern rock, The South, Southern identity, Jimmy Carter, Post-Civil Rights, Southern history, Twentieth century South, Music, Southern music, Southern politics, The Allman Brothers Band, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Capricorn Records, Georgia, Georgia history.

HILLBILLY BANDS: SOUTHERN ROCK'S IMPACT ON SOUTHERN IDENTITY IN THE 1970S

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DEDICATION

This paper has been an eye opening experience for me as both a historian and a musician. Many of the artists discussed, specifically The Allman Brothers Band, have been crucial in my musical journey. Being a southern progressive, there is no figure more revered than Jimmy Carter, whose desire to do what is morally right always outweighed what may have been better for his political career. In the two years that this paper has come to fruition, we have lost many notable southern rock musicians, and have witnessed the unfortunate decline of Jimmy Carter's health. I would like to dedicate this paper to the southern rock musicians that have gone on before us, specifically: Dickey Betts, Greg and Duane Allman, Barry Oakley, Butch Trucks, Ronnie Van Zant, and Gary Rossington. Know that your legacy lives on through your music and the ideologies you lived by. This paper is also dedicated to Jimmy Carter, whose political ideologies and love of music had a profound impact on myself, other southern progressives both during the 1970s and the years that followed.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank my wife for her patience and understanding through this process. She is not a huge fan of southern rock, but withstood the constant playing of the music and my repeated discussions surrounding the topic. She has also been my anchor through this process, keeping me sane and level-headed when roadblocks inevitably came up. Next I would like to thank Dr. Downs, my committee chair, who helped lay the foundation for this project and was instrumental in helpin navigate the twists and turns of thesis writing. Thank you to Dr. Hill and Dr. Todesca for taking time out of their busy schedules to sit on my committee and providing valuable feedback. Finally, a special thank you to the newly revived *Creem Magazine* for letting me have access to their archives of articles and interviews before being re-released to the public online.

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INTRODUCTION

When discussing the history and cultural influence of a region, music has often been overlooked as a major factor in the creation and progression of regional and cultural identities. And yet, music is often an important aspect of these topics. Like most other art forms, music is a conduit through which the artists can voice their feelings and struggles surrounding major issues or changes their culture is facing during a specific period of time. From a historical standpoint, using music as a perspective to explore different time periods or historical events is often valuable as it provides a lens into the lives and ideology of the artist and those of similar backgrounds.

The use of music as a historical lens is especially useful in exploring the South's culture and history in the latter half of the twentieth century. Beginning just before the Civil Rights Movement, music quickly became a way in which ostracized people publicly displayed their perspectives and struggles to a wider audience. Music was a central tool in sharing the struggles of African Americans in the South, evidenced by the rising popularity of genres such as blues, jazz, and soul in the region during the 1950s and 1960s. While being a tool of vocalization, music was also a tool of integration. Music was one of the earliest places in which racial integration began, thanks in no small part to radio stations and recording studios such as FAME in Muscle Shoals, Alabama.[1]

While the music of the 1950s and 1960s was important in promoting change in the South, the music of the 1970s is of particular interest. Studies of southern history often treat the 1970s as a sort of dead period for the region. However, a study of the South in the seventies is valuable,

[1] "The History of Southern Rock," *American Revolutions* (CMT, 2005), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_E1I-ERdJYU.

mainly because it outlines how the major changes in the post-civil rights South affected southerners in the region as well as perceptions of the South in other parts of the United States. As with previous decades, investigating southern music of the seventies provides a valuable lens through which to view the changes to the South's cultural and societal identities.

This paper will focus on a specific genre, southern rock, and its impact on southern identity in the 1970s. Specific focus will be given to the white southern identity, which made up the largest demographic of the genre's listeners. Being made up of primarily southern hippies, southern rock's musicians are often looked upon as leaders of the counterculture movement in the South and the torchbearers of southern progressivism in the region. Because of this, the genre was influential to young southerners who had become disillusioned with the region and the problematic ideologies within.

The investigation of southern rock's impact on southern identity is important, mainly because it provides a perception of the post-civil rights South through the lens of a group that is often ignored or overlooked: white southerners. White southerners of the 1970s were often perceived as ignorant and racist by those outside of the region, being resistant to the changes that the region was undergoing due to desegregation. However, this perception ignores the significant number of white southerners, mainly young southern progressives, who were supportive of racial integration and were against many of the traditional ideologies of the South. The genre of southern rock actively worked against these perceptions and helped many outside the South realize the complexities of southern identity within the region. Further, southern rock's involvement in different aspects of southern culture, such as politics and social issues, proves that music is an important lens through which to investigate the dynamics of the 1970s South.

When using terms that center on culture and regional identity, there is an assumption that the reader understands what these terms mean. The same is true in music and discussions of genres. Most of these terms tend to be broad and sweeping but house a variety of perceptions on how to define them. This is especially true when referencing “the South”, and “southern culture,” terms that are commonly used yet mean very different things based on region, culture, and opinion. The Southern Rock music genre also proves to be complex, holding a variety of opinions on what it actually is and what bands to include in it.

The first chapter focuses on defining “the South” and “southern culture” as it would have been perceived in the 1970s. In defining the South, specific focus is given to regional and cultural identity as the base for identifying the states that make up the region. Investigations on what southern culture is will focus on the traditional aspects of it. By this I mean the commonalities in southern culture from place to place, regardless of the nuances and differences in the various regions of the South.

The second chapter focuses on defining Southern Rock, discussing the genre’s origins, the bands that make it up, the musical influences of the artists, and its evolution over time. Defining the genre and the bands within is a notoriously difficult task due to the individual sounds of each group, but is instrumental in providing a foundation in which the research and writing of this topic is built upon. Because of this, this chapter also discusses what isn’t southern rock, outlining which bands are not included in the genre, and dismantling many perceptions of the genre itself.

One of southern rock’s more well-known contributions is its involvement in politics, specifically the presidential election of 1976. The southern rock genre had very close ties with notable southern politicians such as President Jimmy Carter and segregationist George Wallace.

Carter was close friends with Capricorn Records head Phil Walden and the Allman Brothers Band. Greg Allman and Jimmy Carter's relationship was quite close, the two maintaining contact for many years after Carter's presidency. George Wallace had a close relationship with Lynyrd Skynyrd due to the band's repeated visits to Alabama for concerts and recording sessions.

Chapter three focuses on southern rock's impact on political identity. Though the music itself was typically not overtly political, southern rockers did not hide their opinions and political ideals. Much of the focus will be given to Jimmy Carter's presidential campaign, in which many southern rock bands campaigned on Carter's behalf. Southern rock music was crucial in getting Carter to the White House; the bands raised a significant amount of money for his campaign. Carter's use of the bands was intentional, as he saw the groups as leaders of southern progressivism and hoped their support of him would pull their fans to his side. Because of the association with Carter, the genre was significant in the rise of progressive ideologies in the South. However, Lynyrd Skynyrd's association with George Wallace and their heavy use of Confederate imagery complicate the perception of southern rock as politically progressive, meaning an investigation into the genre's impact on southern conservatism is needed as well.

While an investigation of political identity is an important aspect of southern rock and southern identity, a more detailed investigation into what southern rock musicians were involved in is warranted. Investigating the genre's involvement in different political and social movements helps to better understand where the genre's varying degree of impact and influence on southern identity. It also shows the complexities of the ideologies within the genre and the region. Not every band backed the same movement, similar to how not every southerner supported or opposed the same things.

Chapter four will focus on southern rock's involvement in activism and social movements in the South. Though activism usually implies association with an official movement, the term for the paper will be used in association with the genre's influence on a variety of topics that are not traditionally used with the term activism. Focus will be given to southern rock's relationship with race, male and working-class identity, women and environmentalism. While there were undoubtedly other areas in which southern rock played a role in helping promote change, the ones mentioned above are where the genre's influences are more direct and prominent, thus deserving the most focus in this paper.

Finally, to understand the effects southern rock had on southern identity during the 1970s, it is important to investigate the genre's long-term effects in the years following the seventies. By doing this, one can gather how successful the genre actually was in impacting and reshaping southern identity throughout the 1970s. The final chapter will investigate southern rock and southern identity from the 1980s to the present, with a specific focus on changes to the genre and the ideologies promoted and the varying involvement later bands had in activism, politics, and southern culture. The chapter will also discuss how the genre looks today, with discussions of new artists that have made significant contributions to the new wave of southern progressivism and in the United States as a whole.

CHAPTER ONE

WASTED WORDS ALREADY HEARD: DEFINING THE SOUTH

Defining the South as a region has been somewhat elusive in mass culture. Both southerners and non-southerners have very different ideas about what states should be included in the South, varying from only the former Confederate states to a more broad-based identification anchored on the presence of a perceived southern culture. Regardless of the differing perspectives, the various definitions of the South all hold some merit–a reflection of the complexities of the region and its history.

One of the regional perspectives of the South is that it is made up of the former states of the Confederacy: Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, Florida, and the Carolinas. While there is little doubt that these states are "southern," limiting one's definition of the South in this way inaccurately restricts the region's identity to its Confederate past and negates any progress and regional expansion that occurred in the years after the Civil War. Furthermore, this definition places the region in a comatose state of sorts, implying that the South still holds to the same ideologies and physical boundaries as it did during the Confederacy. Finally, even in the mid-nineteenth century, what was generally considered the South by most Americans encompassed states that never officially joined the Confederacy: Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland, and Delaware.

Another way southern states are determined is by simply classifying all states south of the Mason-Dixon line as "the South." This definition would include the former Confederate States, adding Oklahoma, Kentucky, West Virginia, Delaware, and Maryland to the territorial boundaries. This argument differs from the previous one as it employs an actual political boundary to justify the classification. The Mason-Dixon line has quite a long history as a

territorial line, most notably its use to separate the Northern free states from the Southern slave-holding ones and later being extended to include states in the area that had not existed at the time.

In a sense, the states south of the Mason-Dixon line could be considered "southern" as they are physically located in the southern part of the United States. However, defining the South as such shows an unfamiliarity with southern culture, a distinct aspect of southern states. While physical location is important, the South would not hold the distinctiveness it does without the culture that permeates the region. Keeping this in mind, Maryland, Delaware, and West Virginia arguably have more in common culturally with the northern states than they do their southern neighbors.[2]

Finally, defining the South as a region is often based on the state's southern culture. While there are certainly pockets of southern culture everywhere, thanks in no small part to the popularity of various forms of southern media and literature, location is still an important aspect of this definition. It would be hard to identify a state as part of the South when it does not sit within the southern region. Defining the South in this manner implies knowledge of southern culture. Thus, it is a common way for southerners to identify the region in which they reside. However, this can lead to much harsher critiques of a state's southerness.

While many of the states are commonly perceived as southern, others, such as Virginia, Texas, Oklahoma, and Florida, seem to be on the fence in the minds of many southerners. Texas and Florida are specifically divided into separate regions to classify the state further. East Texas would be southern, while West Texas would not. North Florida may be southern, but South Florida is not. Florida is even more interesting as it is often perceived as culturally northern

[2] Soo Oh, "Which States Count as the South, According to More than 40,000 Reader," *Vox* (blog), 2016, https://www.vox.com/2016/9/30/12992066/south-analysis.

owing to the number of residents hailing from the North. In a sense, it is a northern "haven" located in the South.

Christopher A. Cooper and H. Gibbs Knotts' research on the South is particularly relevant here. In their article, "Rethinking the Boundaries of the South," Cooper and Knotts work to identify the states that make up the region by exploring both location and the relevance of southern culture in each state. Both acknowledge the difficulty in defining the states of the South, especially among academics. "Given the amount of research on the South, you might think that academics would have a handle on questions about the boundaries of the region. However, A quick scan of the literature suggests this is not the case. There are scores of studies examining the South, but there remain many competing definitions of the region."[3] Cooper and Knotts explore many of these definitions of the South, including identifying states by the former Confederacy and those south of the Mason-Dixon Line.[4]

Cooper and Knotts' work in defining the South can be seen as a continuation of a project done by John Shelton Reed, who laid the foundation for Cooper and Knotts. To define the states of the South, Reed focused on the culture of the states, specifically looking at the use of the words "Dixie" and "South" at the beginning of business names. The use of Dixie and Southern as the keywords is important and intentional. Reed and his colleagues indicate that the word Dixie is a "relatively pure measure of sectional identification, usually connoting a shared history of exceptionalism and opposition to the rest of the country" while the word Southern "can have the same connotations, but it can also indicate merely integration into the South's developing economy."[5]

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[3] Cooper and Knotts, "Rethinking the Boundaries of the South." *Southern Cultures,* 16, no. 4: 74.
[4] Cooper and Knotts, 74-75.
[5] Cooper and Knotts, 75.

Cooper and Knotts' research follows the same lines as Reed's. However, they expand the use of Dixie and Southern to include its placement anywhere in the business name, not just at the beginning. Further, owing to the advances in technology, they expanded their data collection to be statewide rather than isolated to larger cities in each state. Like Reed, Cooper and Knotts did two separate investigations, one focusing on businesses with the Dixie name and another with Southern. They then compiled both results and presented their final findings, organizing the states in descending order from definitely southern to minimally southern. The pair go a step further by investigating the state's demographics and their connection to the "Old South" and/or "New South" traditions.

The results of their study show that Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi sit in the "Southern to the Core" category. In "Pretty Darn Southern" resides Georgia, Arkansas, Kentucky, the Carolinas, and Tennessee. Finally, Florida, Oklahoma, Virginia, and West Virginia make up the last category of "Sorta Southern."[6] Surprisingly, Texas did not make the cut on the final list, indicating that, to a large extent, Texas culture has become increasingly less southern over the years. When viewing the results of Cooper and Knotts' work, the states representing the South seem to coincide with how people commonly view the region today. Though Texans may be upset by their exclusion from the list, it nonetheless shows how complicated the region is to pin down, Cooper and Knotts having to separate the list by their southernness rather than simply listing them all as the South. Further, it solidifies the argument that southern culture, though complicated and equally as elusive to track, does play a role in identifying the states that make up the region.

Taking some inspiration from Cooper and Knotts, my definition of the South draws on the physical locations of the states as well as the relevance of southern culture within each of the

[6] Cooper and Knotts, 82.

southern states. Because of the focus on the southern rock genre, the relevance of the music within the states is also a deciding factor in this identification of the South. The origins of the artists that make up the genre are also important in this definition, owing to the inference that being a southern rock artist implied being a part of the South or having some sort of southern heritage. When discussing southern rock and identity in the 1970s, "The South" will comprise Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, The Carolinas, Tennessee, Virginia, and Kentucky. Because of Jacksonville's role as the unofficial capital of the genre, Florida is included on this list. The focus will be on the northern and middle regions of the state, the southern part of Florida having very little in terms of southern culture/ ideology. Like Florida, Texas is included for its eastern half of the state, which holds much in common with other southern states and its contribution to the genre via bands and artists. The other states it is hard to argue that they are not southern, but are very important in the conversations of southern rock as places of origins, labels, included in songs, etc. Though there is a strong case for Oklahoma to be a southern state, the scholarship of southern rock has very little inclusion of Oklahoma, thus not warranting a presence in the boundaries for this topic. To better understand the regional definition of the South, the next step is to discuss Southern Culture and its importance to the region.

For many, the South is the land of delicious food, legendary hospitality, and a borderline religious football culture. It is also the land of racism, ignorance, and intense economic poverty. Defining a region's culture is always complicated, especially since culture is always changing. What makes defining the culture of the South especially difficult is that it is a region that seems to be partially anchored in the past, owing mainly to its close ties to racism and its inability to move on from its Confederate identity fully. While it would be easy to blame the region for

keeping some sort of grip on these ideologies, it discounts the rest of the country's role in this. Imani Perry notes that

> . . . racism, despite all evidence of its ubiquity, is still commonly described as 'belonging' to the South. I don't just mean that other regions ignore their racism and poverty and project them onto the South, although that is certainly true. I also mean that the cruelest labor of sustaining the racial-class order was historically placed upon the South. Its legacy of racism then is of course bloodier than most. But other regions are also bloody indeed. Discrimination is everywhere, but collectively the country has leeched off the racialized exploitation of the South while also denying it.[7]

The negative perceptions of modern southern culture as racist and intellectually ignorant within the United States partly keep the region stuck in the past with its Confederate and Jim Crow roots. While these perceptions are not wholly wrong and are most certainly rooted in the region's history, they do ignore much of the positive progress the South has made while also ignoring similar issues within other regions of the country. Though many of the racist ideologies still exist in the South, the region has become a hub of multicultural influence due to the growing diversity of people in the region.[8] Anti-racism and anti-Confederate ideals have become increasingly relevant over the years as the South has become more diversified. In short, southern culture has undergone and continues to go through much change.

However, in the 1970s, none of this had happened yet. With Jim Crow ideals and the Civil Rights Movement still fresh in the mind of the nation, the negative perceptions of southern culture were certainly the most prominent, and for good reason. With the passage of the 1964 and 1968 Civil Rights Acts, the South was beginning to undergo many changes to its culture, largely owing to the relevance of anti-racist ideas pushed by both black and white southerners. In defining southern culture of the 1970s, it is best to look at the South as having two distinct

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[7] Imani Perry, *South to America: A Journey Below the Mason-Dixon to Understand the Soul of a Nation* (New York New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 2022), xvii-xviii.
[8] Chales Reagan Wilson, *The Southern Way of Life: Meanings of Culture and Civilization in the American South* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 449-457.

cultures: the traditional culture of the South, still rooted in pre-Civil Rights ideologies, and the new southern culture that began to emerge in the 1970s. Defining these cultures is important in understanding context, and gaining a better insight into why southern rock became a cultural phenomenon in the South during this time.

When discussing the traditional culture of the South, it is important to note that it is a culture that is rooted in separation. Separations of race and class were central to the South's culture leading up to the 1970s. It was a region where the wealthy, landowning, southern aristocracy still ruled socially and politically. Class divisions ensured that the lower class and parts of the middle class would remain isolated and relatively powerless from a political standpoint. The clean-cut southerners of the traditional white South tended to look down upon their lower-class counterparts as unsophisticated and rough around the edges, not fitting the conservative-minded society of traditional southern culture. The term "redneck" was often used by the upper class as a derogatory term to describe poor southerners.[9] However, both upper and lower-class southerners had one crucial thing in common that was advantageous to both classes: they were white.

Race relations are a prominent element investigated within southern culture. Though it has shifted throughout history, the racial divide in the South had been one of the central components of southern culture going into the Civil Rights Movement. When discussing traditional southern culture, it is important to note that African Americans were seen as separated from the culture.[10] The almost constant work of politicians and southerners to maintain segregation and the resistance to desegregation between the 1950s and 1960s are central to southern traditions throughout the twentieth century; though segregation centered on the idea of

[9] Kelly Marshall, "Rednecks: A Brief History," *JSTOR Daily* (blog), 2015, accessed February 2024, https://daily.jstor.org/redneck-a-brief-history/.
[10] Wilson, 297-300.

"separate but equal," there was an underlying theme that blacks were inferior to the whites. As awareness of civil rights efforts and ideas equality for African Americans began to gain traction, traditional southern culture continued to push their cultural ideas rooted in Lost Cause ideology into the region's culture.[11]

Like race and class relations, religion is another core element of traditional southern culture. While religion can arguably be considered the basis for many cultural ideologies within the United States, the South has a particular emphasis on religion, specifically Christianity, within its culture. Christianity held a particular reverence in traditional southern culture, evidenced by the development of the Bible Belt and the close relationship between southern politics and Christianity.[12] It is important to note that although religious ideals and practices were instrumental to the South's culture, the focus often seemed to be on the perception of religiosity. There seemed to be less importance on being a good Christian and more on Christianity equating to being a respectable southerner. It was this image-heavy view of Christianity that fueled many elements of southern culture surrounding themes of marriage, sex, gender identity/roles, and modesty,

The religious traditions of the South were also used to justify and promote the racist ideologies embedded in southern culture at the time. Religion and race in the South have been deeply tied together throughout most of its history, with scriptures used to justify the keeping of enslaved peoples and the inferiority of minorities.[13] The maintaining of racial divides and the traditional southern practices that promoted it were deemed as the "southern cause" by many prominent southern religious leaders, comprising what became known as the Religious Right.[14]

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[11] Wilson, 323-324.
[12] Wilson, 416, 421.
[13] 1st Peter 2:18 ESV.
[14] Wilson, 417-419.

Further, many of the racially charged groups and emblems of traditional southern culture used religious symbolism in their practices. The Confederate Flag is the most prominent example, with the Cross of Saint Andrew used as the central piece of the flag.[15] Another example would be The Ku Klux Klan, who used religious symbolism in many of their practices, most notably the use of crosses as instruments of both fear and reverence, giving the image of their racial crusade as one that is holy.

If the traditional culture of the South is viewed as the norm of southern society, then the new southern culture that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s is, by definition, the counterculture. The new culture that began to emerge in the South contradicted many of the region's cultural norms, most notably those that dealt with class and race. The steady increase in industrialization peaked in the 1960s and 1970s, the agrarian-focused industry replaced by the factory-centered, product-heavy commerce of the rest of the United States. With this came an expansion to the importance of the South's middle and working classes. At the same time, ideas of equality that emerged from the Civil Rights Movement had a profound impact on the South's new culture, becoming more racially inclusive and acknowledging the multicultural aspects of the South. The South was also becoming more prominent on a national and international scale[16], and many southerners simply wished to push for more positive portrayals of the region rather than the negative views prevalent in the rest of the country as a racist and backwater culture.[17]

As industrialization spread within the South, so did the working and middle classes. Though both became more central within the United States, it was in the South where working-class and middle-class culture became a central aspect of the region's cultural identity.[18]

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[15] Wilson, 420-421.
[16] Peter Kolchin, "The South and the World," *Journal of Southern History* 75, no. 3 (2009): 565–580.
[17] Karen Cox, "The South and Mass Culture," *The Journal of Southern History* 75, no. 3 (2009): 677–90.
[18] Wilson, 410-412.

The new culture that began to emerge in the South uplifted the working class as the backbone of the region, evidenced by the topics in southern music and other forms of media in the South. Instead of southern culture ostracizing working class ideals, it now seemed to praise the lifestyle, making it a staple of southern personality. The term redneck, for example, was used positively in the South, with southerners using it to identify themselves with pride rather than its original use as a negative term for working-class southerners.[19] Further, southern culture began to shape a new view of southerners, men, in particular, adopting the rough around the edges, hard-drinking and cursing, motif of the southern working class. In a sense, one could argue that southern culture seemed to become obsessed with this lifestyle, swiftly adopting it as one of the culture's staples. No more was the South the land of the agrarian elites but of the blue-collar, working-class southern man.

After the Civil Rights Movement, race relations in the South began to shift in a more positive direction. African Americans became more directly involved in southern society, and their influences on southern culture became more appreciative and prominent during the 1970s. One such area was music, especially the blues, which is heralded as the origin of American, and arguably southern, music genres such as Americana, country, and southern rock. The new southern culture that emerged in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement resisted long-standing ideas of African Americans' place within southern society, opting for ideas of cohabitation and active participation, instead of the separation and inferiority common in the region's traditional culture. Instead of being passive citizens, African Americans could actively participate in politics and society without fearing for their livelihood.

However, that is not to say that race relations improved overnight or that they completely went away from southern culture altogether. With the South being one of the most racially

[19] Marshall, "Rednecks."

diverse regions in the United States, race relations are undoubtedly a staple part of Southern culture, both positively and negatively, and dependent on how one defines southern culture. This was especially true of race relations in the 1970s, where ideas of equality and desegregation were hotly resisted in the South despite the variety of legislation passed. From the perspective of many white southerners at the time, their entire society was ripped out from under them in favor of a new southern culture where they felt they would have no place. Those who did support new cultural ideas of equality still had to struggle with shedding the negative perspective that the rest of the nation had of white southerners, in a sense, being equally as lost as their counterparts. As African Americans began returning to the region, with their rights more solidified, white working-class southerners feared that the new influx of people in the region would negatively impact their jobs and livelihoods. Despite the fascination with working-class culture in the South, many working-class whites still felt ignored and that their woes had been overlooked in favor of the plight of the African Americans, making race relations still tense among many throughout the region.[20]

Despite many drastic changes in the South, religion remained a central aspect of southern culture. However, the rhetoric of religion in the South shifted during the 1970s. The use of religion in the furthering of racist ideologies and divides started to decline in the region following the Civil Rights Movement, making way for an equal religious environment where African-American and predominately white congregations found common ground in Christian ideologies.[21] Much of the efforts of Christians in the South shifted to topics of sex, gender, and sexual identity and the teaching of Christian ideas in school.[22] There were still many white Christians who continued to use religion to promote ideas of racial superiority over the

[20] Wilson, 374-376.
[21] Wilson, 417-418.
[22] Wilson, 418-419.

African-American community. Still, the relationship between racism and religion declined to subtle insinuations rather than overt support of the old-school institutions.[23]

While many of the cultural changes in the South were more ideological, style changes were the most outward expression of the new southern culture. The rise of the hippie movement in the 1960s and the popularity of southern rock in the 1970s influenced young southerners in drastic ways. The clean-cut southerner is central to the traditional South and was traded for the long-haired and often bearded southerner, referred to as a southern hippie. The two often came into conflict, sometimes physically, with each other. This is best shown in the original cut of the song *Uneasy Rider* by The Charlie Daniels Band, chronicling the story of a young southern hippy getting into a barroom brawl with older southerners making fun of his look.[24] In a sense, the drastic change in looks and their increasing popularity is the most physical representation of the changes happening in the South and the resistance to them. The 'hippie' look outlined a resistance to the status quo in the South that the prominence of southern rock would further solidify during this time.

Defining southern culture can be complicated and arguably deserves more attention than offered here. Because of the popularity and notoriety of the culture, there are many differing perspectives of southern culture, fitting into an equally diverse set of ideas on what the South is. I define southern culture as being two different subcultures making up the whole: the traditional southern culture that has been the topic of much criticism and/or praise, and the more progressive southern counterculture, which centers on the diversity and more welcoming aspect of the South. Since music is the central topic, it is also a culture where traditional southern music genres, such

[23] Wilson, 418-419.
[24] Charlie Daniels Band, *Uneasy Rider* (New York: Kama Sutra, 1973).

as old-school country and bluegrass, represent one side of the South. In contrast, genres such as blues and southern rock represent the other, frequently more progressive side of the 1970s South.

CHAPTER TWO

A GENRE OF PEOPLE: DEFINING SOUTHERN ROCK

One of the South's major identities is its musical heritage. Many genres that define American music can trace their origins to the South and its culture. southern rock is no exception. However, southern rock differs from other genres, such as country and folk, because it is less definable and boxed in as a genre. There are about as many definitions of southern rock as there are southern rock bands, and each band brings something different to the table in terms of sound, influence, and culture. In defining southern rock, it is important to look at the origins of the genre, its evolution, and the different definitions of the genre to understand the music and artists that make it up. Investigating the prominent bands will also assist in helping define the southern rock genre as it pertains to this topic. While there are debates on where and when the genre originated, the immediate start of the genre can be traced to a few specific things: the year 1969, Muscle Shoals, Alabama, a cover of a famous Beatles song, an R&B singer, and a guitarist called Skydog, named for his bushy muttonchops and his slide guitar playing.

In 1969, Wilson Pickett released his album, including the song of the same name, *Hey Jude.*[25] Though a cover of the Beatles song, the song was an immediate success on the music charts, reaching the top twenty on the R&B charts and being met with applause by a widespread listening base. What was most noteworthy about the song was the slide guitar playing of Duane Allman, who was only known as a session guitarist at FAME Studios. Duane's slide-playing on *Hey Jude* gained the attention of notable music executives and blues artists such as Eric Clapton. It was Eric Clapton, however, who saw the ability of Duane at the start, later jumping on the opportunity to have him contribute to the Derek and the Dominos album recorded in

[25] Wilson Pickett, *Hey Jude* (Alabama: Fame Studios, 1969).

1972.[26] Its title track, ***Layla,*** further showcased Duane's skill as a guitarist, which gave him more fame and helped put the Allman Brothers Band on the radar of many music fans.

When Phil Walden first heard ***Hey Jude***, and after finding out who that "guitar player, that long-haired hippie boy" was, his immediate response was "Well I'm gonna go down to Alabama, I'm gonna sign him, and I'm gonna put a band together."[27] Duane's move to Walden's Capricorn Studios would spark a widespread musical movement in the South. What originally started with Duane Allman and Jaimoe, eventually included bassist Barry Oakley, drummer Butch Trucks, guitarist Dickey Betts, and keyboardist/singer, who was also Duane's younger brother, Greg Allman. The group called themselves the Allman Brothers Band and would become the flagbearers for a new type of music coming out of the South, called southern rock.

Though they were not an overnight success, what the band had was viewed by many as something special, especially by southerners. The music blended the blues, country, soul, and folk, making their classification into a genre difficult since their sound did not fit within any of the genres of the time. The band wore their musical influences on their sleeve. In an interview with Creem Magazine, what would be one of his last before his untimely death in October 1971, Duane Allman notes his musical influences came from guys like Miles Davis, Roland Kirk, Muddy Waters and B.B. King.[28] However, Duane notes that the band's biggest influence came from each other, stating that "Being influenced shouldn't mean soundin' like or copying anyone else.[29] You gotta strive to play a pure form of music; a kind of music that's honest to yourself. If you got that attitude and feelin' about what you play, you'll be a lot better off. That's the kind of attitude that makes a great performing band."[30]

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[26] Derek and the Dominos, *Layla* (Florida: Criteria, 1972).
[27] "The History of Southern Rock," *American Revolutions* (CMT, 2005), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_E1I-ERdJYU.
[28] Laurel Dann, "The Last Interview With Duane Allman," *Creem Magazine*, 1973, The Creem Archive, 24-26.
[29] Dann, 24-26.
[30] Dann, 26.

Though people would eventually see the Allman Brothers Band as the leaders of a new genre of music, they certainly did not see it that way. At the time of their first album's release in 1969, they simply saw themselves as a rock band from the South. In discussing the genre of southern rock and the band's place at the beginning of the genre, Greg Allman notes that calling them southern rock is like saying Rock-Rock, dictating that Rock music originated in the South, making the genre a pointless categorization.[31] Nevertheless, the name took off, and southerners ate it up. Amid the civil unrest and racial tensions in the South, there was a genre and a band that southerners could be proud of. It became one of the more positive aspects of southern culture that would emerge in the 1970s South that would help soften outside perspectives of the region. The fact that the band was integrated racially was not lost on many, but it was something that the band did not think about much. Not until much later, after Berry Oakley's death and the hiring of Lamar Williams, did many recognize the impact of the band's racial integration. Walden recalls when he asked how it felt to manage one of the first popular racially integrated bands from the South, to which his response was "holy shit, there's two black guys in this band!"[32] Walden's response indicates that the band's racial makeup was not something that was immediately evident to the group, a testament to their progressive views on race.

Though musicians such as Greg Allman resisted the label of southern rock, it nevertheless became the name of a musical genre that encapsulated many of the bands from the South in the 1970s. Groups such as Wet Willie, Marshall Tucker Band, The Charlie Daniels Band, and Lynyrd Skynyrd rose to prominence under the southern rock umbrella. Like the Allman Brothers Band, they mixed elements of southern genres, such as blues, country, and jazz, with rock to create their unique sound and presence in the music industry. However, that is not to

[31] Gregg Allman, *The Allman Brothers Band,* 2005.
[32] Fentress, "The History of Southern Rock."

say that the label of southern rock was readily accepted by the musicians. Many thought like Greg and found the term redundant, while others took it literally, because they were southerners who liked to play Rock music. Outlaws guitarist and vocalist Hughie Thomasson noted "We're a rock 'n' roll band that happens to be from the South. But, first we're a rock 'n' roll band. We go down just as well in the Northeast, or anywhere else, as we do in the South. It's the same thing as with Skynyrd. They never got the credit they deserved. Their roots were more strongly English than Southern."[33] It was not that many disliked the term southern rock, but it was the attachment of southern identity to these groups that many of the musicians seemed to have an issue with, as it implies a division between rock music and rock music from the South. What divides the southern rockers from their regular rock n' roll compatriots? To understand this, an investigation is needed into the origins of the term southern rock.

There are many different opinions on where the term southern rock originated from, but the most popular is offered by Scott B. Bomar in his book *Southbound: An Illustrated History of Southern Rock.* Bomar indicates that the earliest use of the word appears in an article by Mo Slotin, a writer for *The Great Speckled Bird*, who was reviewing one of the Allman Brothers Band's concerts.[34] While the term would go on to characterize a specific genre of music, many saw it as a way to keep southern musicians separated from other genres of music. To the rest of the country, the South was still viewed negatively owing to the region's mass resistance to desegregation. Further, various forms of media and literature fed negative perceptions of southerners, especially the working class, as being ignorant and intellectually inferior to the rest of the nation.[35] The desire to keep the South separated from the rest of the nation undoubtedly

[33] J.M. Bridgewater, "The Outlaws: Bringing It Back Comatose," *Creem Magazine*, n.d., The Creem Archive, 68.
[34] Scott B. Bomar, *Southbound: An Illustrated History of Southern Rock* (Lanham, Maryland: Backbeat Books, 2014).
[35] Bomar, xiv.

encouraged the separation of rock musicians from the South into their own, often viewed as inferior, genre of music. The irony of this is that the southern rock musicians took inspiration and worked closely with the same artists that popular rock acts, such as The Rolling Stones, The Grateful Dead, and The Beatles did.[36] Further, the popularity of predominately black genres from the South, such as blues and jazz, outlined that this genre separation was specifically targeted toward white southern artists.

Despite this, the term stuck, and many artists learned to be proud of the label in a way that reflected their pride in their southern heritage. The genre's popularity among the working class reflected the origins of the majority of southern rockers, often referred to as the blues for the white working class. This same defining principle of southern rock was also what made the genre be spun as a negative portion of American music. Since white working-class southerners were viewed as white trash and racist, then the music made by those same people must be the same. However, this was not the case. Like the counterculture music popular with the hippy movement in other parts of the United States, southern rock challenged both stereotypes of southerners and how southerners viewed their own culture. The long hair and bearded look of the white southern rockers were contrary to the "redneck" look that the southern middle and working class adopted (crew cuts, clean-shaven, etc.).[37] Further, the heavy influence of black music and the racial integration of the majority of southern rock bands outlined an ideology that stood contradictory to southern cultural ideas at the time, another pushback against the negative stereotypes of the genre.

Both the positive and negative perceptions of southern rock lasted well past the genre's height. When Oteil Burbridge joined the Allman Brothers in 1997, he recounted that his sister

[36] Bomar, 13-15.
[37] Bomar, XVII.

disapproved of the idea of joining the band owing to her perceptions of the genre. Burbridge responded by opening up an Aretha Franklin album that pictured Duane Allman on it, going on to say "she had an image of the Allman Brothers Band as racist, redneck, southern boys…honestly it tripped me out that there are these older white guys with thick southern accents who are so hip to black music. They shatter a lot of stereotypes."[38] Being a longtime fan of the music myself, I have seen this criticism firsthand when discussing the music, as many still view the music as belonging to a racist and white trash "redneck" culture. Their shock when realizing that many of the bands are racially integrated and heavily influenced by the blues and jazz music is often entertaining to witness.

Reflective of the complexities of southern rock as a genre, my definition of southern rock is multifaceted, involving multiple elements in the definition. First, southern rock will be defined by location, centered on the origins and location of the bands and labels. I define the genre as being southern in nature, with the bands and labels based in the southern states I mentioned above as being a part of the South. Further, the origins of the bands are also important, as it is hard to conceive of a band as being southern rock in the 1970s if most of its members are not Southern. Thus, the main musicians in the southern rock bands must also hail from the earlier defined region of the South.

Next, if the Allman Brothers are to be viewed as the beginning of the genre, then only the bands placed under the moniker of southern rock after or alongside the Allman Brothers are to be considered southern rock bands. It would be hard to define bands that preceded the Allman Brothers as southern rock when the moniker was not used until their entrance onto the music scene. Many would argue that groups such as Creedence Clearwater Revival should be included as a southern rock band, but they gained popularity before the Allman Brothers Band and were

[38] Bomar, XVII.

part of a notable genre of music called swamp rock. Further, Creedence Clearwater Revival cannot be considered a “southern” band as none of its principal members hailed from the South.

Though it is hard to discuss in writing, the sound of southern rock also plays a role in defining the genre. Despite each of the bands arguably having their own sounds, their basis in rock, blues, jazz, and country are undeniable and produce a sound unique to the genre in the 1970s. Finally, the southern rock genre of the 1970s was not just a music genre but a community of people rooted in brotherhood and family, evidenced by numerous interviews and testimonies from the musicians within the genre. This was not just isolated to the band dynamic but the entirety of the genre, evidenced by the close relationship the musicians had with one another. The community and family were core to the functions of the bands and the genre, deserving to be one of the defining aspects of the genre, if not the most important.

CHAPTER THREE

RAMBLIN' MEN: SOUTHERN ROCK AND POLITICAL IDENTITY

When President Jimmy Carter is asked about his tenure as president, one of the first things he will do is thank the Allman Brothers Band. "The Allman Brothers Band got me into the White House" is one of Carter's most memorable quotes, and one that speaks volumes on southern rock's role in shaping political identity in the 1970s.[39] While the songs of the Allman Brothers Band and other southern rock artists were not overtly political, the bands represented the rise of a new cultural identity in the South, one that was racially integrated and pushed back against negative elements of the region. Jimmy Carter's political rise from governor of Georgia to president of the United States symbolized a shifting political identity in the South, reflecting the cultural shifts many southern musicians represented.

This chapter focuses on southern rock and political identity, investigating the genre's role in putting Jimmy Carter in the White House, and by extension, representing a change in the political landscape of the South. However, to say southern rock was "all in" on Carter would be an oversimplification of the events, so an investigation into the politics of the musicians who did not work with Carter is warranted, as it shows the other side of the South's political atmosphere. The use of Confederate symbolism in southern rock was prominent in the 1970s and made the image of the genre as politically progressive more complicated. Since Confederate symbols were, and continue to be, a politically charged topic in the South, an investigation into their use by southern rock artists will also help understand the genre's level of impact on the South's political identity.

If there was a person who was least likely to be a southern politician, it was Jimmy Carter. It was not his humble beginnings as a farmer in Plains Georgia or his lack of political

[39] *Jimmy Carter: Rock and Roll President*, Documentary (Amazon, 2020).

savvy that was the thorn in his side, but his more progressive political views that were central to his uphill political battle.[40] Carter's ideas on topics such as race, segregation, and the working class were contradictory to the traditional politics in the South. Despite the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the push for desegregation across the South, the traditional views of the South, rooted in segregation and class divides, remained in the region. Because of this, Carter was a part of a population of the South that seemed to be ostracized by the rest of the region, who wanted to maintain the status quo rather than move towards the changes more progressive southerners called for.

That is not to say that Carter was an immediate southern progressive icon. He and his wife initially kept their ideas to themselves, mimicking many southern progressives who stayed quiet for fear of social isolation or being driven out of their homes and businesses.[41] When Carter worked on the school board, one of his first positions in the political sphere, he worked to find more middle-ground solutions to racial issues in education rather than push for more radical changes all at once.[42] Though more subtle with his political ideas during this time, his later life showed a changed direction. Carter became more outspoken about his progressive politics, specifically on race and class issues, and pushed for changes in how southerners viewed many of the issues that had haunted the South.

Alongside religion and political ideals, one important aspect of Carter's life was his love for music. Music was an important part of his childhood. The radio almost constantly played in his home, mainly gospel and country music.[43] The Carter family's love of music carried over to the home of Jimmy and Rosalynn, which became central to their relationships. Carter's

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[40] Jonathan Alter, *His Very Best: Jimmy Carter, A Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020), 13-194.
[41] Alter, 104-105.
[42] Alter, 108-109.
[43] *Rock and Roll President*.

relationship with his son was very much music-centric, both being big fans of Bob Dylan, Willie Nelson, and the southern rock acts that began to emerge in the South.[44] Chip Carter, Jimmy's son, recalls an incident in which he and his father got into an argument and refused to speak to one another, instead using Bob Dylan lyrics to communicate via the album and track number.[45] Carter's election as Governor of Georgia opened him up to many friendships with the musicians he admired, most notably Elvis Presley, Bob Dylan, Willie Nelson, and The Allman Brothers Band. Greg Allman had much respect for Carter, claiming that "he wasn't nothing but a hippie who had to get a haircut."[46] Carter's relationship with Greg and the rest of the Allman Brothers was particularly important, as it would be this relationship that would directly benefit Carter when it came to his presidential campaign.

Carter's relationship with the Allman Brothers began at a reception at the Governor's Mansion. The way Greg Allman tells the story, he was running late owing to being held up at the studio and was worried that Carter would be upset with his arrival late in the evening. When he arrived, he mistook Carter for some hippie hanging at the mansion owing to his dress in Levis and no shirt.[47] "He said, "What the hell, come on in. You're not too late." We go in there, and there's a bottle of J&B scotch on the table…So we sat there and told stories, and pretty much polished off that bottle of J&B."[48] Carter's version of events is a bit different, claiming that he only had a single glass of whiskey, per usual, while they talked about music and Carter's plans to run for president, with the help of the band.[49] Regardless, the two began a long friendship that would last until Greg's death in 2017. The Allman Brothers weren't the only southern rock act

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[44] *Rock and Roll President*.
[45] *Rock and Roll President*.
[46] Greg Allman, *Not My Cross to Bear* (New York New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 2012), 266.
[47] Allman, 265.
[48] Allman, 265.
[49] Alan Paul, *Brothers and Sisters: The Allman Brothers Band and the Inside Story of the Album that Defined the '70s* (New York, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2023), 186.

that formed a close bond with Carter. The Charlie Daniels Band and the Marshall Tucker Band also boasted a close relationship with Carter, and Capricorn Records head Phil Walden, who invited Carter to the studio's yearly picnics.

Carter's connection with southern rock was not just political, he was a man who genuinely enjoyed the music and the company of the musicians. This sort of relationship was not common in traditional southern politics, where southern hippie culture, and its music, were ostracized by the rest of the White South. In a post-Civil Rights era, in which many white southerners were trying to hold onto the region's cultural norms, southern rock represented the new era of the South, through their looks, ideals, and music. The popularity of the different bands throughout the region proved that people were looking for something positive and unifying in southern culture to be proud of and shared with the rest of the nation. Where many saw outcasts, Carter saw friends and allies who would help him gain support in the South and throughout the United States as a figure of unity rather than division.

The subtle inference of southern rock as a representation of new southern culture was not lost on Carter. Though he boasted of his close friendships with many of the southern rock artists, the use of the groups in his presidential campaign was very strategic and intentional.[50] Carter recognized that many of southern rock's listeners were young southerners and southern progressives. On a national level, groups such as the Allman Brothers and Wet Willie attracted those who had been into the counterculture music of the 1960s, with many southern rock bands seen as an extension of the movement. In a sense, these perceptions were not far off. Just as groups like the Grateful Dead represented the counter-culture ideologies on the national stage, many of the southern rock groups represented a counterculture of the South, one that was ready to embrace a new political identity and move past many of the toxic ideologies that had

[50] Paul, *Brothers and Sisters.*

dominated southern politics for many years. Carter knew that his association with the Allman Brothers and other southern rock acts would potentially attract their listeners to his campaign. "There was a sense that if he was all right with the Allman Brothers then he would be all right with them."[51]

Carter's political association with southern rock also softened his image on a national level. Despite the popularity of southern rock bands in the nation, many still held negative perceptions of southerners when it came to politics. It was hard to fathom anyone with progressive ideologies to come out of the South, much less one who wanted to run for president. Carter was often boxed into southern stereotypes, being viewed as an uneducated with very little political astuteness regarding national politics.[52] Those who recognized his progressive ideologies still had their reservations, dictating that he was a hard man to pin down owing to the perception that his southern heritage countered his political ideologies.[53]

However, southern rock artists' support helped change perceptions of Carter as a political figure. Though amassing widespread support in the South, bands such as the Allman Brothers, Marshall Tucker Band, and Wet Willie were viewed nationally as rare gems coming out of a perceived backwater region of the country. The Allman Brothers Band specifically was more outward with its progressive ideologies and counterculture image. Though they claimed not to be overly political, their prominence as one of the first popular racially integrated bands from the South nonetheless had a profound impact on perceptions of the region and, by extension, Carter himself.[54]

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[51] *Rock and Roll President*.
[52] Kai Bird, *The Outlier: The Unfinished Presidency of Jimmy Carter* (New York: Crown, 2021), 105-108.
[53] Bird, 108-110.
[54] Paul, 183-192.

The band's support of Carter gave the presidential candidate a platform to prove that he was up to the challenge of the presidency and was sympathetic to the ideologies of young progressives.[55] Further, it allowed people to get to know Carter, whose only difference from hippies and young progressives seemed to be his physical appearance.[56] The Allman Brothers Band, The Marshall Tucker Band, and the Charlie Daniels Band would play four benefit concerts for Carter's campaign, none of them in the South, and all of them raising a large amount of money for his campaign, which went towards radio broadcasts, campaign ads, and more fundraising opportunities. The success of these benefit concerts outlines that Carter's association with the different groups was beneficial in attracting young audiences to support his presidential campaign and changing the perceptions of him from an uneducated farmer to a progressive candidate who wanted to promote change throughout the country.

However, it was not just Carter's association with the groups that attracted people to his side. People could tell he was a genuine fan of the music and a true friend of the musicians. Carter would often wear band t-shirts during TV interviews and use lyrics in his discussions on his political ideologies. He was not worried about the potential negative effects of associating with rock artists, whose relationships with drug use were often public knowledge. He persisted in continuing these friendships regardless of the negative perceptions. Chuck Leavell dictated that Carter could have easily cut ties with the Allman Brothers Band, whose drug use had increased after the passing of Duane Allman and Berry Oakley, to play it safe with his campaign, but refused to do so.[57] Carter was not worried about public image and saw the relationships that he

[55] *Rock and Roll President*.
[56] *Rock and Roll President*.
[57] *Rock and Roll President*.

had made with many rock musicians as equally important to his campaign. He and his musical friends stated that their connection was on a deep and spiritual level.[58]

Carter's genuineness in his relationship with the Allman Brothers Band and the Marshall Tucker Band attracted many to his side, as they recognized a man who would welcome them and their lifestyle. This was especially prominent in the South, where many young progressives felt outcasted and lost. Carter and the southern rock groups he associated with provided a direction in which they could be proud of their progressive views and their southern heritage at the same time, becoming leaders of the southern progressive movement in the region. While many politicians would avoid associating with hippies and other counterculture groups, Carter did not shy away from having relationships with these people and actively sought out their friendship and support throughout his political career and afterward.

Though many would doubt that this genuineness was central to his support, one only has to look at his opposition to understand the importance of it. One of Carter's opponents, politician Jerry Brown, used Carter's strategy by recruiting the Eagles and Chicago to play benefit concerts for his campaign. Roseanne Cash dictated that his lack of genuine love for the music and what it represented turned her, and many others, away from his campaign.[59] The relationship was very much just political it seemed. In this era of the United States, which had struggled through the political deceptions of the Nixon and Ford presidencies, Carter's genuine love of the music and the culture surrounding it pushed many into his corner and away from politicians who seemed to be trying to mimic what they thought was a simple campaign strategy initiated by Carter. If Carter was genuine with his relationships and love of music, then by extension his political ideologies must be as well.

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[58] Alter, 227.
[59] *Rock and Roll President*.

The southern rock artists were also genuine in their relationship with Carter and support of his ideologies. They did not just support Carter because he asked; they believed in Carter and his desire to unify the nation after years of distrust and dissension. Chuck Leavell dictated that they knew they were fighting an uphill battle with Carter's campaign and were not confident he would win.[60] However, they supported Carter and what he stood for, and were willing to put their necks out for him.[61] Phil Walden's support of Carter came from their similarities. Phil Walden, who was ostracized by Macon society for liking and promoting black music, saw a kindred spirit whose upbringing and ideas were similar to his own.[62] Charlie Daniels, who was politically conservative, supported Carter, dictating that he was a good man who promised the nation that he would never tell a lie. "I don't think he ever did tell us a lie. I voted for Carter the second time, too."[63]

The Charlie Daniels Band was a valuable asset to Carter's campaign. Daniels, who grew up in the pre–Civil Rights South, was a staunch conservative. However, he made a conscious effort to change many of his views on race and segregation in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, arguing that the issues were above political ideologies.[64] In a sense, Daniels represented a direction for many southerners to take without sacrificing all of their conservative ideologies. Though many were discontented with the dismantling of segregation, Charlie Daniels symbolized that southern conservatives could maintain their political identity without the race-centric ideals that came with southern conservatism.

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[60] *Rock and Roll President*.
[61] *Rock and Roll President*.
[62] Paul, 188-190.
[63] Peter Cooper, "Charlie Daniels Sees Differences Vanish in Music," *The Tennessean* (blog), 2014, accessed November 2023, https://www.tennessean.com/story/entertainment/music/peter-cooper/2014/03/28/charlie-daniels-bob-dylan/6980873/.
[64] Charlie Daniels, *Never Look at the Empty Seats: A Memoir* (Tennessee: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 2017), 30-32.

Carter, though a Democrat, was very centric in his political views, the only major differences between himself and southern conservatives were his views on race and the working class. The relationship between Carter and the Charlie Daniels Band outlined Carter's desire for unity, reflecting the bipartisanship of his ideologies. It helped southern conservatives come to terms with the new era of the South, recognizing that many things had remained the same despite the changes brought about by the Civil Rights Movement. Further, it stressed that Carter did not villainize his counterparts on the other side of the aisle like many progressives had. Just as Carter was willing to engage with hippies and southern rock artists, he was just as willing to do the same with southern conservatives and those who were resistant to leaving the Jim Crow South behind.

Through their involvement in Jimmy Carter's presidential campaign, southern rock had a profound impact on southern political identity. Bands such as the Allman Brothers and the Marshall Tucker Band helped bring southern progressivism to the forefront of southern politics through their campaigning for Jimmy Carter. In a sense, the bands acted as a sort of bridge between the progressive culture that began to blossom in the post-Civil Rights South and the political sphere in which southern conservatives had dominated.

Though their music was not political, the bands nonetheless became political figures through their participation in Carter's campaign, and through their counterculture ideologies and lifestyles. In his book *Dixie Lullaby,* Mark Kemp indicates that groups such as the Allman Brothers Band gave direction to himself and other southern progressives who felt outcast and misunderstood by southern culture because of their ideas on race, class, and southern culture.[65] Southern rock helped bring Carter into the light. It gave a voice to southern progressives on a

[65] Mark Kemp, *Dixie Lullaby: A Story of Music, Race, and New Beginnings in a New South* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 29.

national scale, pushing back against the negative stereotypes of southerners that had been popular in politics during the Civil Rights era. In a sense, the Carter campaign made young southerners and progressives proud of their heritage. Many felt ashamed of their heritage owing to the atrocities done under the Jim Crow era South, and many, such as Kemp, tried to escape and ignore their heritage.[66] The surging popularity of southern rock and its relationship with Jimmy Carter shifted these ideals on southern heritage, making southern progressives prouder of their culture/heritage, and willing to work to fix the issues in the region.

To claim that southern rock was solely a torchbearer for progressive political ideologies would be an oversimplification of the genre's history in southern politics. Though the genre's relationship with Jimmy Carter is well-known, southern rock is often considered the soundtrack of southern conservatism. When viewing southern rock and its relationship with political identity, it is important to note that the genre has two sides. One is the more hippie-oriented aspect of the genre, while the other appeals more to perceived rednecks and the white working class, whose political ideologies often sit between politically moderate or conservative. Much of this has to do with the genre's use of Confederate symbolism in their shows and the political ideologies of the artists.

When investigating the artists that ended up not supporting Jimmy Carter, it is important not to jump to conclusions that their lack of campaigning equated to a dislike of progressive politics or Jimmy Carter. When it came to southern rock, many artists simply did not want to be heavily involved in politics, especially given how divisive it had become in the South. Even the artists who campaigned with Carter held complicated views on the president and his legacy. Charlie Daniels' son recalls that his father viewed Carter as a good man, but not a good

[66] Kemp, xviii-xvi.

president, even though Daniels voted for Carter for president.[67] Daniels seemed to have cut ties with his association with Carter after the perceived failure of his presidency, barely mentioning his involvement with Carter in his memoir.[68] Lynyrd Skynyrd, the modern iteration being one of the torchbearers of conservativism in the United States, initially supported Carter's campaign but backed out of a benefit concert at the last minute. Ron Eckerman, the band's tour manager during the 1970s, recalled the incident in his autobiography, stating that Ronnie Van Zant, the band's lead singer and leader, was nervous and uncomfortable about the concert.[69] Eckerman stated that Van Zant pulled him aside and said he could not go through with the concert, stating that he could not support the man, but to not tell anyone.[70] Eckerman canceled because Ronnie was "sick," resulting in a riot by the audience once learning that Skynyrd would not be performing.[71]

The case of Lynyrd Skynyrd is one of particular interest when discussing southern rock and political identity. The band's legacy is complicated, being a group that many found to be progressive at the time but is now looked upon as a foundation of southern conservativism. While this is partially the result of a change in what constitutes "progressive," there are still some serious questions that need to be answered to best understand the group's true impact on southern political identity. Why did a band that seemingly boasted its counterculture roots keep close ties with famous segregationist George Wallace? Why did a band whose leader held some very progressive views on race, gun control, and gender use Confederate symbolism in their concerts and marketing? And finally, did the infamous 1977 plane crash that killed many of the band's members, including Van Zant, affect the band's shifting legacy in the political sphere?

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[67] Charlie Jr. Daniels, "Charlie Daniels, Politics and Presidential Encounters," *Soap Box* (blog), 2020, accessed January 2024,https://www.charliedaniels.com/soap-box?b_id=7786.
[68] Daniels, *Never Look at the Empty Seats*.
[69] Ron Eckerman, *Turn It Up! My Years with Lynyrd Skynyrd: Love, Life, and Death, Southern Style* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2020), 134.
[70] Eckerman, 135.
[71] Eckerman, 135-137.

While these questions may further complicate the perceptions of the group, they are crucial in understanding why Lynyrd Skynyrd's legacy is multi-faceted and showing that these complexities extend to southerners and southern identity during the 1970s.

When discussing the Jim Crow South, George Wallace is almost always a part of the discussion. Wallace, who served as the governor of Alabama through the 1960s and the 1970s, was famous for his segregationist views and resistance to the Civil Rights Movement. It was Wallace who uttered the phrase "segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever" and who stood in front of the doors of the University of Alabama to prevent black students from entering the university during its racial integration.[72] Though he would renounce his views on race and segregation later in his life, in the 1970s, he was still seen as a resistor of "New South" ideologies.

Lynyrd Skynyrd's connection with such a figure as George Wallace was not something that retroactively only bothered people; many during the 1970s saw issues with the connection as well. In his 1975 article for Creem Magazine, Robert Christgau, a fan of the band, struggles to make sense of the group's support of Wallace's presidential campaign despite their contradictory views in their song Sweet Home Alabama:

> Yes, the whole business is confusing. As a loyal New Yorker, I was distressed by those lines until I caught the "Boo boo boo" part, first in concert at the Academy of Music, accompanied by raised fists, and then on record, where somehow I'd never noticed it before. What a relief: they were booing him! How reassuring to explain away the whole stanza as an attack on liberal self-righteousness, maybe the self-righteousness of Neil Young himself. Just because we're from the south, I could imagine Van Zant saying, that doesn't make us all George Wallaces, and you, you Southern California asshole, did you do all you could do? There were some Southern Californians mixed up in Watergate, isn't that so? Right on, Ronnie. The New South, I felt indicted myself.[73]

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[72]Richard Pearson, "Former Ala. Gov. George C. Wallace Dies," *Washington Post* (blog), 1998 ,accessed March 2024, https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/daily/sept98/wallace.htm.

[73] Robert Christgau, "Lynyrd Skynyrd: Not Even a Boogie Band Is as Simple As It Seems," *Creem Magazine*, 1975, The Creem Archive, 25.

When asked about the contradictory messages that the band is sending, Van Zant always replied "we say boo boo boo," as if that makes the band's stance clear on the matter.[74] When discussing this with Christgau, Van Zant opens up a bit more on the topic, stating that he does not agree with everything the man says, especially "what he says about colored people," but that he was doing it for his dad more than anything.[75] When the discussion began to get more political, Van Zant stated, "I don't know anything about politics anyway," and moved on to other topics.[76] It is evident that Van Zant held his cards close to his chest when it came to his political views. That is not to say that his beliefs are ambiguous; rather, he simply believes that his views on different issues are obvious based on his lifestyle and the themes the music is centered on.

Based on songs such as "Mr. Banker" and "Things Goin On" It is easy to see Van Zant's populist views and his distaste of classism in the South.[77] With that in mind, it is not a stretch to infer that some of Van Zant's respect for Wallace came from their shared populist ideologies. However, the divide between the two came with the practice of those ideologies. The music of Skynyrd was an avenue in which white working-class woes were shared to a larger audience, while Wallace's views of the same group were centered on racial issues; viewing the white working class as disfavored over the rights of the black population. In a sense, both Van Zant's and Wallace's populist views on the working class sat contrary to the South's social and economic divides that had been central to the region's culture. It is unsurprising that Skynyrd, whose origins and songs centered on working-class southerners, would have a relationship with a politician who, though he held problematic political views, was sympathetic to the struggles of an often-discarded group of people in the South.

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[74] Christgau, "Lynyrd Skynyrd," 73.
[75] Christgau, "Lynyrd Skynyrd," 73.
[76] Christgau, "Lynyrd Skynyrd," 73.
[77] Lynyrd Skynyrd, *Mr. Banker* and *Things Goin On* (Georgia: MCA Records, 1973).

Negative perceptions of southern rock largely come from the genre's perceived use of Confederate imagery in its marketing and concerts. While most southern rock bands did not use Confederate symbolism, it is largely thanks to Lynyrd Skynyrd, who was known for their use of Confederate imagery, that this perception exists. However, Skynyrd does not bear the full responsibility of this. Charlie Daniels' southern rock anthem "The South's Gonna Do It" is full of Confederate symbolism.[78] While the song is meant to be an ode to southern rock and paint the South more positively, some of its lyrics sit contrary to that image. Its notable lyric, "Be proud you're a rebel 'cause the South's gonna do it again" proves to be problematic with its use of "rebel" in the context of southern pride, the word alluding to the Confederacy's rebellion against the United States.[79] Further, the statement "the South's gonna do it again" begs the question, do what again? It is not difficult to deduce what Daniels is referencing with these lyrics.

Lynyrd Skynyrd's Confederate imagery was central to the band's live performances and marketing. When the band signed to one of their early labels, the use of Confederate imagery, mainly the Confederate flag, became prominent with the image of the band. MCA's sublabel, "Sounds of the South," continued the marketing strategy during the height of the band's popularity. Skynyrd's heavier rock sound, their appeal to the white working class, and the band's image as a bunch of rough and rugged men played a role in the decision to use the Confederate flag as a part of the band's marketing. The perception of many southerners that Skynyrd was a group of misbehaved, longhaired rednecks made them rebels against southern culture, making the use of the flag a sort of rallying symbol for those of similar backgrounds. On a simpler level, the flag symbolized that this was a rock and roll band from the South. Skynyrd's sound did not entirely mesh with the other southern rock bands of the time. Comparisons were more often

[78] Charlie Daniels Band, *The South's Gonna Do It* (Capital Records, 1974).
[79] Daniels, *The South's Gonna Do It.*

made with the Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, and other hard rock bands rather than the bands coming out of Macon, being a band that gained widespread popularity throughout the world, rather than being a "southern" group. The use of the flag, in this sense, simply showcased the band's roots as a rock and roll band from the South.

While one could infer from this that Skynyrd had little control over how they were marketed, that is simply not the case. The band has a long history of waving the flag at their concerts and actively using it to market themselves even after they departed from MCA. Gary Rossington, guitarist and one of the band's founding members, states that the use of the flag was not problematic during the band's height of popularity in the 1970s, stating that "The flag didn't mean quite as much as it does today, or it didn't offend people….we never meant to hurt anybody or hurt their feelings, we were just a band from the South and proud of it."[80] While the band's intentions of using the flag may have simply been a way to show their southern heritage, the argument that the Confederate flag's meaning has changed over time does not quite hold up.

As stated in the previous chapter, white nationalist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan used the Confederate flag as early as the 1950s and 1960s. To these groups, which included many southern politicians, the flag was a symbol of their resistance to desegregation and the end of Jim Crow. While Lynyrd Skynyrd's use of the flag may have been innocent, the "southern pride" the flag harkened to was the institution of slavery and of racism in the region. Clearly, Lynyrd Skynyrd was not the only southern group using the flag. Many southern institutions, such as companies and colleges, used the flag to market themselves as "southern." [81] However, the band's use of the Confederate flag muddied the legacy of the band and the genre, the symbolism of the flag often overshadowing the group's progressive ideologies and practices.

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[80] Dan Rather, "The Big Interview with Lynyrd Skynyrd."
[81] Dan Rather, "The Big Interview."

Despite the band's use of the Confederate flag, the ideologies of Van Zant and the rest of the band were still viewed as progressive both during the 1970s and the present day. However, the band is now viewed as a poster child of conservatism alongside other notable acts such as Kid Rock and Jason Aldean. The band's continued use of the Confederate flag is not the only reason for this, so where/when did things change? Unfortunately, the change came about after the infamous plane crash in 1977 that killed Ronnie Van Zant and other members of the band and crew, including guitarist Steve Gaines and backup singer Cassie Gaines. Ronnie Van Zant was the unchallenged leader of the band, its primary songwriter, and controller of the band's direction and image. Henry Paul, leader of the Outlaws, states that Ronnie wanted to put his band on a pedestal as the beacon of the "New South" society, shedding the perceptions of racism and classism in favor of a morally-just southern man.[82] When the band reformed in 1987, with Ronnie's younger brother Johnny Van Zant on lead vocals, their image and music became more politically charged than it had been under Ronnie.

Despite the band's insistence that their music is not politically charged, the songs and lyrics say otherwise. Songs such as "God and Guns" and "That Ain't My America" are politically loaded conservative anthems that have attracted like-minded individuals to the band.[83] Further, their concerts are filled with political rhetoric that those holding right-wing ideologies would be attracted to. The band's Jacksonville stop on their *Last of the Street Survivors* tour in 2018 could be viewed as a festival for conservatives, with Kid Rock and Jason Aldean being openers for the band. Being stationed close to Jacksonville during my time in the Army, a few friends (all but me being Puerto Rican or of South American descent) and I decided to go and were uncomfortable with many of the statements and implications made by the band and the

[82] *Lynyrd Skynyrd's Ronnie Van Zant Was Not Who You Think He Was*, Rock History Music, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MGBiNP4nEGA.
[83] Lynyrd Skynyrd, *God and Guns* and *That Ain't My America* (Tennessee: Roadrunner, 2009).

preceding acts. As a longtime fan of Skynyrd, I left the concert with a bad taste in my mouth concerning the band and a deeper understanding as to why the band is now looked upon negatively by progressives and others ostracized by conservative rhetoric. To my friends and me, the band's legacy was tarnished with this new iteration, who vehemently argued that Ronnie would approve of the band's image in the modern age.[84]

So where does that place Skynyrd in the context of their effects on political identity? Well, it's complicated. One of the common insights of studying history is the recognition that people and events are often not a good vs. bad scenario. Typically, they sit in a gray area and are an amalgamation of their beliefs and ideologies, good and bad. Applying that to Skynyrd, it is best to separate the band into two separate entities: the Skynyrd before the 1977 plane crash, and the band that came afterward. Doing so has much merit. Artimus Pyle, drummer of the band during the 1970s, argues that the modern iteration of Lynyrd Skynyrd is nothing but a knock-off and money grab for the people involved, citing the increased merchandise sales and the prices of concert tickets as evidence.[85] Further, the band's continued touring despite the death of the original members who still played with the band, outlines that the Skynyrd of today is an entirely different group than the one of the 1970s.

The Skynyrd of the 1970s wrote songs that were not necessarily politically charged but were reflections of working-class woes and the experiences of the band's members, the lyrics often having political effects. Even the band's most political song, *Sweet Home Alabama,* is mainly satire, responding to Neil Young's lyrics about the South and southern culture.[86] Further,

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[84] Author's account of the 2018 concert in Jacksonville, Florida.
[85] Jeff Gaudiosi, "A Conversation with Former Lynyrd Skynyrd Drummer Artimus Pyle," *Misplaced Straws* (blog), 2021, accessed February 2024,https://misplacedstraws.com/2021/10/a-conversation-with-former-lynyrd-skynyrd-drummer-artimus-pyle.html#google_vignette.
[86] Neil Young, *Southern Man* (Reprise, 1970). Mark Ribowsky, *Whiskey Bottles And Brand-New Cars: The Fast Life and Sudden Death of Lynyrd Skynyrd* (Chicago, Illinois: Chicago Review Press, 2018), 108-109.

the political ambiguity of Van Zant and the band is evidence of the lack of political themes in and of itself. In the present, Lynyrd Skynyrd seems to go out of its way to be political, directly involved in shaping conservative political identity in the modern South. When the outcry against the Confederate flag gained more traction, the band initially promised to stop using the flag in its marketing and shows.[87] After outcries from their more conservative fans that the band was selling out, they dialed back their statement, stating that the band would still use the flags at shows, actively meeting the demands of their conservative listeners. Johnny Van Zant has also voiced his distaste for removing Confederate monuments, a topic that is at the center of many current political debates.[88] The modern Skynyrd has complicated the Skynyrd of old as well. Casual listeners and those who know the band only by its present reputation often do not know that the more recent lineup was made up of a mainly of new members and, since 2023, no original members whatsoever. In their eyes, today's band is the band of the 1970s, overshadowing the impact of Van Zant's populist ideologies and the lyrics that challenged southern ideologies on classism, race, and violence.

The effect of southern rock on political identity is complicated. Though the bands were seen as foundational to progressive identity in the 1970s South, much of the legacy has been mixed with the conservative fanbase of the modern age. Some of this concerns the shifting ideologies that qualify as "progressive." What was progressive in the 1970s, such as the views on racial equality and the resistance to classism in the South, is now seen as reasonably moderate politically. Many of the white southern progressives who supported the ending of segregation, see that as the end of institutional racism and do not connect with the progressive movements against racism in the modern age. Further, the shifting political ideologies of many southern

[87] Dan Rather, "The Big Interview."
[88] Dan Rather, "The Big Interview."

rockers, such as Charlie Daniels and Lynyrd Skynyrd equated to a similar shift by the music's fans.

The height of southern progressivism in the 1970s South ended owing to several factors. The ending of southern rock's major influence in the South, mainly owing to the breakup of the Allman Brothers Band and the Lynyrd Skynyrd plane crash, left many southern progressives without their leaders and role models.[89] Perceptions of the bands and their listeners as inferior via their status as hippies and working-class southerners persisted, pushing many back to the outskirts of southern society. Further, Carter's presidency left many with a negative perception of southern progressivism, giving conservatives fuel to push back against the ideologies held by progressive politicians. Carter's perceived mishandling of the Iranian Hostage Crisis and the economic issues that the United States was dealing with during his presidency, made his presidency looked upon as a massive failure.[90] As Carter left office, so too did the influence of progressivism in the South, having been moved aside for the conservative ideologies that took both the South and the United States by storm with the coming of Reagan's presidency.

Southern rock's effect on political identity was, and continues to be, a two-sided coin. The genre fuels both progressivism in the South just as much as it does conservatism, dependent more so on the bands and the demographic of their listeners rather than a genre-defining political ideology. For example, one is more likely to find southern progressives favoring the sound of the Allman Brothers Band over Lynyrd Skynyrd, and vice versa. In a sense, the genre still represents the diverse political ideologies of the South, the fans being a mix of conservative and progressive listeners of varying degrees and practices. The genre's impact on political identity is quite

[89] Kemp,120-122.
[90] Bird, 564-582.

evident in the modern day just as much as it was in the politically charged atmosphere of the 1970s South.

CHAPTER FOUR

PICKET SIGNS AND MUSIC LINES: SOUTHERN ROCK AND ACTIVISM

Though southern rock's impact on southern culture is partly shown through its relationship with the South's political identity, one must dig into specifics to better understand the genre's impact on southern identity. Southern rock bands were surprisingly active in a variety of movements that worked to change major cultural issues in the South and, by extension, the negative perceptions of the region. However, to say that the musicians were the leaders of the grassroots movements in the South would be a bit of a stretch. While some southern rockers were involved in organized movements, often the musicians were simply vocal about their views. They did not hesitate to share their opinions on different topics. While this may seem contradictory to earlier statements made regarding southern rock bands not being overtly political, many of the issues that the groups spoke on were not seen as super political in their eyes. Though no doubt political, many southern rockers viewed many issues, such as race and class, as more societal than political problems.

This chapter will focus on southern rock's role as activists in the South. The first portion will focus on southern rock and race, investigating the genre's role in improving race relations in the South and investigating different grassroots efforts in other efforts such as the American Indian Movement. Next, an investigation of southern rock and class is warranted, given that most of the genre's members came from working and lower-class backgrounds. An often-overlooked 1970s southern movement is environmental activism, which southern rock also had a role in furthering through the music lyrics. Though not as much attention is given to them, a look at other smaller movements, such as gender and sexual identity, is warranted in order to best show southern rock's influence on the whole of southern culture.

Because the majority of listeners in the 1970s were white, it is important to note that much of the focus will be on how the genre's involvement in these different efforts affected white southern identity. While Southern Rock's themes on things such as working-class struggles crossed racial boundaries, the music especially resonated with the white working class, who were made to believe their problems had been overlooked in favor of racial issues. The genre helped soften perceptions of race and southern culture, helping many realize that southern pride and southern culture were not taboo but celebrated by southerners of all races and backgrounds. Further, a genre that often spoke on issues from the perception of a white progressive went far in helping white southerners find the similarities in their struggles and culture with those of other races and political ideologies who resided in the South.

While southern rock is seen as a genre closely associated with white southerners, it is important to note the prominence of the black musicians in the genre, many of whom were essential in helping create the genre's sound. Musicians such as Jaimoe and Lamar Williams were essential in shaping the sound through their membership in the Allman Brothers Band. Further, the racial integration of bands, such as the Allman Brothers Band and Wet Willie, worked to dismantle negative stereotypes of African Americans in the South and apply positive racial relationships between white and black southerners. The music itself often praises black culture through its lyrics and album art, acting as an example of the diversity of the South and southern culture.

When the Allman Brothers Band came out with their first album in 1969, they were not out to make a statement about their status as an integrated band. The fact that they were one of the first racially integrated bands to come out of the post-Civil Rights South did not immediately register with the band upon formation. While some of this had to do with their progressive

political ideologies, the group's interactions with African Americans can be traced much earlier. Their relationships with black friends and musicians in their childhood through early adulthood years were foundational in shaping the individual members' ideology and their relationships with other races. Greg notes that he and Duane never understood the segregation policies and the racism in the South. In their eyes, if someone could play solid music, then that was enough justification to become friends.[91] For Greg Allman, there was no divine revelation regarding his views on race; he just never saw the issue with him and Duane hanging out and playing music with black friends. The incident he recalls that comes close to a revelation-type experience is when he realized the severity of racism in southern culture when his mother asked the boys to send their friend/mentor Hank Moore home on account of his skin color.[92] Greg indicates he did not send Moore home; his mother just learned to live with it.[93]

The rest of the band shared similar experiences regarding music and race. Duane Allman gained notoriety as a guitar player through involvement with black musicians such as Wilson Pickett. Betts and Oakley held a special reverence for black genres such as jazz and the blues.[94] For Jaimoe, there was no ill will toward his white bandmates. Having already been semi-established in the music industry, he had worked with a variety of musicians from different backgrounds. He decided to join Duane's vision of the Allman Brothers based on some advice he was given, "if you wanna make money, play with a white boy."[95]

What was important about the Allman Brothers Band was how central the "brothers" aspect was. The brotherhood was not limited to just Greg and Duane but encompassed the entirety of the band and their relationships with each other. They were a family with a deep

[91] Allman, 42-43.
[92] Allman, 44-45.
[93] Allman, 45.
[94] Paul, 10-11.
[95] Paul, 10.

connection to one another through their shared love of music. Pairing this with the inclusion of Jaimoe and Lamar Williams, the band's family dynamic broke racial boundaries that many southerners still struggled to overcome. The band's love of one another and openness to share that brotherhood with their audiences helped many southerners recognize the similarities that could be found with those of different races and backgrounds. That is not to say that the band revolutionized race relations in the South. If anything, the group's early experience solidified that race relations in the South were not wholly fixed and still tense after the Civil Rights Movement. The band met a lot of resistance for their racially integrated makeup and their status as southern hippies. Members of the band have recalled several different instances where they had to deal with some in the audience using racial slurs towards either Jaimoe or Williams.[96] What the band did was symbolize that positive relationships between whites and blacks were not only possible but socially acceptable given the band's growing fanbase throughout the 1970s.

The Allman Brothers Band was not the only southern rock group that boasted an integrated band makeup. Wet Willie's original formation included Ella Brown Avery, a black singer and one of the core parts of the band's sound. Avery and Donna Hall, who made up the Willetes, were essential in solidifying the band's soulful take on southern rock. The band formed in Alabama, one of the stalwart states that opposed desegregation thanks to notable politicians such as George Wallace. A racially integrated band coming out of Alabama, of all places, spoke volumes about the direction southern culture was moving towards despite much resistance to change. What makes the case of Wet Willie more interesting, is that they did not reach widespread popularity like bands such as the Allman Brothers, Charlie Daniels Band, and Lynyrd Skynyrd did. Though they had a few notable singles, such as their billboard-topping hit

[96] Allman, 128.

Keep on Smilin, most of their popularity remained in the South.[97] Similar to the Allman Brothers, the fact that Wet Willie was a racially integrated band and became so popular in the South in many ways symbolized how much racial ideals had changed and continued to change in the South, despite resistance and the desire of many southerners to hold on to the South of old.

Southern rock's relationship with race was not just limited to the racial integration of the bands. The music and album art of the southern rock bands also showed a reverence and love of black culture and music. Two of Wet Willie's album covers centered on a love of black music and African American beauty. Their third album, *Keep on Smilin',* featured a blind street performer Reverend Pearly Brown, a black blues musician of some fame in the Macon area. The band thought Brown was perfect for the album cover, especially owing to the sign he often wore around his neck stating, "God Loves a Cheerful Giver."[98] Putting the album cover into the context of the 1970s, featuring a black musician on the cover of a predominately white band, surely turned some heads in the South. Further, the album art showcased Wet Willie's reverence for black-centric music, the band openly citing notable genres such as soul and blues, and musicians, such as BB King, Muddy Waters, and Robert Johnson, as major influences on the band's sound. Wet Willie's album, *The Wetter The Better,* featured a risqué image of a naked, black woman from the chest down, holding a popsicle.[99] The body used was allegedly backup singer Ella Brown Avery's, and in many ways, showcases black beauty. It was not uncommon for white musicians, especially in rock n roll, to use sexualized images of women in conjunction with their album art or in promotional images of the band, but it was usually white women. To use a black woman in this manner, especially with a band popular mainly in the South, was a

[97] Wet Willie, *Keep on Smilin,* 1974.
[98] "Wet Willie Interview 'Keep on Smilin,'" 2023, https://www.psychedelicbabymag.com/2023/02/wet-willie-interview-keep-on-smilin.html.
[99] Wet Willie, *The Wetter the Better,* 1976.

bold move. Depictions of African Americans by white southerners typically portrayed them as ugly and inferior, caricatures being evidence of this.[100] For Wet Willie to use a black woman as the main portion of a sexually loaded album cover inferred a recognition of beauty and a changing perspective of African American appeal, from inferior to desirable.

Southern rock's relationship with race did not just extend to African Americans, though that relationship was a prominent aspect of the genre. The Allman Brothers Band had a very close relationship with American Indians. This relationship was largely because of Dickey Betts' marriage with Sandy BlueSky Wabegijig, an indigenous Canadian, and for whom the song "Blue Sky" is written.[101] The Allman Brothers Band would do much work with the American Indian Movement, playing a variety of benefit concerts to help raise awareness for the issues American Indians were going through and gather funds to keep the movement afloat.

Southern rock's role in positive race relations in the South is hard to ignore. The bands were central in helping many white southerners find their way in the South's new integrated society and helped show that positive relationships between whites and people of color were not only possible but beneficial for cultural enrichment and progress. Through the integration of the bands, their roles in civil rights activism, and their focus on changing common perspectives of blacks and other minority groups through their songs and album covers, southern rock was a valuable aspect of southern culture that helped bridge the gap between white southerners and everyone else in the region. The development of southern rock's sound would not have been possible without the influence of African American musicians and the willingness of white southerners to work with black artists, the music having a profound impact on future southern musicians for decades.

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[100] "Blackface: The Birth of An American Stereotype," *National Museum of African American History and Culture* (blog), n.d., Blackface: The Birth of An American Stereotype.
[101] Allman Brothers Band, *Blue Sky* (Georgia: Capricorn Records, 1972).

Another aspect of southern rock's activist efforts is the genre's impact on male identity. Though the musicians did not actively seek to change perceptions of the South's male identity, the lifestyles of the artists and the music in the genre nonetheless had an impact. It is important to note that the genre's influence on male identity is multifaceted, changing perceptions of the "southern man" and upholding many common perceptions in other aspects. Despite the musicians sharing many commonalities in their lifestyles, perceptions of male identity differed depending on which band one investigates.

One major commonality across the board is southern rock's portrayal of male identity as rough and often belligerent; the word unsophisticated pops up when one investigates perceptions of the bands in the South. Much of this concerns the South's remaining classism in the 1970s. Middle and upper-class southerners often viewed the working class in the South as belligerent and unintelligent, classifying them with terms such as redneck and hillbilly to mark their difference from "normal" southern society.[102] The majority of southern rockers in the 1970s were a part of this group, often referred to as longhaired rednecks by non-southerners, hippies by southerners, and other derogatory terms as a way to denote the music and listeners as separate from other southern music. In his memoir, Ron Eckerman notes an incident at a truck stop where the band got into a fight with some "genuine southern rednecks truckers" after comments made to the band surrounding their long hair.[103]

In many ways, the southern rock musicians held up these perceptions of working- and lower-class southerners. The physical looks of the musicians sat contradictory to what the traditional southern man should look like, being long-haired with unkempt facial hair rather than short hair and clean-shaven or little facial hair. In this way, the musicians fit the stereotype of the

[102] Kelly Marshall, "Rednecks."
[103] Eckerman, 38-40.

southern working class, but it was not just physical looks. Bands such as the Allman Brothers Band and Lynyrd Skynyrd had a long history of partying and belligerent behavior, both being the predecessors of rowdiness that would follow rock and roll for decades. The musicians would often get very drunk, starting fights amongst themselves or with others in the vicinity. Dickey Betts, the Allman Brothers Band's hothead, was notorious for his brawling and intense anger issues when drunk.[104] Ronnie Van Zant and almost every member of Skynyrd were heavy drinkers and rowdy partiers, Eckerman reporting that he had to travel with extra funds to pay for damages at bars, restaurants, and hotels after the band's stay.[105] Like Betts, Van Zant was a mean drunk and notorious for his shift from a mean drunk to a fun drunk.[106] Van Zant, looked upon as the leader of the band, was no pushover and had no qualms about laying down the law with the band and roadies.[107] The fighting and violence that seemed to follow the bands did not just center on drugs and alcohol. Twiggs Lyndon, the Allman Brothers' road manager, stabbed a venue owner over a payment dispute, resulting in his incarceration and negative press surrounding the band for a time.[108]

The views of southern rockers, rooted in their southern working-class background, solidified perceptions that the working-class "rednecks" were an unruly mess. However, this was not something that the musicians saw as a negative. Most musicians embraced their rough and belligerent working-class persona, often vocalizing this in their shows and marketing for albums and tours. What many southerners saw as a stain on their society quickly shifted into an identity many working-class southerners began to embrace more openly. When Jimmy Carter, a

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[104] Paul, *12*.
[105] Eckerman,64-67.
[106] Eckerman, 113.
[107] Eckerman, 179-180.
[108] Galadrielle Allman, *Please Be With Me: A Song for My Father, Duane Allman* (New York New York: Random House, 2014), 238-242.

working-class southerner, became President, this pushed pride in one's working-class background to a higher degree.[109] Working class culture slowly became something that was revered in the South, and derogatory terms such as rednecks and hillbillies began to be adopted as titles of pride by male southerners, working class or not.[110]

Contradictory to the working-class perceptions, more hippie-centric groups such as the Allman Brothers Band and Wet Willie created a different ambiance for a male identity. While these bands held many similarities with the more "redneck" bands, there were stark differences in the interactions of these musicians that implied a differing view of the southern male. Most notable was the family-centric nature of the bands. The Allman Brothers did not hide the familial aspect of the band. The familial bond was not just limited to the band members, but their spouses, children, and crew members. The band and their families often lived amongst each other, spending significant time together on and off the road, mostly at the Big House, a property the Brothers purchased in Macon, GA.[111]

This emotional connection the band had to one another was essential to the band's functionality. The deaths of Duane Allman and, a year later, Berry Oakley, shook the band at its core. They all saw the worst of each other in pretty much every aspect as they all tried to cope with the loss of their friends/family, the brotherly bond being crucial to the band's continued existence.[112] In a way, the band's losses the band faced brought the remaining members, both old and new, together. The band had little else to lean on than each other, and there is certainly a sense of vulnerability that can be felt among them that does not fit perceptions of the "southern man."[113] This emotional connection is not one that the band kept private but was vocalized by its

[109] Marshall, "Rednecks."
[110] Marshall, "Rednecks."
[111] Allman, 224-228.
[112] Jaan Uhelsziki, "To Beat The Devil: The Allman Brothers Comin Round Again," *Creem Magazine*, 1975, The Creem Archive, 49.
[113] Uhelsziki, 49-50.

members. In a 1975 Creem Magazine article, Chuck Leavell, keyboardist and band member after Duane's death, stated that there's a mutual love between the members.[114] "The reason we stick it out is just this love. A real love and devotion for one another, and the respect we have. That's what keeps us together. And, damn it feels so good."[115]

Having a band, specifically southern men, be open and vulnerable in such a public manner certainly had a profound impact on perceptions of male identity among its listeners. It went against what was, and arguably still is, the perception of what a man should act like, showing no emotion publicly and being a sort of standoffish figure when it came to family dynamics. While a significant amount of drugs and alcohol were most likely consumed when these topics were discussed, which was undoubtedly the case with Greg Allman, this level of vulnerability indeed showed a different side of the "southern man" motif, and certainly was impactful to the group's younger listeners who hung onto the band's every word, deed, and creed.[116]

While the familial bond seemed to last among the band members through most of the 1970s, it is essential to note that this did not extend outside of the band to their families. The majority of the band, most notably Duane, Dickey, and Greg, boasted multiple marriages lasting anywhere from a few days to a few years. Further, the members had multiple kids with different women, complicating the band's familial legacy. These relations do not imply that all of the members were bad fathers or husbands; in fact, the band often went above and beyond for their spouses and kids, but the members held a looser definition of family. Greg Allman states that he did not like marriage much because of the tied-down feeling he had, along with his eventual

[114] Uhelsziki, 49.
[115] Uhelsziki, 49.
[116] Uhelsziki, 78.

boredom with his spouses.[117] In fact, only Cher and his late wife were the two he felt the closest bond with; both, he considers being his soulmates.[118] The rotating family dynamic was not just because of a nomad ideology with some of the members but also evolved around issues surrounding money and drugs. Greg ended things with his first and second wives partly because they used him for his paycheck and to buy them drugs.[119] The band had many issues with drug and alcohol addiction, which was problematic for the band's families. Drug use paired with alcohol was the primary reason for Dickey Bett's violent anger issues, and it was the main issue that created a rift between Cher and Greg Allman early in their marriage.[120]

Southern rock had a significant impact on male identity. Through their lens of working-class culture, the musicians helped shift male identity to be more like the "rednecks" that had been ostracized by a majority of southern culture. Because of this, southern males quickly began to adopt the mannerisms of the more rugged artists, such as Lynyrd Skynyrd and began to take pride in referring to themselves as rednecks and hillbillies. The newfound pride in these identities solidified northern perceptions of southerners as unsophisticated and uneducated. While much fed the rugged motif of southern male identity, there was also a familial focus on the new identity, taking the Allman Brothers Band's brotherhood dynamic as cues to emotional openness and care for one's family. There was a sense of loyalty to one's family alongside loose views of marriage and commitment, outlining the gray areas in which many musicians sat in terms of family.

One crucial, and often overlooked, aspect of southern rock and male identity is the treatment of women. Again, this is a topic that produced a mixed bag. The musicians held some

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[117]Dan Rather, "The Big Interview: Greg Allman" (AXS TV, 2015).
[118]Rather, "The Big Interview."
[119] Uhelziski, 53.
[120] Allman, 256-259, Paul, 224-225.

progressive views about women's autonomy but did not skimp on commentary defining women as sexual objects and a hurdle to be conquered. Some of the musicians' actions often veered towards disrespect in many situations and outright abusive in others. It is interesting to see these depictions of southern rock artists in magazines and interviews, often putting the respectful southern gentleman perception directly with the sexually charged rocker, showcasing the complexity of the musicians.

Lester Bangs' *Creem Magazine* article about Wet Willie outlines this dichotomy of southern male identity well. While the article's focus is on Bangs' concert experiences with the band, he spends a significant portion discussing the band's sexual exploits, specifically his efforts to get the members laid.[121] Bangs notes: "Now, I ain't saying the Willies is queer or limp or nothing, they're right fine ruttin' tuttin' down home boys, it's just that they're a leetle shy."[122] Bangs notes that this shyness seems a common perception surrounding southern men, citing a groupie's comment to one of the musicians during an after show party.[123] Wet Willie is an interesting band to investigate when looking at southern rock artists and their relationship with women because they provide a good middle ground to work off regarding how they treat women. They were guys who did not seem to pursue women for sexual purposes actively but also did not object if a woman wanted to have intercourse and actively made comments that sexualized women they encountered, showcasing both a level of respect and sexual energy that encompassed the majority of southern rock bands to varying degrees.

Lynyrd Skynyrd arguably hit the most extreme in terms of their treatment of women in a variety of ways. In many ways Skynyrd's view on women were progressive, as they had much

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[121] Lester Bangs, "C'mon Sugar, Let's Go All-Nite Jukin' With Wet Willie," *Creem Magazine*, 1974, The Creem Archive.
[122] Bangs, 27.
[123] Bangs, 71.

control over things that were commonly of outside of the perceived gender role. Ronnie Van Zant's wife had a lot of control regarding band decisions and finances, often advising Van Zant and manager Ron Eckerman on decisions regarding the band. Because of the band's almost constant touring schedule, the wives had a significant amount of control and autonomy that may have been seen as odd by older southerners. The wives were in charge of dealing with everything on the home front, extending outside of typical housewife duties to handling finances and a variety of issues that popped up.[124] However, the band's road behavior contradicts their actions with their wives. Eckerman notes that the band had a "what happens on the road stays on the road mindset," indicating that the band was able to act as they pleased regarding sexual encounters with women.[125] It's unclear whether the wives approved, or were even aware, of the band's pact about road behavior, but it nonetheless outlines a problematic ideology surrounding women. The women the band met on the road were simply party acquaintances and objects of sex for the band to exploit.

In fairness to the band, this perception was mainly owing to publications surrounding the band at the time, in some ways pushing the band into this lifestyle more than their desire to. Eckerman notes that on multiple occasions, the band often showed up to their hotel, fresh off the stage and wanting sleep, with their areas packed with groupies hoping to party with the band after someone had leaked where the band was staying.[126] Magazine and other publications' discussions of the band's offstage antics, notably their sexual encounters and partying, made many want to experience this for themselves, pushing the band further into these environments.[127] Eckerman notes that some of the band did not like the constant presence of

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[124] Eckerman, 105.
[125] Eckerman, 106.
[126] Eckerman, *Turn It Up.*
[127] Jean Uhelszki, "Lynyrd Skynyrd: Fifths and Fists For The Common Man," *Creem Magazine*, 1976, The Creem Archive.

groupies and the environment of hookups. Ronnie Van Zant and Artimus Pyle often kept to themselves, retiring to their room to partake in their stash of alcohol and drugs. By Eckerman's account, Van Zant seemed to be the one policing the band, ensuring things did not get too crazy regarding their relationship with women and the drug use that took place alongside.[128]

Other southern rock bands seemed to be less into the sex culture surrounding the genre. Charlie Daniels, who was married for most of his southern rock career, claims he did not sleep around on the road and remained faithful to his wife.[129] Much of this had to do with Daniel's lack of partying, having had a bad run of addiction issues, and swearing off alcohol and drugs because of it. The Marshall Tucker Band was another who remained relatively tame on the road. That is not to say that the band did not participate in partying and sex, but it was not something that followed the band throughout the high point of their career.[130] One common factor between these two is their age. Both Charlie Daniels and most of Marshall Tucker's members were significantly older than the other musicians in the southern rock genre. Age arguably brought a different level of maturity in how they approached the southern rock environment, focused solely on their careers as musicians and their families, rather than the temptations of women and partying that followed rock bands of the time.

While the 1970s were a time of social and cultural change for the South, it was also a time of swift environmental change. Industrialization had started to swiftly expand into the South, mainly for the use of the region's resources, and there was much debate over how much of the land should be sacrificed for industrial and economic development. Further, there were many arguments that the South was akin to a wasteland, better suited for industrial development

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[128] Eckerman, 182-183.
[129] Daniels, *Never Look At The Empty Seats.*
[130] Bomar, 93-94.

rather than keeping some of the land intact. Work of scientists, such as Eugen Odum, and activists worked to change the perceptions of the southern landscape.[131]

However, it was not just the work of activists and intellectuals commenting on the South's environment. Southern rock artists spoke extensively about the region through their music. The songs spoke on topics ranging from industrialization to the beauty of the southern landscape. In many songs, the musicians took pride in their specific state or area, taking part in a turf war over which states and areas had the most beautiful landscapes. There also seemed to be an active effort to make the South look less scary to other areas of the United States, the music making the South look welcoming and, in many instances, a fun place to visit.

In 1976, Lynyrd Skynyrd released their album *Give Me Back My Bullets.*[132] The album contains arguably one of Ronnie Van Zant's best songs, "All I Can Do Is Write About It."[133] The song acts as a commentary on the changing landscape of the South owing to industrialization. Throughout the song, Van Zant focuses on the beauty of the rural landscape of the South and its natural beauty, specifically referring to the animals and the hills, grass, and mountains of different parts of the South.[134] The chorus makes a lasting, honestly depressing, impression: "And Lord I can't make any changes, all I can do is write 'em in a song. 'Cause I can see the concrete a slowly creepin', Lord take me and mine before that comes."[135] The chorus indicates Van Zant's recognition that he cannot stop the "creeping" industrialization, and cannot see himself living in a region that is so far removed from what it once was. The song acts as a plea for people to stop and think about what will be lost with industrialization and is a prime example of southern rock's use as an outlet to talk about environmentalism.

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[131] Reid W Harris, *And the Coastlands Wait: How the Grassroots Battle to Save Georgia's Marshlands Was Fought-and Won* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2020), *20*-21.
[132] Lynyrd Skynyrd, *Give Me Back My Bullets* (Georgia: MCA Records, 1976).
[133] Lynyrd Skynyrd, *All I Can Do Is Write About It* (Georgia: MCA, 1976).
[134] Skynyrd, *All I Can Do Is Write About It.*
[135] Skynyrd, *All I Can Do Is Write About It.*

Skynyrd was not alone in their disapproval of southern industrialization. All of the notable southern rock acts held a particular reverence for the pre-industrialized South. However, unlike Van Zant, who addressed his woes in a depressively toned song, the other bands portrayed the landscape in relatively upbeat music, giving listeners a more positive mindset when it came to their visions of the region rather than a fear of what was potentially going away.[136] "Blue Sky" by the Allman Brothers Band is a prime example. The song, a signature of the band's upbeat jam band sound, portrays a positive view of the rural South, taking the listener on a "walk along the river" with the sunshine and bluebirds in the sky.[137] The song infers a simple life with little worry, Which Bart Elmore dictates sitting in contrast with life in the city.[138] Though a song with few words, it is impossible to hold back a smile and the positive feelings *Blue Sky* brings to its listeners as it takes them to the rural scene via the music.

"Blue Sky" was certainly not the only southern rock song that romanticized the landscape of the rural South. Wet Willie's "Country Side of Life" references the desire to stay in the country rather than deal with life in the city.[139] The song portrays the city as overly complicated, with its "heavy arithmetic" and "crowded streets or city slicker tricks."[140] In contrast, "the countryside" is portrayed as more laid back, emphasizing the freedom to rest one's mind and the perfect environment for someone with "a lazy streak."[141] The song specifically references Georgia, which indicates the landscape of the song is in the rural South rather than a different region of the US.[142] References to other states, such as Alabama, "where the skies are so blue," and Florida, which is better than the rest of the South according to Molly Hatchet, outline a

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[136] Bartlow J Elmore, "Growing Roots In Rocky Soil: An Environmental History of Southern Rock," *Southern Cultures* 16, no. 3 (2010): 102–28.
[137] Allman Brothers Band, *Blue Sky.*
[138] Elmore, 114.
[139] Wet Willie, *Country Side of Life* (Georgia: Capricorn Records, 1974).
[140] Wet Willie, *Country Side of Life*.
[141] Wet Willie, *Country Side of Life*.
[142] Wet Willie, *Country Side of Life*.

positive portrayal of all of the South instead of just specific parts.[143] While other songs are less specific, there are nonetheless environmental references. Elmore claims that The Allman Brothers Band's song "Dreams," referencing how it took him and his friends back to life in the rural South.[144] Though the South is not referenced specifically, it was most likely at the forefront of the musicians' minds, given their upbringing in a South surrounded by nature instead of buildings.

It was not just the physical landscape that southern rockers used to make the South look appealing. Their songs often reference the good times that could be had in the South. From the lens of the music, the Post-Civil Rights South is portrayed as a laid-back environment with many get-togethers and celebrations that are worth being a part of. This perception of the region contrasts with outside perceptions of the region as dull and divisive. Marshall Tucker Band's song "Hillbilly Band," gives such a portrayal. It outlines many stereotypes and staple sounds of southern music in a positive manner, dictating that it's something worth experiencing.[145] While there was much resistance to anything coming out of the South, Marshall Tucker said "You can have fun I'm tellin' you can. When you stomp your feet to a hillbilly band."[146]

"Rambling Man" by the Allman Brothers Band is another song that puts a positive spin on the South, specifically the song's final verse: "I'm on my way to New Orleans this morning, heading out of Nashville Tennessee. They're always having a good time on the bayou, Lord, and them Delta women think the world of me."[147] The song's final verse gives another positive portrayal of the South as a place where "good times" and fun are had.[148] There seems to be an

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[143] Lynyrd Skynyrd*, Sweet Home Alabama* (Record Plant Studios: MCA Records (Sounds of the South), 1974), Molly Hatchet, *Gator Country* (The Sound Pit: Epic Records, 1978).
[144] Elmore, 103.
[145] Marshall Tucker Band, *Hillbilly Band* (Georgia: Capricorn Records, 1973).
[146] Marshall Tucker Band, *Hillbilly Band*.
[147] Allman Brothers Band, *Ramblin' Man* (Macon, Georgia: Capricorn Records, 1972).
[148] Allman Brothers Band, *Rambling Man.*

implication that the farther South one travels, the more fun they're guaranteed to have. Grinderswitch's *Watermelon Time in Georgia* outlines this well, the song about leaving the North, specifically New York, to head back South for "watermelon time in Georgia," a symbol of summer and simple times.[149] The song implies that the South has the same feeling as the summertime, relaxation and fun. All these songs imply that everybody is "Southbound," as the Allman Brothers put it, for fun.[150] According to ZZ Top, even Jesus was heading South from Chicago, where he turned the water in the Mississippi River into wine.[151]

One big selling point of the South for southern rock musicians was the women and their portrayal of the region as feminine through the lyrics. Lynyrd Skynyrd dedicates a song to Georgia women, titled "Georgia Peaches," in which they describe the attractiveness of Georgia women.[152] The band also references Georgia Peaches in their song "Call Me The Breeze," Van Zant singing that they "make me feel right at home."[153] Marshall Tucker Band's "Southern Woman" implies a superiority of southern women over those of other regions with the line: "Now I've been looking for quite some time. Whoa southern lady, you seem to suit me fine."[154] Making references to the region as a woman or as feminine in nature was a common method in music by males to dictate their love of something. With southern rock, it made the South more appealing to listeners. Dickey Bett's "Sweet Virginia" is an excellent example of this, treating the state as a woman he's in love with.[155]

Putting everything together, southern rock did much to change how the South was perceived by both disenchanted southerners and those outside of the region. The music harkened

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[149] Grinderswitch, *Watermelon Time in Georgia* (Rabbitt Records, 1977).
[150] Allman Brothers Band, *Southboun*d (Georgia: Capricorn Records, 1972).
[151] ZZ Top, *Jesus Just Left Chicago* (Tennessee: London Recordings, 1973).
[152] Lynyrd Skynyrd, *Georgia Peaches* (Muscle Shoals Sound Studio: MCA Records, n.d.).
[153] Lynyrd Skynyrd, *Call Me The Breeze* (Georgia: MCA Records (Sounds of the South), 1974).
[154] Marshall Tucker Band, *Southern Woman* (Georgia: Capricorn Records, 1974).
[155] Dickey Betts and Great Southern*, Sweet Virginia* (Florida: Arista, 1977).

listeners to the region's beauty, with the implication that the bad times were over and the region could be seen as a place of relative fun. For southerners who had left the South, such as Kemp, the music let them relive their early lives in the region and make the area seem like a place worth revisiting. Further, the painting of the South as a place to escape the city and other areas of industrialization appealed to many as a destination to enjoy nature and unwind from the busy lives they most likely had in the city. The resistance to industrialization in the music spoke volumes to how many southerners felt about the looming threat of industrialization and the desire to hold onto the southern landscape as it was.

Southern rock's activist efforts were influential in varying degrees to different issues the South was dealing with. Though race was arguably the genre's most significant contribution to activism, one cannot ignore the other areas in which southern rock influenced the South. The genre's influence on male identity did much to change how white southern males viewed themselves in a changing culture, influencing young southerners in both positive and negative ways. The genre's influence on family dynamics and women produces a mixed bag of results. While the musicians certainly pushed back against the traditional southern family dynamic through the wives having more influence on issues outside of household duties, their treatment of women as objects of sex while on the road and the cheating on their spouses outline the genre's contradictory ideas on women. The southern landscape and the environment were big deals to the musicians, who used their music to push back against industrialization and negative perceptions of the region to show a new South that was a place worth visiting and experiencing.

CHAPTER FIVE

LIFE AFTER THE SEVENTIES: SOUTHERN ROCK FROM THE 1980S TO THE PRESENT

Southern rock's prominence as a major music genre throughout the seventies should have solidified its influence in the following decades. However, the genre receded to the background in the eighties and has not gained much mainstream popularity since. Regardless, the genre still held some level of influence in the South surrounding many of the topics discussed in previous sections. While newer southern rock acts did not reach the same level of national fame as their predecessors, the genre is still beloved in the South as a core part of the region's culture.

Southern rock's fall from mainstream popularity happened for a number of reasons. The rising popularity of other music genres, such as pop and heavy metal, in the eighties pushed many of the more Americana-focused genres to the wayside in favor of the more flashy music genres. This shift in music followed a larger cultural shift among younger citizens in the United States, pushing more toward non-traditional cultural practices than had been seen prior to the eighties. Trends and styles seemed to be flashier and more noticeable than those in the seventies. The glam-rock movement is a prime example of this. Being a long-haired hippie wasn't enough anymore, but having long, poofy hair combined with skin-tight leather clothes and a face full of makeup as a male rocker certainly made a much bigger statement.[156] Much of this had to do with changes in what was normal. By the end of the seventies, what had been ostracized as "hippie culture" had become normalized in the United States thanks to southern rock and other popular genres. This meant that more drastic "extremes" needed to be made if one wanted to make a

[156] "I Wanna Rock: The 80's Metal Dream" (Paramount Plus, 2023), accessed December 2023, https://www.paramountplus.com/shows/i-wanna-rock-the-80s-metal-dream/.

statement stylistically or culturally. While many music genres changed alongside this shift, genres such as southern rock and blues did not, in a sense, staying true to form.

While cultural shifts in the United States certainly explain large-scale changes, it still does not explain why a southern music genre lost popularity in the South. There are many arguments centering on why southern rock lost its popularity that coincide with big events and shifts worth exploring. Band breakups decreased popularity in progressivism in the South, and the tragic loss of southern rock icons all impacted the genre's popularity and influence after the 1970s. While separately, these are relatively normal things to happen within a music genre, it was the rapid succession in which different events happened that caused a drastic shift for the genre.

The decision of the Allman Brothers Band to disband had a drastic effect on the genre. As the founders of the southern rock movement with a profound cultural impact in the South, the band's decision to break up left many young southerners without their perceived leaders. Mark Kemp states that the breakup of the Allman Brothers led him to seek out other genres of music to latch onto as a young progressive; leading him away from the South.[157] This was certainly the case with many young southern progressives, who began to feel disenchanted with the region again. The situation surrounding the Allman Brothers Band's breakup deepened the damage of the band's end. To save himself, and as discovered later the rest of the band, Greg testified against the band's drug dealer for a reduced charge.[158] At the time, Greg was seen as a traitor by the rest of the band and their fans, who wanted nothing to do with him after the trial, being a major factor in the band's disbandment.[159] Southern progressives also saw this as a betrayal of their culture, Greg being perceived as a "narc" by many. This resulted in a mass falloff of

[157] Kemp,120-122.
[158] Paul, 276-283.
[159] Kemp,121.

southern rock fans, as there was a sense that trust and good faith has been destroyed with the group's breakup.

On October 20th, 1977, reports came in that the plane transporting Lynyrd Skynyrd had crashed somewhere in Mississippi. At the time, the reports were just rumors, but later were confirmed alongside reports of the deaths of many on the plane; notably Ronnie Van Zant, Steve and Cassie Gaines, alongside members of the road and plane crew. Charlie Daniels recalls that he heard the news right before he and his band went on stage to a sold-out crowd in Saint Louis.[160] Daniels decided not to break the news to the audience owing to uncertainty surrounding who had lived or died in the crash.[161] However, later concerts, such as the Volunteer Jam, were centered on Lynyrd Skynyrd dedications with appearances by the surviving members.[162]The Charlie Daniels Band was not the only group to do this. Many of the Southern Rock bands still operating dedicated their concerts to Lynyrd Skynyrd and were deeply affected by the loss of their friends, and the uncertainty around the health of the survivors.

It was not just the rockers who were affected, but the fans as well. Ronnie Van Zant specifically was a beloved figure by many and was looked upon as a leader in a similar manner to Duane Allman. The loss of someone who was seen as such, especially at a relatively young age, was impactful. At the time, there was a feeling that Lynyrd Skynyrd died with Van Zant, the majority of the fans feeling that there was no way the band could continue without its leader and voice. Their insistence was that nobody could replace Van Zant or, in good conscience, recreate the band after such a tragedy. Further, many saw the plane crash as the death of the southern rock genre. With the Allman Brothers Band already broken up, the loss of the other main southern rock band signified that the genre was all but finished. While groups such as the Marshall Tucker

[160] Daniels, 123-124.
[161] Daniels, 124.
[162] Daniels, 125.

Band, Wet Willie, and the Charlie Daniels Band were still together, they did not reach the same level of popularity and influence that the Allman Brothers and Lynyrd Skynyrd had.

The perceived failures of Carter's presidency left many southerners disgruntled with the progressive movement in the region. Since the genre had close ties with Carter and the southern progressive movement as a whole, this negatively impacted the genre's popularity and arguably was central in the genre's perceived shift to southern conservatism.[163] In fairness, Carter cannot be blamed for southern rock's loss of popularity among progressives in the South. The aftermath of the Allman Brothers Band's breakup and the Lynyrd Skynyrd plane crash already symbolized a major shift away from the genre with the loss of its two most popular groups. The negativity surrounding Carter's presidency simply confirmed perceptions that the southern progressive movement was not going to be a mainstay in the region. That is not to say that it would go away, but the level of influence that southern progressives seemingly had in the 1970s would not persist after Carter left office. Further, Reagan's rise paralleled the resurgence of conservatism on a national scale, in many ways symbolizing a political shift to the right across the board.

Throughout the eighties, it seemed like southern rock had faded into obscurity. That is not to say that southern rock was dead, but the genre was getting little to no attention when it came to mainstream music magazines. ZZ Top was an exception to the rule, but much of their popularity came alongside a drastic change in the band's sound. After a brief hiatus in the later part of the seventies, the band returned with a different sound. Their 1981 album, El Loco, saw the band using synthesizers and drum machines, which was swiftly becoming popular in newer music being released.[164] The band's use of these as a part of their sound was solidified in their

[163] Jason T. Eastman, *The Southern Rock Revival: The Old South in a New World* (Ridge Summit, Pennsylvania: Lexington Books, 2020), 4.
[164] ZZ Top, *El Loco* (Warner Bros., 1981).

album *Eliminator,* which arguably became their most popular due to hits such as *Sharp Dressed Man* and *Give Me All Your Lovin'.*[165]

Despite their sound change, ZZ Top still stuck to their blues and country-fueled, southern rock roots, making their fame in the eighties worthy of note. Though many articles categorize the band as boogie-rock, their sound, combined with their southern identity sets them snuggly in the southern rock genre, especially given their involvement in the genre throughout the seventies.[166] It was not just the music's sound that deserves focus, but the ZZ Top's look as well. Billy Gibbons and Dusty Hill had very long beards, while Frank Beard had a mullet. The band continued to wear popular southern and western clothing but combined it with popular eighties clothing trends. *Creem Magazine* outlines this combination with their photoshoots of the band, notably their 1985 Rock-Shots photo.[167] In the photo, the band mixes boots and cowboy hats with colorful leopard print shirts, showcasing an eighties-themed southern dress.[168]

ZZ Top's combination of southern music and cultural trends with that of the eighties had an impact on southern identity. There was a sense that the South could hold on to trends that were unique to southern culture while also enjoying the new styles and music that was being released in the eighties. It is interesting that ZZ Top's popularity seemed to come when their music began to sound less southern, and their dress was more reflective of eighties trends than southern ones. In many ways, this is reflective of the cultural shift among young southerners. The eighties saw many young southerners looking to outside influences for direction, many feeling that their idols in the South had failed them. Though ZZ Top was from the South, they

[165] ZZ Top, *Eliminator* (Warner Bros., 1982).
[166] "ZZ Top: Texas Beardo," *Creem Magazine*, 1985, Creem Archive.
[167] "Texas Beardo."
[168] "Texas Beardo."

very much had an eighties sound and look to them that made their music more approachable to young southerners.

The nineties witnessed a steady rise in southern rock's popularity. New bands, such as The Black Crowes, Gov't Mule, and Widespread Panic became popular acts on the rock scene. The Allman Brothers Band reformed with a fresh lineup, gaining a level of popularity that was almost on par with the seventy's iteration. Alongside the Allman Brothers, Lynyrd Skynyrd made the decision to reform in the aftermath of the plane crash, with Ronnie's younger brother Johnny Van Zant on vocals, and Ricky Medlocke from Blackfoot replacing Steve Gaines on guitar. The new iteration of the band formed in the eighties, but their first album under the new iteration came out in 1995.[169] Though there's no doubt that these bands fall into the southern rock genre, they were not marketed as such. Apart from the Allman Brothers and Lynyrd Skynyrd, who helped bring the genre to popularity, the newer bands were categorized under the hard rock umbrella. That is not to discount their status as southern rock bands, but there wasn't as much of a push to use the title as a music classification as there had been in the 1970s.

Much of southern rock's resurgence is thanks to the popularity of jam bands in the 1990s. Alongside the rise of grunge and alternative rock, jam bands rose to prominence under the alt rock umbrella, groups such as Dave Matthews Band and Phish becoming prominent among young listeners. The formula between southern rock and jam bands was similar, and the two genres appealed to similar audiences. In fact, there is a strong argument that some southern rock bands could arguably be classified as jam bands because of the similarities. A good example is the Allman Brothers Band, who played many shows with the Grateful Dead and became popular among their listeners.[170] With this in mind, it is not a far jump to assume that the popularity of

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[169] *Lynyrd Skynyrd, The Last Rebel (Atlantic Recording, 1993).*
[170] Paul, 85-102.

newer jam bands in the 1990s helped elevate the music of new southern rock bands, being similar sound-wise, yet different enough to be fresh among jam band music fans.

It is interesting to compare southern rock in the nineties with its origins in the seventies, mainly due to the similarities in the nation's culture. Like the seventies, the 1990s was a time in which racial tensions had become high again, mainly due to a negative relationship between African Americans and police in major cities, such as LA where the gangsta rap movement began.[171] The nineties also witnessed an elevated focus on black music, specifically rap and hip-hop. Like hard rock's rise and prominence in the 1970s, grunge brought a renewed interest in rock music and all its subgenres. While most of the topics mentioned above did not have a substantial effect on the resurgence of southern rock, it does outline a pattern for the genre, seeming to thrive in times when there is a focus on multiculturalism and progressive ideologies on topics such as race.

What made southern rock music prominent in the 1990s is the number of new artists and new sounds that emerged with the genre. Most of the new artists were very young throughout the 1970s, having a later introduction to the music than when they first released. Rather than saying that the newer artists were a part of the southern rock movement as it was traditionally perceived, it would be more accurate to claim that the new groups were influenced by their predecessors rather than active participants. Evidence of this is how different Southern rock sounded in the 1990s.

While pinpointing the sound was somewhat elusive in the 1970s, it was more ambiguous in the nineties, with the music leaning heavier on the multi-genre aspect than the previous bands. The blues, hard rock, and southern rock blended sound of the Black Crowes, evidenced in their song *Twice As Hard,* was much different than the jam band- southern rock blend of Widespread

[171] NWA, "Fuck Tha Police" (California: Audio Achievements, 1988).

Panic, heard in their song *Ain't Life Grand.* [172] Other groups, such as The Derek Trucks Band, kept a more traditional southern rock sound. Derek Trucks, the nephew of Allman Brothers Band drummer Butch Trucks, grew up around the band. Derek Trucks, who fronted his own group in the nineties, joined the Allman Brothers Band in 1999 and toured with the group until their retirement in 2014. Another group that stuck to the traditional sound of southern rock was Gov't Mule. The group, led by Warren Haynes and Allan Woody, started as a side project of the Allman Brothers Band, which both were a part of.[173] Though they initially operated when the Allman Brothers were on a break, Haynes and Woody eventually left the Allman Brothers Band to devote their full attention to Gov't Mule. The group would become southern rock icons, in many ways continuing the legacy of the Allman Brothers Band through their sound and reverence for their predecessors.

Warren Haynes' experience is one that is worth noting. Haynes, who was nine years old when the first Allman Brothers record came out, claims he was a fan of their music "all his life."[174] Though Haynes was not old enough to experience firsthand the band's rise and significant events for the group, his love of the band signifies an important aspect of the genre as a cultural movement. Haynes and those of his generation signify the importance of southern rock in the South. It was not just a phase in music that would fade with the change of time, but something that would persist because of its close link with southern politics. Gov't Mule's albums, particularly *Revolution Come..Revolution Go,* outline that southern rock and progressivism would remain closely tied for many, despite outside perceptions or outliers in the genre.

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[172] The Black Crowes, *Twice As Hard* (Def American, 1990), Widespread Panic, *Aint Life Grand* (Capricorn Records, 1994).
[173] Garret Woodward, "Warren Haynes Shares How He Joined The Allman Brothers Band," *Jam Buzz* (blog), n.d.,accessed March 2024, https://jam.buzz/extra/how-warren-haynes-joined-allman-brothers-band/.
[174] Woodward, *"Warren Haynes Shares How He Joined The Allman Brothers Band."*

Southern rock in the nineties did not produce major cultural waves in the South as it did in the 1970s. However, that does not mean that there was not an impact at all, in fact the opposite is true. In many ways, the southern rock bands that emerged in the 1990s outline that there was still much love for the genre and its culture despite its existence in the background during the eighties. Greg Allman and Dickey Betts dictate that their decision to step away from the music scene in the 1980s was largely due to the perception that they did not have a place in the changing cultural and music landscape.[175] However, the reverence for the southern rock sound by the generation following the genre's primary audience proves that the ideologies and culture of the genre were still very much alive and revered by both southerners and those outside the region. If that was not the case, then southern rock groups such as the Black Crowes, Widespread Panic, and Gov't Mule would not have reached the level of popularity they had.

The early 2000s saw southern rock become more prominent on the music scene. While most of the southern rock groups of the nineties maintained their popularity in the 2000s, the new decade also saw the emergence of many more new bands that would become popular in the South and the rest of the world. However, the rise of the genre was not as organized an effort as it had been in the 1970s. The music of the 2000s sat in a weird position in the business, being multi-genre oriented more than its predecessors, but still boxed into singular genre categories. For southern rock, this meant being categorized as rock, country, or blues but never multiple, arguably affecting the popularity of southern rock acts as they do not completely fit the mold of any singular genre. This is not specific to southern rock, but other multigenre acts, which often get pushed into the alternative umbrella due to uncertainties of where to place them.

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[175] Martin Kielty, "How The Allman Brothers Returned With Warren Haynes' Help," *Ultimate Classic Rock* (blog), 2020, accessed March 2024, https://ultimateclassicrock.com/warren-haynes-allman-brothers-band/.

Southern rock's rise in the 2000s came alongside some hurdles the genre had to overcome. Like its rise in the 1970s, the genre was perceived as music for the conservative South, the political right being perceived as the most prominent ideology in the region. To be fair, much of this had to do with the prominence of conservative-based southern rock acts. The late nineties and 2000s was the time in which Lynyrd Skynyrd's music became more politically charged and conservative based. Further, perceptions of newer music acts from the South, often perceived as southern rock, also damaged perceptions of the genre. One of particular importance is Kid Rock, a southern conservative often pushed into the southern rock category by many unfamiliar with the genre. Negative perceptions of the presidencies of George W. Bush and Bill Clinton, both southerners, also extended to the South as a whole. Perceptions of the South as intellectually inferior and backwater began to reemerge, providing a significant hurdle for southern music to overcome if it was to be taken seriously.

When discussing southern rock of the 2000s, there are two groups that made significant contributions to the genre, and were arguably central to its resurgence, The Drive-by Truckers and Blackberry Smoke. While they certainly were not the only southern rock groups to make waves, the two groups were significant due to their widespread popularity and their challenge to common perceptions of southern rock and the South as a whole. While Blackberry Smoke pushed against the southern stereotypes as musicians, Drive-by Truckers used their music to address problems in southern culture and negative perceptions of the South and attacked problematic components of conservatism.

Though they initially emerged in the late nineties, it was not until the 2000s that the Drive-by Truckers would gain popularity as a music act. In many ways, their early music set the stage for the politically charged band that would emerge in the 2000s. Their first two albums are

largely satirical, written from the perspective of a "trailer trash" southerner to make fun of the stereotypes given to the region. The songs *Buttholeville* and *Bulldozers and Dirt* outline the satirical nature of the two albums perfectly, both creating a narrative that is perceived to be common in the backwater mythology of the South.[176]The art on their first album *Gangstability* solidifies the intent of the music, showing a caricature of a "white trash" couple on the hood of an older vehicle.[177]

The 2000s brought significant changes in the band, notably to the style and the overall topics of the music. The release of *Southern Rock Opera* in 2001 came along with a sound change, the band leaning heavier into the rock side rather than the more country sound of their previous albums.[178] The overall tone of the album also seems to be more serious. That is not to say that the humor of the Truckers' previous albums is not there, instead it is not central to the construction of the album. *Southern Rock Opera* seems to take its job as a musical narrative much more seriously, marking a significant change in the band's approach to the music and songwriting.

Southern Rock Opera, and the two albums that followed are not just prominent as the band's most memorable works. More importantly, the albums had a profound impact on southern culture and perceptions of the South. The albums shape a narrative of the South that both confirms and pushes back against stereotypes of the region through the story-centric makeup of the albums. The three albums are widely viewed as parts of a singular narrative in which the Truckers share their discontent of their native region while also critiquing the unfairness of negative perceptions of the region. However, *Southern Rock Opera* is of particular interest as it

[176] Drive-By Truckers*, Buttholeville* (Soul Dump, 1998), *Bulldozers and Dirt* (Soul Dump, 1999).
[177] Drive-by Truckers, *Gangstabilly, (Soul Dump, 1998).*
[178] Drive-by Truckers, *Southern Rock Opera (Soul Dump, 2001).*

centers on the story of Lynyrd Skynyrd and notable southern figures such as George Wallace and Paul "Bear" Bryant.[179]

Southern Rock Opera acts as the band's first outing as a political band. Songs such as *Wallace* outline the group's disdain of racism in the South, specifically regarding George Wallace's pandering to voters by being pro-segregation and later flipping to anti-segregation policies.[180] The song *Ronnie and Neil* further discussed the issue of racism in the South, voicing their disdain for racial violence against African Americans through the song's discussion of the 16th Street church bombing.[181] The song continues by discussing the perceived feud between Ronnie Van Zant and Neil Young; the Truckers dictating that the story regarding the two and the song *Sweet Home Alabama* are negatively misconstrued.[182]

What makes the Drive-by Truckers valuable as a cultural and political entity is their honest discussions of the region. The group outlines that one can be both critical of southern culture while also praising the positive aspects of the region's cultural identity: "Our whole approach to it–the way we've always written about political things–is to write about a personal thing, where one of us is playing a character, somebody we know or somebody we made up and put them in a situation to tell their story. One of the problems we have as people in this country is this lack of empathy toward other people's points of view and life situations–what puts them in the position they're in and what makes them have the beliefs they do."[183]

Stephen Deusner, author of *Where The Devil Don't Stay,* dictates that it is common for Patterson Hood, the leader of the band, to berate audience members for waving Confederate flags

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[179] Stephen Deusner, *Where The Devil Don't Stay: Traveling The South With The Drive-By Truckers* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2021), 9.
[180] Drive-By Truckers, *Wallace* (Soul Dump, 2001).
[181] Drive-By Truckers, *Ronnie and Neil* (Soul Dump, 2001).
[182] Drive-By Truckers, *Ronnie and Neil.*
[183] Deusner, 6.

or similar memorabilia at their concerts.[184] The band does not hold punches on their ideologies, going out of their way to ensure they do not get boxed into the negative stereotypes surrounding southern rock. Deusner notes that his first introduction to the band challenged his perspectives of southern rock, dictating that it was not the Confederate flag-waving, beer-drinking bro music that his high school bullies would listen to.[185] Instead, it was a new flavor of southern rock that Deusner, along with other disenfranchised southerners, enjoyed and related to.[186] The topics of the songs centered on issues many southerners related with because of their complicated relationship with the South. The Truckers would take things further later in their career by tackling national issues, notably done on their album *American Band.*[187]

When Blackberry Smoke debuted in 2003, they were seen as a bit of a conundrum. Lead singer Charlie Starr dictates that their music confused many because of how hard they lean into the rock aspect of their sound, despite their stated love of country music.[188] With this confusion came uncertainties as to where to place the band genre-wise, their albums often charting in both the country and rock genres. The band labels themselves as a rock band from Georgia, in many ways mimicking Lynyrd Skynyrd who viewed themselves in a similar manner during the 1970s. Blackberry Smoke is one of the groups that pushed southern rock back into the limelight in the late 2000s and 2010s. The band is perceived by their compatriots as one of the primary torchbearers of the new wave of southern rock, Jaren Johnston of the Cadillac Three, dictating that they are carrying on what the Allman Brothers and Lynyrd Skynyrd started.[189]

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[184] Deusner, 12.
[185] Deusner, 14.
[186] Deusner, 14.
[187] Drive-By Truckers, *American Band* (ATO Records, 2016).
[188] Jospeh Hudak, "How Blackberry Smoke Revived Southern Rock With New Album," *Rolling Stone Magazine*, 2016.
[189] Hudak, *How Blackberry Smoke Revived Southern Rock.*

Blackberry Smoke did not stand alone as a popular southern rock band. The 2010s and 2020s have been witnessing a plethora of southern rock and southern rock influenced bands that receive a significant amount of attention. Much of this has to do with the formation of the Americana genre category. While Americana has been used in the music industry for decades, the name was repurposed in the last twenty years as a genre for music that doesn't fit in the rock, blues, or country category. It is a category, similar to 1970s southern rock, in which multigenre music can thrive and get its due respect. To best understand, one could consider the Americana genre as "southern alternative" due to its basis in country, rock, and blues with a splash of others mixed in. The term roots or roots-rock is a term that has recently become popular to define a subgenre of Americana.

The development of the Americana genre is just one of many new genre creations in the past twenty years. Developments for music, such as Spotify and Apple Music, have made music a more niche-driven experience, giving listeners easier access to artists or bands that may not get significant radio and media attention. These developments also play into southern rock's resurgence, attracting southerners and non southerners to bands that would be classified as southern rock. Though southern rock is not typically used to classify modern groups, the genre is flourishing regardless of official titles. In a sense, the lack of use has been helpful for southern rock bands. Despite the progressive nature of modern groups, southern rock still leaves a bad taste in the mouths of those unfamiliar with the genre's makeup. The genre is still seen as a flavor rock for the Confederate sympathizing southern conservative, thanks in no small part to Lynyrd Skynyrd and southern rock-sounding acts like Kid Rock. The use of Americana or roots instead of southern rock does not damage the impact of the music of new wave southern rock. Americana and roots are based around a focus on American originated music genres, the

majority of which originated in the South. The popularity of Americana and roots rock over the past twenty years shows that southern-based music is not only still significant but flourishing on a large scale.

Two bands worth noting are Tedeschi Trucks Band and Alabama Shakes. Both groups debuted around the same time, TTB's first album *Revelator* releasing in 2011 just a year before Alabama Shakes' *Boys and Girls*. Like Blackberry Smoke, both groups are widely viewed as torchbearers for the new wave of southern rock, arguably reviving the genre's popularity. The bands turned perceptions of southern rock and the South on its head, being the complete opposite of what many had come to expect from a southern rock band.

Derek Trucks and Susan Tedeschi, the husband-and-wife leaders of Tedeschi Trucks Band, were already fairly well known on the music scene. Derek Trucks, viewed as a guitar prodigy, played with the Allman Brothers Band until the group retired in 2014. Susan Tedeschi made a name for herself in the blues genre, being one of the many musicians to popularize the genre alongside the likes of Kenny Wayne Shepherd and Joe Bonamassa. Widely viewed as the immediate heirs to the Allman Brothers Band's legacy, Tedeschi Trucks Band was significant in drawing in new fans to the southern rock sound while also promoting many progressive ideals in the South.[190] Similar to the Allman Brothers, the Tedeschi Trucks Band is a racially integrated group, its members often taking center stage during their live performances to sing and assisted with songwriting duties on the albums. The group did not view themselves as just a band, but as a family, similar to the brotherhood dynamic of the Allman Brothers. Tedeschi Trucks Band are also politically progressive, openly supporting President Obama during both of his elections and playing at one of his many White House concerts.

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[190] Will Hermes, "Let Me Get By: Heirs Apparent of the Southern Jam Crown Step Up," *Rolling Stone Magazine*, 2016.

Alabama Shakes is prominent to both southern rock and southern identity in several ways. One major point is that they were fronted by Brittany Howard, a black singer. Howard's position as the frontman and primary songwriter for the band is a first for the genre, being one of the first female lead singers of a southern rock group alongside Susan Tedeschi. Though the band did not make a big deal of this, it is nonetheless noteworthy given the group's popularity during their two-album tenure. The group's sound was also noteworthy, marking a deviation from the traditional southern rock sound to incorporate more elements of funk and soul. Like Tedeschi Trucks Band, Alabama Shakes did not hide their progressive views; their music often critiqued conservative ideology. The group was noteworthy in their support of LGBTQ rights, speaking out against legislation that affected the well-being of those in the community.[191]

Like their predecessors, new southern rock bands have had an impact on southern identity, specifically centered on southern progressivism. Most of the groups are racially integrated, challenging common perspectives of what southern rock stands for. Further, there seems to be a bolder approach to addressing cultural and societal issues by the musicians. While southern rock artists of the 1970s seemed to be more ambiguous when discussing their views on politics, many of the new southern rock groups are not afraid to speak out and share their stances. Brittany Howard, lead singer of Alabama Shakes, recently embarked on a solo career starting with her album *Jaime.* Many of the album's songs challenge traditionalist views in the South and speak out against the political right movement in the United States.[192] The southern rock group, Cadillac Three donated all their merchandise sales to the NAACP in 2020, stating

[191] Sarah Grant, "Alabama Shakes On N. Carolina 'Bathroom Bill':' It Was Wrong'," *Rolling Stone Magazine*, 2016.
[192] Brittany Howard, *He Loves Me* (ATO Records, 2019).

that the group would use its voice to help fight racial inequality and police brutality in the United States. [193]

The rise in the prominence of southern rock music once again comes during a rise of progressivism in the South. Though the prominence of progressive ideologies was nationwide, it is important to note the changes in the South with Obama's presidential election. Like Carter, Obama was an open fan of music, having a close friendship with many notable musicians such as Bruce Springsteen. Obama also took a page out of Carter's book by regularly hosting concerts at the White House to celebrate different cultures, genres, and iconic artists. Though Obama only won North Carolina, Virginia, and Florida, he was fairly close to winning other southern states, outlining the rising significance of progressive politics in the South.[194] Coupled with Biden's successful win in Georgia during the 2020 election, it is evident that progressivism in the South has become a substantial force in a majority of the region.[195]

While much of Obama's prominence surrounded his status as the first black president, he did much for progressivism in the South. His rise to the presidency and recognition that there was still progress to be made had a significant impact on me and other young progressives in the South. Being a young progressive during Obama's presidency, my friends and I felt more emboldened to support Obama because of his love of southern-centric music alongside his ideologies. In a way, it was a recognition that not all aspects of the South were negative, there being some positives to our perceptions of the region as a problematic area. Obama's critique of Confederate symbolism, notably his statement that the flag should be taken down and placed in a

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[193] Jon Freeman, "A Southern Rock Band Is Pledging Merch Sale Profits to the NAACP," *Rolling Stone Magazine*, 2020.
[194] "2008 Presidential Election," *The American Presidency Project* (blog), n.d., accessed March 2024, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/elections/2008.
[195] "2020 Presidential Election," *American Presidency Project* (blog), n.d., accessed March 2024, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/elections/2020.

museum, gave many young progressives in the South the courage to speak against the cultural norms of the region.[196]

The prominence of southern rock, and later Americana, after the 1970s was influential to southern identity. The gradual resurgence of the genre from the 1980s to the present was coupled with a gradual rise in progressivism in the South. While the genre's impact was minimal in the 1980s and 1990s, it was in the last twenty years that the genre has had more of an impact on southern culture. The new wave of southern rock is different from its predecessors in several ways. The artists produce more diverse sounds and are more outwardly political than the majority of the artists in past decades. Groups such as the Drive-by Truckers, Alabama Shakes, and the Cadillac Three openly opposed problematic ideologies both in the US and the South, being major voices for southern progressivism both within and outside the region.

With the emergence of the Americana genre, there have been a number of successful southern rock acts within the past fifteen years. Notable acts include Marcus King, Willie Nelson's son Lukas Nelson, North Mississippi Allstars, Sam Morrow, and Larkin Poe. Duane Betts and Devon Allman, sons of Dickey Betts and Greg Allman formed a new iteration of their fathers' band, giving it the name the Allman Betts Band. Initially created to celebrate the legacy of their parents, the Allman Betts Band has gone on to release original music and spurred both Allman and Betts into prominent solo careers. Though the majority of the groups work under the roots/Americana genre, the bands do not hide their southern rock influences and sound, proving that the genre has had a lasting, multigenerational impact both musically and culturally.

[196] Jordan Fabian, "Obama Thinks Confederate Flag 'Belongs in a Museum,'" *The Hill* (blog), n.d., accessed March 2024, https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/245579-obama-thinks-confederate-flag-belongs-in-a-museum/.

CONCLUSION

The music of the southern rock movement in the 1970s undoubtedly had an impact on southern identity. However, the impact the genre had proves to be a mixed bag of results that is further complicated by negative perceptions of the genre due to its more problematic elements. Looking at the South through the lens of the music also shows that the South itself was, and continues to be, just as complicated as the music that came from the region. When looking at the music in the context of the 1970s South, it proves that negative perceptions of the region and its people were often created unfairly, creating generalizations about the entirety of the South and white southerners that did not fit a significant portion of the region. While the views of the South as backwater, racist, and ignorant are justifiable given the region's checkered history with slavery and Jim Crow, it completely overlooks the number of southerners who pushed back against these problematic elements within the region through their musical, political, and societal influence.

This perception of the South as a complicated region is an important one, as it shows that resistance to desegregation and racial integration in the 1970s was not supported by every white southerner. Nor were the racial issues strictly a southern issue. Other parts of the United States, notably Boston and New York, experienced much resistance to the desegregation of schools, buses, and other public facilities. While the racism was more subtle and lowkey in other parts of the nation, it was in the South where racism was more belligerent and central to regional issues, thanks in no small part to the fame of segregationist politicians such as George Wallace, and where much of the Civil Rights Movement took place. All of the factors gave a negative perception of the region by others in the United States, giving the nation a "bad guy" to place blame on regarding the widespread racial issues in the country.

The election of Jimmy Carter as Georgia Governor and later President of the United States, proves that the stereotypes of the South in the 1970s were largely false. The counterculture movement in the region, led in large part by the southern rock bands outline the significance of southern progressivism in the region, and the desire by many to push the South in a more positive direction. While the genre's music was typically not overtly political in the seventies, the artists did not hide their opinions surrounding topics of race and class. The Allman Brothers Band, whose members included black musicians Jaimoe and Lamar Williams, repeatedly voiced their distaste of racism and hammered in that their band was a big family that they would defend no matter the consequences. Their close relationship with Jimmy Carter, and the popularity of the two, symbolized that there was an active effort in the region to push for less divisive ideologies and practices.

The genre also had a significant impact on perceptions of the southern working class. Alongside minorities and southern hippies, the South's working class was often ostracized by both southerners and nonsoutherners as being made up of intellectually inferior and unruly people. For nonsoutherners, there did not seem to be a difference between the southern working class and the rest of the region, often using the negative perceptions of the working-class southerner as a caricature for the entirety of the South. Southern rock's musicians often came from working class backgrounds and made efforts to dismantle negative stereotypes of the working class and bring awareness to the classism that was still a major issue in the South. Lynyrd Skynyrd was a notable contributor to this movement, whose leader singer Ronnie Van Zant was a known populist and pro-working-class southerner.

Much of southern rock's music appealed to the southern working class for a variety of reasons. The artists being from working class backgrounds was reflected in their music, drawing

many working-class southerners to the groups since they understood the subtle inferences and meanings behind the songs. Similar to southern hippies, the working-class southerners felt heard and understood, creating a more spiritual connection to the music that went beyond simple fandom. The genre's growing popularity in the South also meant a growing awareness of the region's working-class culture, which increasingly became more synonymous with southern male identity as time progressed. Fast forward to the present, and the southern working-class man is often mythologized, and the unruly and belligerent perception of the working class has become an aspect to be praised in the eyes of many southerners.

While southern rock significantly impacted southern identity in a number of positive ways, many of the genre's negative aspects often overshadow the progress the genre helped push in the region. Most notably is the use of Confederate imagery by notable southern rock groups such as Lynyrd Skynyrd and Charlie Daniels. Skynyrd used the Confederate flag as part of its marketing as a southern rock and roll band. Though members of the band later claimed that the flag had a different meaning in the seventies, evidence derived from interviews and magazine articles of the time prove that the band's use of the flag was seen as problematic and directly contradicted many of Van Zant's progressive views on race. Daniels' song *The South's Gonna Do It* uses a large number of Confederate imagery in the song, calling southerners to be a rebel and inferring that the South is "gonna do it again." The question "do what again?" often pops up when discussing the song.

Later iterations of southern rock have done much to dismantle many of the progressive ideologies that the band worked to push into the South and southern identity. The current iteration of Skynyrd, comprised of no original members, is widely viewed as a pro-conservative band and the posterchild to what many think southern rock is comprised of; a flavor of rock

catered to the southern conservative. Other southern rock inspired groups, such as Kid Rock, help push the rhetoric further, seemingly making the genre something that is contradictory to its original designs. However, that does not mean that southern rock does not continue to have positive impacts on southern identity. Progressive southern rock bands often do not use the southern rock classification as a descriptor, working more in the americana and roots-rock category. Regardless they still hold a place in the genre's current makeup and have had a significant impact on southern progressive identity, despite progressivism still being overshadowed by southern conservatism. Many of the more progressive southern rock bands, such as Drive-by Truckers and Alabama Shakes, are more outwardly political in their music and interviews, explicitly speaking out against the use of confederate imagery and divisive legislations affecting minorities and those in the LGBTQ+ community.

Studying southern rock's impact on southern identity in the 1970s is important because of the striking similarities in issues within the modern South with the South of the 1970s. Southern progressivism has been on a steady rise in the region since the election of President Obama, despite renewed perceptions of the region as backwater and ignorant. In many ways, there seems to be a new southern counterculture movement on the rise in the region, with many southern musicians putting themselves in the center of calls for more progressive legislation in the region. With this has come a renewed interest in southern music, thanks to the creation of the modern Americana genre in the 2010s and its growing popularity in the present. While someone's enjoyment of an artist's music does not equate to their support of their ideologies, it does infer that the progressive ideologies that many of the musicians hold are being shared to a wider audience throughout the region. While some would argue that the southern progressive movement of the modern age might be just a short-term phase, this paper, through the lens of the

music, outlines that the southern progressive movement is in fact one that has a long history in the South, with southern rock seemingly a conduit between ideology and identity.

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