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1970's American Southern Rock was a musical phenomenon as unique, diverse, and dynamic as the politically and racially tumultuous region from which it hailed. This region has been portrayed in popular culture via a male stereotype that almost seventy years ago Southern ethnographer W.J. Cash dubbed the "hell of a fellow [hell uva fella]." Even in the post-bellum South of the late Civil Rights Era, the values of the ruggedly individualistic frontiersman survived and developed into a unique concept of regional masculinity. The Southern man portrayed in 1970's Southern Rock is a unique, regionalized aggregate of the American South's cultural heritage, its dynamic values in the 1970s, and the incorporation of characteristics found in Cash's decades older hell uva fella tradition, all of which embody an individualism that is both personally and politically self-destructive.

1970's SOUTHERN ROCK AND W.J. CASH'S

HELL UVA FELLA

by

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## CHAPTER I

### BACKGROUND

1970's American Southern Rock was a musical phenomenon as unique, diverse and dynamic as the politically and racially tumultuous region from which it hailed. This region has been portrayed in popular culture via a male stereotype that almost seventy years ago Southern ethnographer W.J. Cash dubbed the "hell of a fellow [hell uva fella]" (52). Even in the South of the late Civil Rights Era, the values of the ruggedly individualistic frontiersman survived and developed into a distinctive concept of regional masculinity (Butler). This hell uva fella who was still isolated from the modernity of the purportedly more civilized regions of the United States during the 1940s was

to stand on his head in a bar, to toss down a pint of raw whiskey at a gulp, to fiddle and dance all night, to bite off the nose or gouge out the eye of a favorite enemy, to fight harder and love harder than the next man, to be known eventually as a hell of a fellow—such would be his focus (Cash 52).

The evolution of the stereotype of Southern masculinity described by Cash and other cultural historians is exemplified best in the sub-genre of rock and roll unique to the South, that is, Southern Rock of the 1970s. However, the men melodiously mirrored in the music are as complex as the real men who sang about them. Not only are they hard-drinking, hard-fighting, hard-loving souls, they also are paradoxical in nature. They are men of simplicity, devoted to their Protestant faith (as Cash astutely observed), mother on rare occasion, and country to varying degrees and to locality more than region (58).

These Southern men still look back nostalgically on their rebel heritage but also rebel against that heritage, since rebellion in general is part of their nature. These men embrace, more often than not, the music of Southern Black culture, long hair, and the right to be a Southern hippie, one who drinks and fights for no better reason than to establish his masculinity.

In order to understand Southern Rock of the 1970s, it is necessary to take a brief tour through the evolution of rock and roll with special emphasis on its Southern roots and the socio-historical context in which it arose. Rock and roll, the dominant musical genre of the twentieth-century, was spawned in the African-American charismatic Christian churches of the Deep South. As early as the 1930s, the New Deal sponsored folklorist team John and Alan Lomax recorded upbeat music such as “Run Old Jeremiah” (Palmer 3) in black churches in rural Mississippi. Even while the Lomaxes were recording the songs and saving them for posterity, rock prototypes were already in abundance. The style was called “rocking and reeling” and probably originated in renegade Holiness or Sanctified Deep South African-American churches where the music was played using guitars, drums, and horns, as well as the more traditional piano or organ (Palmer 3). This “rocking and reeling” was rooted in the complex African-American spiritual tradition, a fusion of native African music, melodic lamentations inspired from centuries of slavery and oppression, and the Christianity that was originally forced upon immigrant slaves. Later, Christianity was embellished and transformed into a racially unique version of Protestantism, a synthesis of both African traditions and those of white churches.

In the commercial realm, protorock made some headway in the popular music scene long before it became a cultural phenomenon. For example, the Graves brothers, with their Mississippi Jook Band from Hattiesburg, recorded “rocking and reeling” spirituals as early as 1929 for Paramount Records (Palmer 3). In fact, seven years later, their recordings of “Barbeque Bust” and “Dangerous Woman” featured fully developed rock and roll guitar riffs and a thundering beat that is almost indistinguishable from rock music of the 1950s (Palmer 3).

With the onslaught of the Great Depression, which was particularly hard felt in the rural, agrarian South, the latter part of the Great Black Migration to the industrial cities of the North and upper Midwest took with it this emerging musical genre. In places like Chicago, Detroit, and New York, blues-playing immigrants such as Tampa Red and Big Bill Broonzy were transforming their rural style into jump bands (Palmer 4). This blues and jump music, through yet another complex process, would eventually fuse with elements of the folk music of the Scots-Irish settlers of the Appalachian region and its direct heir, country music. Over the course of the next decade, embryonic rock and roll would continue to synthesize the musical genres of spiritual, gospel, blues, folk and country, into the resulting genre of R&B. R&B morphed until in the early 1950s full blown rock and roll<sup>1</sup> burst onto the scene, taking the youth market of America by storm and shocking the older generations because of its raucous nature.

The 1950s saw rock and roll grow exponentially in popularity in American culture. According to *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock and Roll*, the first true

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<sup>1</sup> According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, “rock and roll” is a somewhat outdated African-American moniker for sex derived from an anonymous 1922 song “My Man Rocks Me” (“Rock”).

rock hit<sup>2</sup> of this seminal decade was 1951's "Rocket 88," performed by the Ike Turner Band and cut in Memphis at Sam Phillip's Recording Service (Palmer 11). This "first hit" was indebted to countless, nameless musicians and their innovations on existing styles, who originated from the South, or who had some ancestral ties to the region and its music. By the mid-1950s, rock and roll was the fastest growing genre of popular music, despite its negative association, in mainstream, suburban, white society, with black culture, teen rebellion, and promiscuity. Ironically, black artists in a segregated America dominated the nascent rock years from 1951-53. Their raucous music crossed racial boundaries, reaching both white and black youth cultures. The former groups' parents were affluent enough in this decade of post-war rampant consumerism to provide their teenage progeny with disposable cash to make rock of great interest to traditional record labels. The growth of rock occurred regardless of cries of possible anarchy by the more conservative elements of American society via spins by such legendary disc jockeys as Cleveland's Alan Freed and Memphis' Dewey Phillips (Palmer 11), and again to the chagrin of many adults, artists such as Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, Little Richard, and Ray Charles would be the mainstay of teenage basement parties, bringing elements of black, rural Southern culture into white, suburban, mainstream American society. By the mid to late 1950s, African-Americans were not the only ones making rock; white people were as well. Future rock legends<sup>3</sup> such as Jerry Lee Lewis, Bill Haley and the Comets,

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<sup>2</sup> On a note of trivia, "Rocket 88" was technically a R&B hit, since the rock genre did not yet officially exist.

<sup>3</sup> A sizeable portion of early successful white rock musicians were Southerners who grew up in close proximity to their black neighbors despite de jure segregation. Since most of them were poor, racial barriers were less restrictive and future legends such as Elvis Presley were admittedly strongly influenced by the music of their black neighbors.

Buddy Holly, and the immortal Elvis Presley blitzed onto the scene. These white rock idols owed their success not only to African-American musical predecessors, but to country music giants such as Hank Williams, Sr.,<sup>4</sup> and, generally neglected by the popular media, folk music influences such as Woody Guthrie (Maslin 219).

Over the next several years, rock and roll continued the dynamism of its early years by continually reinventing itself, largely through the influence of the first British Invasion with its vanguard, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. By the mid 1960s, rock had lost its proverbial innocence, if it ever was truly innocent, as an aurally voluminous expression of teen angst, non-conformity, and generational rebellion. Don McClean memorialized both the loss of the music's supposed innocence and two of its greatest singers, the Big Bopper and Buddy Holly, in "The Day the Music Died." Through the rising social conscience of the Baby Boom generation as it reached its collectively contemplative late-adolescent years, rock entered its own contemplative adolescence. It was transformed into the voice of a new generation that was socially aware and politically active against a world it did not make, but one that it was hell bent on reforming.

The popular memory of socio-political issues from the second half of the 1960s can be largely relegated to being little more than conventional wisdom and bland stereotype, but that memory is true and is integral in explaining the evolution of rock and roll up to the period and the sub-genre of concern, 1970's Southern Rock. It is a common, but utilitarian generalization that American collective memory memorializes the 1960s in

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<sup>4</sup> Similar to their indebtedness to the musical innovation and influence of African-Americans, early rock stars owed a great deal to country and Western musicians. In fact, many of them were crossovers from that genre, and sometimes their music is indistinguishable from more up tempo country music.

the United States as a time of peaceful, “flower powered,” near universal antiestablishment protest against the injustices of an autocratic American government, akin to Orwell’s Big Brother. The members of this flower-power generation felt that they were on a viable moral crusade battling a government chosen not by them, and one that promoted racial intolerance, social inequality, nuclear proliferation, and in some cases outright genocide; however, as quickly as its optimism for positive social change arose in its nascent years, its cohesion quickly collapsed and fragmented. The utopian daydreams embodied by the 1967 Summer of Love and its Monterey Pop Festival were but a recent memory by the decade’s end. With the expansion of the Vietnam conflict, the assassinations of the visionary leaders Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy, the failure of Johnson’s Great Society, the hostile distrust of the Nixon administration, and the failure of the Civil Rights Movement to make sweeping changes in racial attitudes, cohesive, peaceful, passive protest transmogrified into factional radicalism and violence. This was the stage in which Southern Rock would make its debut. It would prove to become a very popular sub-genre of rock, not only because of the raw sincerity of its music, its emphasis on fierce personal independence, and its rebellion against any status quo but partially because, as John Egerton noticed over thirty years ago, “The Union is meeting the South at the front door with overtures of welcome” and “regional distinction is giving way to homogenization” (xix-xx). Even so, the South, with its traditions of personal and regional independence, has not always returned the greeting to the Union so amicably, even in recent times and certainly not in Southern Rock.

## CHAPTER II

### THESIS

In 1969, with the breakout of the Macon, Georgia band the Allman Brothers, Southern Rock was unleashed, and it became a *tour de force*<sup>5</sup> throughout most of the 1970s (Brant 37). The Allman Brothers, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Molly Hatchet, the Outlaws, the Marshall Tucker Band, Blackfoot, the Charlie Daniels Band, and others would become household names and the mainstay of radio stations and concert venues across the United States during this decade. Many of these bands' biographies will be summarized in this paper as they, like their music, are paradoxical in nature. These biographies exemplify unique versions of the hell uva fella tradition with the tradition's implication that being such a person adds to the isolation of the individual and the South from the rest of America. It is paradoxical that Southern Rock music, so different in content from the antiestablishment music venerated on the national level, began becoming so successful at the zenith of the popularity of protest music. Though the music varies in content, style, and sheer volume, there is continuity to be found in its lyrical portrayal of Southern masculinity and its advocacy of isolation and independence on both personal and regional levels. Of the traditional characteristics of Southern manhood, Ted Ownby has identified four that are essential to Southern Rock:

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<sup>5</sup> The use of the phrase *tour de force* is an allusion to the title of a 1986 .38 Special album.

- Personal independence. Working for another to earn one's livelihood had for a long time been associated with the overly dependent position of slaves, women or weak men.
- Honor and to some extent chivalry. Men had to repeatedly prove themselves in public battle, sometimes in the defense of a woman.
- Racism. White Southern males had to show physical dominance over black men and sexual power over black women.
- Being a hell uva fella. (371)

The man of 1970's Southern Rock is both a Byronic antihero and a version of some of the more renowned characters from Southern literature such as the famous Faulknerian character Quentin Compson with his mixed and often conflicting emotions. But he is most accurately encapsulated by Cash's description as a hell uva fella. Cash's concept embodies the four tenets promulgated by Ownby. Admittedly, there are some unique 1970's twists on the hell uva fella derived from the socio-historical context from which the music sprang. This *ne plus ultra* of Southern manhood hails from the complex Southern dystopia of violence, alcoholism, lust, racism, and nostalgia, yet he is paradoxical in that he is sometimes aggressive and sometimes lachrymose. More importantly, he perpetuates Southern isolationism via personal independence. At no level can it be viably argued that Southern masculinity, at least in song, promotes reliance on others, social unity, or social change. Often the lyrics of Southern Rock describe an itinerant, hard, unconquerable bigot of a man who revels in drunken mayhem and burning lust. At other times, the lyrics describe a kinder, gentler soul defeated by life, brokenhearted and lachrymose, remorseful and sober. But despite the paradoxical differences, the commonality is that both sides promote isolationism on both the personal and regional levels. To simplify a complex scenario, the Southern man portrayed in

1970's Southern Rock is an unique, regionalized aggregate of the American South's cultural heritage, its dynamic values in the 1970s, and the incorporation of characteristics found in Cash's decades older hell uva a fella tradition, all of which relish an individualism that is both personally and politically self-destructive. Southern Rock, in some regards, is the younger South's way of fighting the war again, and with the same outcome.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE MUSICIANS, A SAMPLING

In 1971, the Allman Brothers Band was described by *Rolling Stone's* music critic George Kimball as “the best damn rock and roll band this country has produced in the past five years,” and in both their music and lives, they exemplified Cash’s hell uva fella tradition (“The Allman Brothers Band”). This pioneering band of Southern Rock was formed by the Macon, Georgia, brothers Duane and Gregg Allman. After going through various guises as a garage band, the Allman Brothers Band made its debut in Jacksonville, Florida, on March 26, 1969, and consisted of its leader Duane Allman (guitar), Gregg Allman (vocals and organ), Dickey Betts (guitar and vocals), Berry Oakley (bass guitar), Butch Trucks (drums), and Jai Johanny “Jaimoe” Johanson (drums). Their eponymously titled debut album was also released in 1969. It was a critical success but a commercial failure.<sup>6</sup>

The Allman Brother’s second album, 1970’s *Idlewild South*, was a massive critical and commercial success. The biggest hit from the album was “Midnight Rider,” which is still a mainstay of current 1970’s format rock stations. Nineteen seventy-one saw the release of their live album, *At Fillmore East*, recorded in mid-March of that year. It was also a success and highlighted the band’s adeptness at live performances byattaining gold status. Within a year, however, the first in a series of tragedies would beset the band. The band’s leader, Duane Allman, was killed in a motorcycle accident in

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<sup>6</sup> “The Allman Brothers Band” [www.allmanbrothersband.com](http://www.allmanbrothersband.com).

his hometown of Macon, Georgia.<sup>7</sup> Duane Allman's death alone and on a vehicle generally associated with uncompromising individuality literally initiates the isolated self- destruction of a hell uva fella.

Dickey Betts filled Allman's former role in the band, but he could never quite fill his shoes. The Allman Brothers, with a mutable membership via band breakups and regroupings, would continue to produce hits and pack concert venues throughout the 1970s and into the present time. As the decade progressed, the band continued to be plagued with problems. Berry Oakley was killed in 1972 in another motorcycle accident only three blocks away from Duane Allman's fatal crash, thus adding mystique to self- destruction. The band stayed in almost constant internal conflict causing breakups and membership changes, and Gregg Allman was indicted on federal drug trafficking charges.<sup>8</sup> Like the music they wrote and played, the members of the Allman Brothers band were a bunch of hell uva a fellas whose very lives were fraught with acts of self- destructive individualism such as Duane Allman's lone death on a motorcycle and the similar demise of Berry Oakley.

The next band to be considered, Lynyrd Skynyrd, is probably the most well- known of 1970's Southern Rock bands. It was formed at Robert E. Lee High School in Jacksonville, Florida, in the late 1960s, by classmates Ronnie Van Zant (singer), Gary Rossington (guitarist), Allen Collins (guitarist), Leon Wilkeson (bassist), and Bob Burns (drummer) under the name of "My Backyard." The band's subsequent name was derived from the high school's notorious gym teacher, Leonard Skinner, who hated longhaired students ("Lynyrd Skynyrd Band History").

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<sup>7</sup> "The Allman Brothers Band" [www.allmanbrothersband.com](http://www.allmanbrothersband.com).

<sup>8</sup> "The Allman Brothers Band" [www.allmanbrothersband.com](http://www.allmanbrothersband.com).

In 1968, Lynyrd Skynyrd recorded two singles, “Michelle” and “Need all My Friends,” with a local agency, Shade Tree Records. The following year, they won a battle of the bands contest at Hemming Park in Jacksonville, and the main prize was a free recording session in Atlanta at a major studio. Over the next four years, their local popularity continued to soar, culminating with their gold debut album *Pronounced Le-Nerd Skin-Nerd*. The subsequent success of their debut album landed them a spot as an opening act with The Who on their *Quadrophenia* tour (“Lynyrd Skynyrd Band History”).

Nineteen seventy-four saw the release of their second effort, appropriately named *Second Helping*, and some realignment among band personnel. Most notably, *Second Helping* produced their first charting U.S. single, “Sweet Home Alabama,” which was popularly interpreted as a rebuttal to Neil Young’s 1971 scathing musical commentary on Southern racial violence, “Southern Man,” and thus as an instance of Southern music aggressively defending the prejudices and the isolation of the South from the rest of the nation. The next year saw the release of yet another gold record for Lynyrd Skynyrd, *Nuthin Fancy*, and it produced, much to the chagrin of the N.R.A., the anti-handgun hit song “Saturday Night Special.” I will argue later in this paper that “Saturday Night Special” goes against the violence described by Cash in his typing of Southern masculinity. Also that year, Skynyrd’s tribute to the deceased Southern Rock icon Duane Allman, “Freebird,” was released, and it became the anthem of the genre if not the entire South (“Lynyrd Skynyrd Band History”) with its emphasis on freedom and independence. Musically, the song was freed from the restraints of play time since it had one of the longest codas then in existence.

In 1976, some of Lynyrd Skynyrd's most memorable songs and albums were produced. "That Smell" paradoxically condemned drug use while capturing the lure of addiction. The album *Gimme Back My Bullets* and the best selling *One More for the Road*, with its live version of "Freebird" and its coda of dueling guitars, are seminal examples of the appeal of violence and self-destruction. "Freebird," which is about Duane Allman's untimely, violent demise, would become a mainstay of Southern rock. However, 1977 was the year that changed the group and Southern Rock forever. After the release of *Street Survivors* on October 20<sup>th</sup>, Ronnie Van Zant, Steve Gaines, Cassie Gaines (a backup singer), and their road manager Dean Kilpatrick were killed when their antiquated, rented plane ran out of fuel and crashed into a swamp in Gillsburg, Mississippi, while en route to a concert at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. Other members were grievously injured, but they survived the crash. As the 1970s waned, so did Skynyrd wane as a musical phenomenon, reeling from the loss of its leader and other key members. Even though they continue to successfully produce and perform music to the current day, their last, most commercially successful and greatest album is the 1979's double compilation album *Gold and Platinum*, which has become the definitive Skynyrd musical collection ("Lynyrd Skynyrd Band History").

Another important and near legendary Southern Rock band from the 1970s is the Charlie Daniels<sup>9</sup> Band, centered on the persona of its charismatic lead singer, Charlie Daniels. Daniels was born in 1936 in Wilmington, North Carolina. There he was raised on a musical diet of gospel, local bluegrass, R&B and, of course, country music. By the time he graduated from high school in 1955, Daniels was immersed in the nascent rock

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<sup>9</sup> There is no possessive in the Charlie Daniels Band's name to signify Daniel's ownership of the band.

and roll that had already made famous such rock icons as Elvis Presley. With his new freedom from parental constraints, the young Daniels, already adept at playing the guitar, fiddle, and mandolin, took to the road with his band (“Charlie Daniels Chronology”).

The later half of the 1950s and 1960s placed Daniels as an itinerant troubadour, more country than rock, in California, where he was largely unsuccessful.<sup>10</sup> Daniels and his band’s breakthrough came in 1973 with their second musical compilation, the *Honey in the Rock* album and its hit song “Uneasy Rider.” Their next album, *Fire on the Mountain*, includes such Southern-oriented anthems as “Long Haired Country Boy” and “The South’s Gonna Do It Again.” Both songs have their own takes on the Southern hippie and the South’s, not the nation’s mission, and they propelled Charlie Daniels to superstar status in 1975. Following stints with Capitol and Kama Sutra, the Charlie Daniels Band finally found a home with Epic in 1976. His contract with them made him a millionaire and produced his most notable hit, 1979’s “The Devil Went Down to Georgia,” in which a hell uva fiddle player puts the Devil to shame. The single topped both country and pop charts, won him a Grammy Award, became the cornerstone of the movie hit *Urban Cowboy*, and propelled the album from which it hailed, *Million Mile Reflections*, to triple platinum sales status. The Charlie Daniels Band was an international phenomenon (“Charlie Daniels Chronology”). While the South did not win its war, its peculiar brand of rock won international acclaim. However, like Southern Rock itself, the Charlie Daniels Band had reached the zenith of its success. Even though they continue to make music in their geriatric state, their prime has passed, and their music is relegated to

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<sup>10</sup> Some of his more illustrious achievements over those fifteen years were writing “It Hurts Me” which appeared on the B side of a 1964 Presley album and some musical sessions with the legendary Bob Dylan in 1969.

nostalgic rock events and radio stations that specialize in Southern Rock formats.

Following stylistically in this survey of Southern Rock bands is the lesser known Marshall Tucker Band. The band was formed in Spartanburg, South Carolina, in the early 1970s by brothers Tommy and Toy Caldwell and Doug Gray; like the Charlie Daniels Band, it is debatable whether they belong to the Southern Rock or country genre. They took their name from a piano tuner whose name was found on a key ring in one of their first rehearsal studios. They were noticed by Capricorn Records (the predominant producer of Southern Rock bands during the 1970s) in 1972 because of their powerful stage performances and signed to that label the same year (“The Marshall Tucker Band Keeps on Rockin’”). In 1973, the band, comprised of the Caldwell brothers, Doug Gray, Paul T. Riddle, George McCorkle, and Jerry Eubanks, released their eponymously titled debut album, which earned platinum status. Their instant success, coupled with relentless touring, allowed them to grow from an opening act for the Allman Brothers Band to headlining shows themselves, earned them a following of their own and gained them critical and commercial success (“The Marshall Tucker Band Keeps on Rockin’”).

Marshall Tucker’s most famous singles are the love ballads “Heard It in a Love Song,” “Can’t You See,” and the Western musical tragedy “Fire on the Mountain.” As with most 1970’s Southern Rock bands, they peaked at the end of the decade and began to decline, arguably, due to the personal tragedies that plagued both the band and the genre, the growing popularity of disco, and the influx of British New Wave. A grinning Doug Gray said in a late 1990’s interview that testifies to the arguability of their demise, “As we’ve become older our Southern heritage seems to come out even more. But no matter how old we get, we can still rock your socks off” (“The Marshall Tucker Band

Keeps on Rockin'"). Even though it is unclear from Gray's aforementioned statement, it should be briefly mentioned that what separates Southern Rock musicians from other rock musicians is not only their Southern heritage, but their often unwitting adherence to W.J. Cash's description of Southern masculinity in song and in life in particular, their toughness and resilience, two topics that will be addressed later in this paper.

A band that has been under noticed by mainstream rock critics is the Outlaws from Tampa, Florida.<sup>11</sup> They were formed in 1972 by singers/guitarists Hughie Thomasson and Henry Paul, bassist Frank O'Keefe, and drummer Monte Yoho. The next year's addition of guitarist Billy Jones completed the original lineup. The band signed in 1974 with Arista Records, and not with Capricorn like so many Southern Rock acts, after catching the attention of producer Clive Davis, and released its self-titled album in 1975 ("The Outlaws").

Over the next few years, the Outlaws continued to produce hits and play venues filled to capacity. Their last notable hit single of the 1970s came from the 1979 *In the Eye of the Storm* album, the hauntingly morose Western song "Ghost Riders in the Sky." As the 1970s ended, so did their commercial success, culminating in their 1982 temporary breakup as a band ("The Outlaws").

As Southern Rock began to wane as a commercially successful genre in the late 1970s, one Southern Rock band that emerged on the national scene is Jacksonville, Florida's Molly Hatchet. The band, comprised of Joe Brown, Dave Hlubek, Duane Roland, Steve Holland, Banner Thoman, and Bruce Crump, is named after an infamous seventeenth-century axe murderess ("Molly Hatchet"). Their self-titled 1978 debut

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<sup>11</sup>This band's very name implies the individualism and isolationism from the status quo.

album on Epic Records reached multi-platinum status, and according to the band's website "[it] established their reputation of working hard, playing tough and living fast through intense touring [250 live shows per year]" with some of rock's biggest names ("Molly Hatchet"). The aforementioned quotation directly speaks to the band living up to Cash's definition of Southern masculinity due to their raucous lifestyles.

Their greatest commercial album success came in 1979 with the release of *Flirtin' with Disaster* and the hit single of the same name, despite being derided by some critics as engaging in little more than mimicry of Lynyrd Skynyrd. This song would grow in popularity to rival Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Freebird," and its lyrics and thundering music epitomized the self-destructive nature of Cash's hell uva fella. Further, and unlike most Southern Rock acts, their success continued to grow in the 1980s even as the commercial viability of the genre floundered ("Molly Hatchet").

The final band to be considered in this biographical synopsis is Blackfoot, which has the unique attribute of being one of the few mostly Native American rock bands.<sup>12</sup> Blackfoot had a long hard road to their brief stay at the top of Southern Rock, and the band itself has been often unsure whether they can even be classified into this genre. It may be more appropriate to categorize them as a heavy metal act from the South like Pantera.

Blackfoot was formed in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1970 by Rick Medlocke, of Lynyrd Skynyrd fame (singer/guitarist and grandson of legendary bluegrass musician Shorty Medlocke who will be mentioned later in this paper), Jackson Spires (drummer/singer), Greg T. Walker (bassist/singer), and lead guitarist Charlie Hargrett

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<sup>12</sup> "Blackfoot" <http://www.nolifetilmetal.com/blackfoot.htm>.

(the only non-Native American). After relocating to various places in the North and a near disastrous breakup in 1972, the band reformed with a change in line up that included North Carolina native Lenny Stadler on bass. Blackfoot began gaining a modicum of success through constant touring and building up a local/regional following by playing small clubs like the Blue Max in Greensboro, North Carolina.<sup>13</sup>

In 1975, Blackfoot released their debut album *No Reservations* on Island Records and permanently moved back south to Florida. It was not a commercial success, but it did expose other parts of the country to their music. Their second album, *Flying High*, was released in 1976, and they began playing major concert venues for Peter Frampton, KISS, and Ted Nugent. Their rise was short-lived, however, and they sank back into the obscurity of a regional act. Blackfoot's first true commercial success came in 1979 with the release of *Blackfoot Strikes*. The album produced two hit singles, a "strong version" of "Train, Train," written by Ricky Medlocke's famous grandfather Shorty Medlocke, and "Highway Song."<sup>14</sup> Following the album's release, the band embarked upon a very successful tour in the spring with R.E.O. Speedwagon. Their touring success continued into the early 1980s as they played with heavy metal giants AC/DC, the Scorpions, Def Leppard, and Iron Maiden. Even though their success outlasted most Southern Rock bands by a few years into the 1980s, largely because of their metal sound, the band's popularity went into decline in 1983 which Hargrett would dub "the beginning of the end."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "Blackfoot" [www.sigo.com/blackfoot\\_history/blackfoot\\_crew.htm](http://www.sigo.com/blackfoot_history/blackfoot_crew.htm).

<sup>14</sup> "Blackfoot" [www.sigo.com/blackfoot\\_history/blackfoot\\_crew.htm](http://www.sigo.com/blackfoot_history/blackfoot_crew.htm).

<sup>15</sup> "Blackfoot" [www.sigo.com/blackfoot\\_history/blackfoot\\_crew.htm](http://www.sigo.com/blackfoot_history/blackfoot_crew.htm).

All the Southern Rock bands whose biographies have been presented here contributed heavily to the success of the genre in the 1970s. Further, in their personal lives and in their music, the musicians, consciously or not, propagated W.J. Cash's helluva a fella tradition.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SONGS AND ANALYSIS

As is self-evident from the bands' biographies, many of these Southern Rock musicians all too often lived the lives they sang about; they were a hell uva bunch of fellas by the standards of mainstream American society. Their lives centered upon strong penchants for personal independence, self-destruction, and, cognizant of it or not, the promotion of traditional Southern isolationism from the rest of the United States. As is the case with many rock stars, but especially those such as Greg Allman who played Southern Rock, their violent, itinerant, chemically enhanced lives often cost them their very existence. They seemed to live out the songs that they wrote. Three songs that exemplify these wayward lifestyles are the Allman Brothers Band's "Ramblin' Man" and "Midnight Rider" and Molly Hatchet's "Flirtin' with Disaster." While "Ramblin' Man" and "Midnight Rider" pale in comparison with the powerful lyrics and menacing sound of "Flirtin' with Disaster," the reverence for hedonistic freedom is still omnipresent.

Lord, I was born a ramblin' man.  
Trying to make a livin' and doin' the best I can.  
And when it's time for leavin',  
I hope you'll understand,  
That I was born a ramblin' man. [chorus]  
Well my father was a gambler down in Georgia,  
He wound up on the wrong end of a gun.  
And I was born in the backseat of a greyhound bus  
Rollin' down highway 41.

[chorus]

I'm on my way to New Orleans this morning,

Leaving out of Nashville, Tennessee,  
They're always having a good time down on the bayou,  
Lord, them delta women think the world of me.

[chorus]

Lord, I was born a ramblin' man . . . . (Allman Brothers Band, "Ramblin' Man")

From a linguistic standpoint, the song is obviously of Southern American origin. The letter "g" is dropped on the endings of many of the words such as "ramblin'." As can be observed, many songs analyzed in this paper will have the same regional, linguistic attributes. On a similar note, again as is the case with most songs analyzed in this paper, each song is sung with distinctly Southern accent.

The protagonist of the song is an itinerant. He is a natural-born wanderer, considering the mobility of his diesel powered birth bed, and he probably follows in his father's occupational choice of gambler. The gambling profession is known for its dangerous lifestyle, complete with loose women, excessive alcohol consumption, and brawling over alleged cheating in games of chance, usually poker. This unnamed person falls in line with Cash's hell uva a fella through the independent, isolated, and self-destructive tradition. Further, unlike Faulkner's Quentin Compson, he embraces his lifestyle with relish and no regret. In fact, he revels in his nonconformity, as is exemplified by his elation at the prospect of leaving Nashville to embrace the sinful pleasures of the Deep South in Louisiana, where like-minded women find him attractive, and that attraction is plainly libidinous. The protagonist promotes individual freedom, but he places it in a distinctly Southern setting. That setting reinforces the song's regional

identity and foregrounds the individualistic lifestyle only truly obtainable in the South with its own isolationist tendencies.

The next Allman Brothers' hit, "Midnight Rider" from 1970's *Idlewild South*, is a moody song that follows the trail of an outlaw in the classical Western sense of the term. The protagonist is obviously itinerant, impoverished, and a fugitive from justice.

Well, I've got to run to keep from hiding,  
And I'm bound to keep on riding,  
And I've got one more silver dollar,  
But I'm not gonna let them catch me, no,  
Not gonna let em catch the midnight rider . . . .  
(Allman Brothers Band, "Midnight Rider")

The protagonist blatantly acknowledges that he has reached a point of apathy concerning his situation, but not to the point of being so apathetic that he will allow himself to be caught. This benumbed mindset is not quite in line with that professed by Cash in his hell uva fella tradition, but it is not too distant from it either. Since he has "gone by the point of caring," this unnamed midnight rider shows not a fierce rebellion against his plight, but a daunting lack of remorse for his crimes (whatever they may be), and the desperate situation in which his transgressions have left him. These near sociopathic tendencies align well with the 1970's musical image of the Southern man, since adhering to the law undermines personal independence on several levels: psychologically, geographically, economically, and socially.

Molly Hatchet's infamously popular song "Flirtin' with Disaster," from its 1979 album of the same name, takes the wayward lifestyle of the hell uva fella to a new level

in comparison to the rather mild, in music and verse, Allman Brothers' songs of similar theme. "Flirtin' with Disaster" features driving heavy metal guitars and lyrics shouted forth by the singer/protagonist keenly aware of his own imminent doom to the point of embracing it. Most of the Allman Brothers' songs are not as loud and the singer/protagonist more passively accepts his bleak fate. Molly Hatchet's lyrics and sound aspire to a state of anarchy, destruction, and even outright nihilism, reminiscent of then contemporary British Punk Rock by the Sex Pistols. To relate it to a closer regional literary source, it smacks of the pessimistic *weltanschauung* of Faulkner's Mr. Compson in *The Sound and the Fury* with the song's equally pessimistic prognosis of life (Dobbs 366). The song strongly evokes a regional dimension, through the singer's distinctly Southern-sounding voice, diction, and allusions that have to be heard to be fully appreciated.<sup>16</sup> Further, it goes beyond being a commentary on the riotous, self-destructive life of musicians on the road to an indictment of mainstream society and its complacency.

I'm travelin' down the road,  
I'm flirtin' with disaster.  
I've got the pedal to the floor,  
My life is running faster.  
I'm out of money, I'm out of hope,  
It looks like self destruction.

Well how much more can we take,  
With all of this corruption.

Been flirtin' with disaster,  
Y'all know what I mean.  
And the way we run our lives,  
It makes no sense to me.  
I don't know about yourself or  
What you want to be-yeah.

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<sup>16</sup> Typical allusions used in Southern Rock will be addressed later in this paper.

When we gamble with our time,  
We choose our destiny. [chorus]

I'm travelin' down that lonesome road.  
Feel like I'm dragging a heavy load,  
Yeah! I've tried to turn my head away,  
Feels about the same most every day.

Speeding down the fast lane,  
Playin' from town to town.  
The boys and I have been burnin' it up,  
Can't seem to slow it down.

I've got the pedal to the floor,  
Our lives are runnin' faster,  
Got our sights set straight ahead,  
But ain't sure what we're after . . . .  
(Molly Hatchet, "Flirtin' with Disaster")

On a superficial level, the song is about the frantic pace of life on the road while touring. Life becomes a blur of going from one nameless venue to another for days on end. The disastrous side of this, judging by the band's history of licentious living,<sup>17</sup> stems from the dangers of excessive alcohol and drug consumption, too many loose women, and more than likely, the band's share of physical altercations over meaningless threats to their bravado. Since Molly Hatchet, in its online biography, confesses to literally living out Cash's description of Southern masculinity, it follows that their lyrics would mirror that reckless, nontraditional lifestyle with a particular Southern flair that sets them apart from other rock and roll bands not tied to a particular region. In that biography and in their music, they essentially condone the reckless bohemianism defined by Cash. Molly Hatchet's endorsement of a wayward lifestyle allows them to confront the American status quo in favor of isolationism for both person and the region that spawned them.

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<sup>17</sup> Throughout Molly Hatchet's official website, <http://www.mollyhatchet.com>, there are comments about their formerly debauched lifestyles.

“Flirtin’ with Disaster” has a deeper meaning, whether the song’s author was cognizant of it or not, and authorial intent is largely a moot point in itself given recent trends in post-modern criticism. It is an indictment of the complacency of American middle class society’s conformity and unwillingness to take risks. The former becomes evident in the words, “and the way we run our lives it makes no sense to me” (Molly Hatchet, “Flirtin’ with Disaster”). The “we” seems to be more of an all inclusive reference to society, rather than just the band, when taken in context with the rest of the chorus, “I don’t know about yourself, or what you want to be. When we gamble with our time, we chose our destiny.” Taken as a whole, this point of view is existential. Despite not knowing another person’s life aspirations, living on the edge of the proverbial abyss and without weighing the moral consequences of personal actions can lead only to personal endangerment. Further, if the last two lines of the first stanza are taken into consideration, they support the premise that life beyond the pale yields self-knowledge. Also, the statement “Well how much more can we take, with all of this corruption?” indirectly, but potently, attacks the worthiness of American values (Molly Hatchet, “Flirtin’ with Disaster”). The corruption to which the singer refers is the state of complacency that comes from conformity to mainstream American values, and the ensuing lack of self-discovery of one’s own life’s purpose. Being unaware or being unwilling to know and pursue one’s true life path hinders personal independence, and independence is a key facet of Cash’s hell uva fella and the region that produces such men.

Another characteristic common in Southern Rock is violence, and, especially, violent acts committed using guns. A prevalent stereotype equates the American South

and Southerners with the uncontrolled proliferation of firearms and the N.R.A., and that may be true if one looks merely at the statistics. The N.R.A.-I.L.A. website on October 3, 2006, cited a Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Enforcement [A.T.F.] 1999 survey that estimated that there were 215 million guns in the hands of private citizens in the U.S.A., and the majority of those guns were owned by citizens of the American South<sup>18</sup> with an overall growth rate of 4.5 million annually (“Guns, Gun Ownership and R.T.C.”). Further, just because the South holds more than its share of guns per capita and a sizeable share of those gun owners take their Second Amendment Right very seriously, the popular depiction of all Southerners being “gun crazy” is fallacious, but one that consciously or not relates to Cash’s hell uva fella tradition and its violent aspect of “fight[ing] harder . . . than the next man” (52). Ironically, “Gimme Three Steps,” Lynyrd Skynyrd’s 1972-73 hit single from their debut album, and “Saturday Night Special,” a 1975 hit from their third album *Nuthin Fancy*, are both blatantly anti-gun. The latter of the two has political overtures to stricter gun control (Brant 116 & 156), which is something that seems out of character coming from a Southern band that lived and sang of many of the merits of being a hell uva fella. The former song also has implications of cowardice or self-preservation (depending upon one’s perspective) that is also uncharacteristic of Cash’s definition of Southern masculinity.

“Gimme Three Steps” is a humorous and slightly embellished account of a potentially fatal incident that satirizes Cash’s Southern masculinity and violence. The event happened to Skynyrd’s lead singer Ronnie Van Zant while he tried to seduce a young woman at a Jacksonville, Florida, nightclub called the West Tavern (Brant 116).

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<sup>18</sup> Multiple gun ownership by individuals in the American South is the reason for this majority according to the website.

As the storyline of the song goes, an unnamed protagonist (easily identified with Van Zant via the personal nature of the lyrics and the fact that both protagonist and Van Zant are/were fair-haired) is dancing in a honky-tonk called the Jug with a girl named Linda Lu. Much to his dismay, her large, muscular boyfriend discovers his female friend's infidelity and goes into a jealous, murderous rage; Van Zant is the focus of his wrath.

. . . He said, hey there fat fellow,  
With the hair colored yellow,  
Watcha tryin' to prove?  
Cause that's my woman there  
And I'm a man who cares  
And this might be all for you.

. . . I was scared and fearin' for my life.  
I was shakin' like a leaf on a tree.  
Cause he was lean, mean,  
Big and bad, Lord,

Pointin' that gun at me . . . .  
(Lynyrd Skynyrd, "Gimme Three Steps")

In a move uncharacteristic of the impulsiveness to fight manifested by some Southern men that typify Cash's hell uva fella tradition, the physically undersized and under-armed protagonist opts for survival by begging his nemesis to "Gimme three steps" so that he can run away from the battle that would lead to his demise. Obviously, Van Zant lost whatever compunction he had to do battle over his short-lived love when he was staring "straight down a .44 [a reference to a large caliber magnum pistol]" (Lynyrd Skynyrd, "Gimme Three Steps"). The choice of instinctual flight over fight is a means of survival

for the protagonist in songs like “Gimme Three Steps,” which, again, are intended to satirize Southern masculinity.

Lynyrd Skynyrd’s “Saturday Night Special” is a much more cynical and overtly anti-gun song with a political agenda calling, figuratively, for the demise of all pro-handgun advocates. Again, this anti-gun stance is seemingly at odds with the violent and isolating nature of the Southern males that choose to follow Cash’s stereotype. The lyrics of this song contain two mini-tales about the danger of pistols. The opening stanza describes a burglary in progress that results in the unarmed owner of the house being roused from his bed and shot to death with a .38 caliber pistol while in the non-confrontational act of getting dressed (Lynyrd Skynyrd, “Saturday Night Special”). The second stanza relates the disastrous effects of drinking excessively and taking poker too seriously while carrying a handgun. The character Jim, who is in a drunken rage over an argument about cheating at a game of chance, shoots his friend in the head. Both of the stories portray the tragic results of gunplay with pistols that will ultimately lead to the isolation of the individual perpetrator from society, probably via prison.

Skynyrd’s lyrical diatribe about the dangers of handguns reaches its zenith in the final stanza that alludes to or includes the audience in the very personal tragedy of drunken suicide and murder, and it seemingly attacks a bastion of Southern culture, pro-gun groups like the N.R.A., with its very political message:

Handguns are made for killin’.  
Ain’t no good for nothing else.  
And if you like to drink your whiskey,  
You might even shoot yourself.  
So why don’t we dump ’em people

To the bottom of the sea.  
Before some fool come around here  
Wanna shoot either you or me.  
(Lynyrd Skynyrd, "Saturday Night Special")

Even though these two songs are examples of anti-gun sentiment by only one Southern band, their popularity in their respective years of release (Brant 116 & 156) is a testament that not only did some band members of Lynyrd Skynyrd harbor a severe dislike of handguns with all their potential for misuse, but that same sentiment was felt by at least some of their fans. Further, both songs exemplify that all the components that make up Cash's stereotype of the perfect Southern man are not universal. The Southern man is a paradoxical aggregate in many aspects. With the two aforementioned songs, fatal violence is shunned. In them, deviance is shown from Cash's definition of Southern masculinity. Further, these two songs are in disagreement with Cash in regards to another aspect of violence, the social isolation, albeit the resulting prison or social ostracism, that follows from violent acts.

## CHAPTER V

### HISTORICAL SYNOPSIS

A synopsis of the recent history of the American South is necessary at this point in order to foreground the portrayal of racial relations in Southern Rock. The 1950s, and especially the 1960s, were tumultuous decades in American history on many levels. General consensus dictates that no other region of the country was more affected by these sweeping changes than the American South. After World War II, many African-American soldiers returned home after fighting the ultimate war for freedom against Nazism, Italian fascism, and Japanese imperialism. When they returned to the States, despite conquering tyranny and racial injustice abroad, they found little had changed in America regarding racial equality, especially in the South, where what C. Vann Woodward dubbed “the un-American experience of history” was still in full swing (231). In the South, African-Americans were still subjected to the indignity and intolerance engendered by Jim Crow laws. In fact, separate but equal had been legal since the 1898 U.S. Supreme Court Case of *Plessey v. Ferguson*. Needless to say, many ex-GIs of color and their progeny were dissatisfied with their second class status. Gradually, protests for change began culminating with the U.S. Supreme Court’s overturning of the *Plessey* decision in *Brown v Topeka Board of Education* in 1954. Actual desegregation was hard fought by parties on both sides of the issue, and it took twenty more years to achieve, if racial integration was ever truly achieved at all. The lamentable fact that desegregation was literally fought by both sides in the South, and largely by Southerners, itself may be

indicative to the region's propensity to follow too closely to the violent aspect of Cash's stereotype for both races.

Desegregation's most vocal and often violent opponents came from the American South, where Jim Crow had been an accepted way of life for decades, and most of the time, barring a very vocal minority, was accepted by both races as regional status quo. Recent American history is fraught with incidents of reluctance to desegregate that often exploded into violence that left blacks and white Civil Rights workers dead in the South. Ergo, many citizens from other regions of the country continued to equate Southerners with backwardness, Klan lynchings, and overt, *de facto* racism more akin to the antebellum period before the ratification of amendments 13-15 to the U.S. Constitution. Here again, it may be that Cash's more violent aspects of Southern masculinity were playing themselves out on a regional level, directly leading to further isolation. This isolation from the rest of the nation was an even welcomed form of alienation by anti-civil rights Southerners, who sought to insulate themselves from social change.

By the early 1970s, the Civil Rights movement had achieved some notable victories, but at the expense of such assassinated advocates as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Medger Evers. Here again, violence and isolation come into play on the national stage. Even though a degree of calm began to settle across the South in the new decade, the negative national perception of Southerners changed little. To some degree, SouthernRock musicians went against this stereotype of Southern racial attitudes by honoring blacks in some of their songs. But this probably stemmed not from a genuine concern for racial equality, but rather from an appreciation of black musical influences. For example, in the 1970s, Southern Rock bands nearly universally used what many

considered to be the regionally distinct totem of racism, the Confederate flag, on their albums and band paraphernalia, partially to assert a regional identity tainted by racism. It is more probable that what reverence Southern Rock musicians held for blacks came from personal respect for specific neighbors, and admiration for black musicians to whom they were indebted for creating the genre of rock and roll.

It needs to be recalled that many Southern Rock musicians grew up poor; the Southern poor were in closer proximity to their black neighbors than more affluent members of Southern Society. Even though *de jure* racial barriers and racist attitudes were still present between poor whites and blacks in the South during the formative years of these musicians who came to adulthood and notoriety during the 1970s, they had lived near blacks because poor white neighborhoods generally bordered black areas, and they interacted out of economic necessity via such means as low-paying jobs and places of commerce that they frequented. Local grocery stores more akin to nineteenth-century general stores than then popular chains like Piggly Wiggly and Woolworths were racial intersections where Jim Crow's talons were not as sharp in some respects. This can be shown through scenes of racial interaction in the autobiographical writings of such contemporary Southern authors as Rick Bragg in his works *All Over but the Shoutin'* and *Ava's Man*.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Both works by Rick Bragg are filled with examples of racial intersections between poor Southern whites and their black neighbors.

CHAPTER VI  
THE SONGS AND ANALYSIS CONTINUED

Returning to the songs, the foremost example of Southern Rock musician's admiration for a black bluesman's music is "The Ballad of Curtis Lowe," written by Ronnie Van Zant of Lynyrd Skynyrd and released on their *Second Helping* album. Van Zant admitted that when he was young he sang in a racially mixed church with black, female, gospel singers and that he sometimes checked into hotels under the pseudonym of his blues idol, Robert Johnson (Butler). These admitted facts by Van Zant and the song's storyline suggest it was based on real life admiration for a personally known musician of color; however, the song was actually inspired by the grandfather of a band associate who was a quasi-famous, white bluesman named Shorty Medlocke (Brant 133). Regardless of the inspiration for its writing, the song eulogizes an impoverished, alcoholic, largely unappreciated, elderly black musician for his art while emphasizing his lack of place in the South.

Well I used to wake the morning before the rooster crowed  
Searching for soda bottles to get myself some dough  
Brought 'em down to the corner, down to the country store  
Cash 'em in and give my money to man named Curtis Lowe<sup>20</sup>

Old Curt was a black man with white curly hair  
When he had a fifth of wine he did not have a care  
He used to own an old dobro, used to play it across his knee  
I'd give old Curt my money, he'd play all day for me

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<sup>20</sup> An alternate spelling of Curtis Lowe's surname is Loew. I have made a conjectural emendation and used the more popular spelling.

[chorus]

Play me a song Curtis Lowe, Curtis Lowe  
I got your drinkin' money, tune up your dobro  
People said he was useless, them people are the fools  
Cause Curtis Lowe was the finest picker to ever play the blues

He looked to be sixty, and maybe I was ten  
Mama used to whip me but I'd go see him again  
I'd clap my hands, stomp my feet, try to stay in time  
He'd play me a song or two  
Then take another drink of wine

[chorus]

On the day old Curtis died, nobody came to pray  
Ol' preacher said some words, and they chunked him in the clay  
But he lived a lifetime playin' the black man's blues  
And on the day he lost his life, that's all he had to lose

Play me a song Curtis Lowe, hey Curtis Lowe  
I wish that you was here so everyone would know  
People said he was useless, them people all are fools  
Cause Curtis you're the finest picker to ever play the blues.  
(Lynyrd Skynyrd, "Ballad of Curtis Lowe")

The narrator's admiration for Lowe seems self-evident. It appears that the young Van Zant, using a persona or not in his poetry, is so smitten by the old man's talent that he not only goes to great lengths to provide his mentor with money for his vice, but blatantly defies his mother's directives that are probably driven by racism, at the repeated risk of corporal punishment. Even going beyond admiration, Van Zant berates his local society for not appreciating Curtis' musical gift and for treating him as a pariah. By writing and singing the ballad, Van Zant singularly rebels against accepted social norms, but as will be shown later, it is equally probable the song praises the blues genre more

than the man or is a mild form of rebellion for its own sake against a rapidly becoming antiquated Southern status quo of overt racism. It should be noted that rebellion for its own sake is another facet of Cash's hell uva fella because of its inherently isolating self-destructiveness. As Mike Butler notes,

The inclusion of the song on one of its most popular recordings demonstrates that Skynyrd endorsed a form of racial integration and black acceptance that deviated from traditional Southern racial attitudes, which contributed to and reflected the perception of a changing concept of white masculinity in the 1970's South.<sup>21</sup>

Butler's argument is feasible in that the reverence this song exhibits towards black musicians deviates somewhat from the traditional concept of Southern white male's racial attitudes, but it must be noted that this reverence probably only goes so far as to appreciate the art and not so much the man. In other words, the music itself appeals more to the aficionados of the genre and not the life accomplishments of its founders. Also, by praising the fictitious Lowe's musical contributions in the 1970s, Van Zant is rebelling in a modest form against the dying vestiges of a Southern status quo that was wholly racially intolerant.

It is ironic that "The Ballad of Curtis Lowe" appeared on an album that also contained a Top 10 hit, the reactionary pro-Southern song "Sweet Home Alabama" that was written in response to Canadian Neil Young's 1970 attack on traditional Southern culture in "Southern Man." As Ronnie Van Zant said in a 1974 interview with Tom Dupree of *Rolling Stone*, "We thought Neil Young was shooting all the ducks in order to kill one or two." This evasive comment by Van Zant to allegations of Southern racism is

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<sup>21</sup> Butler "'Luther King Was a Good Ole Boy': The Southern Rock Movement and White Male Identity in the Post-Civil Rights South."

not conducive to proving tolerance because he avoids the question. Further, it is ironic that Lynyrd Skynyrd, like many other Southern Rock bands, constantly displayed the Confederate flag in concerts, band paraphernalia, and on album covers. The band displayed this totem of bigotry in defiance to cries of racism by Northerners, blacks, and others who found it offensive (Butler) and, likewise, a factor in the continuing isolation of the South and the values of Cash's Southern male from the rest of America. In response to these damning allegations by detractors and skeptics, Van Zant stated that the band did not use the song and flag to promote a racist agenda: "They think we do . . . We're just proud of being from the South and we like to show it [especially via regional imagery like flying the Confederate Flag]" (Butler). Still the Stars and Bars' racially charged ramifications are felt considering its original denotation and the persistent use of it by violent racist groups like the Ku Klux Klan and others to advocate white supremacy. To risk an overly simple analogy, some racism is not unlike the related crime of harassment because the implication of both lies in individual perception of what is considered offensive. All things considered, the quintessential Southern man exhibited in 1970's Southern Rock does not strictly follow Cash's hell uva fella parameters. Despite claims to the contrary, what seems to be racial tolerance, as seemingly exhibited in the "Ballad of Curtis Lowe," must be taken with a degree of skepticism about motivation for writing the song. Further, it must be taken in context of the verisimilitude of Cash's tradition and be viewed from a socio-historical perspective.

On a related note, at least one Southern Rock group, and one of the few that ever has received much scholarly analysis, Black Oak Arkansas, fed on years of racial strife to attract a bigoted audience with such songs as "Television Indecision." C. Kirk Hutson

wrote that the band had a racist agenda, and they admitted that it was utilized to gain commercial success more than from fierce personal conviction. Hutson cites lyrics that he claims are overtly discriminatory:

Agitation to the nation,  
Tell you what to do;  
Regulation, integration,  
Bus your ass to school.  
Occupation, copulation,  
Working for the man.  
Communication, information  
More that you can stand. (196)

Specifically, Hutson contends that through this song Black Oak Arkansas “clearly lambasted [the issues of] integration and busing, two of the things white Southerners hated the most” (196). Further, Hutson rails that these lines “mirrored white frustrations and chastised the federal government’s racial equality policy and reflected that many good ol’ boys refused to change” (196-197). Evidence like this from Black Oak Arkansas coupled with the dubious racial tolerance found in at least one Lynyrd Skynyrd song make the distance of the Southern male’s portrayal in 1970’s Southern Rock from Cash’s original hell uva a fella questionable. The evidence also undermines the believability of Butler’s premise in his article “‘Luther King was a Good Ole Boy’: The Southern Rock Movement and White Male Identity in the Post-Civil Rights South.” He states, “The movement also shows that Southern whites separated their regional identities from their racist ideologies, which allowed them to continue some Southern traditions and project a

love for their region while also accepting blacks as potential equals.”<sup>22</sup> This premise is at least partially faulty given the presence of overt, antagonistic racism as manifested in the music of Black Oak Arkansas and the questionable acceptance of racial equality by such bands as Lynyrd Skynyrd. Much of Cash’s thesis holds true in the racial arena, which essentially states that Southern white males felt a need to assert supremacy over their black neighbors. Despite some modifications that suggest racial tolerance, racism prevented the South from becoming part of mainstream American society during the 1970s.

Even though the jury stands divided over whether or not there is much, if any, revision to the tenets of Cash’s hell uva fella when it comes to race, another facet of it is most assuredly modified when two songs by the Charlie Daniels Band are analyzed. “Long Haired Country Boy” and “Uneasy Rider” portray Southern men who seemingly have little in common with Cash’s racist, politically conservative, hard fighting hell uva fella. In those aspects, the Charlie Daniels Band’s Southern man is the opposite, even hostile of Southern tradition; however, the similarity that somewhat overshadows those aspects is that both rebel against the status quo. Both songs manifest rebellion, not just for its own sake, but as an augmentation of personal independence, and one definition of independence means thinking as one wants to think regardless of popularity. The Charlie Daniels Band’s Southern man defines its own white Southern masculinity as rebellion against a different set of circumstances than would have impeded the hell uva fella of Cash’s 1940s. The Charlie Daniels Band’s version is, in a sense, the hell uva fella’s antithetical *doppelganger* in his racial tolerance, liberalism, and embracing of the

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<sup>22</sup> Butler “‘Luther King Was a Good Ole Boy’: The Southern Rock Movement and White Male Identity in the Post Civil-Rights South.”

remnants of the 1960's peace movement. This, in itself, signifies rebellion, but in this instance it is against a social conservatism reminiscent of the former South Carolina Senator Strom Thurman's Dixiecrat Party of the 1940s or the contemporary Alabama of George Wallace, the last bastion of an anachronistic view of race relations.

The Charlie Daniels Band's protagonist in "Long Haired Country Boy" is a lazy, apathetic sort merged with the Arcadian attributes of a hippie. In retrospect, it may seem odd that the "children of god" would have anything in common with Southern males, but they do have a lot in common. During the late 1960s and 1970s, the stereotype of the Southern male was modified from an extreme conservative to a new type of man who embodied the social liberalism of the era. Southern males were transmogrified in music by the Charlie Daniels Band and others from red-necked, socially conservative tobacco-chewing farmers with crew cuts to long haired, inebriated sloths who embraced, to a degree, part of the more hedonistic anti-establishment liberalism. By embracing what was rebellious and anti-status quo, without the overt political activism, the Charlie Daniels Band and others were unknowingly perpetuating a modified version of being independent and being from outside society, both of which are so integral to Cash's Southern male tradition.

People say I'm no good and crazy as a loon  
Cause I get stoned in the morning I get drunk in the afternoon  
Kind of like my ole blue tick hound I like to lay around in the shade  
And I ain't got no money but I damn sure got it made, cause

[chorus]  
I ain't asking nobody for nothing  
If I can't get it on my own  
If you don't like the way I'm living

You just leave this long haired country boy alone . . .

Preacher man talking on the TV putting down the rock n roll  
Wants me to send a donation cause he's worried about my soul  
He said Jesus walked on the water and I know that is true  
But sometimes I think that preacher man'd like to do a little walking too . . . .  
(Charlie Daniels Band, "Long Haired Country Boy")

An earlier generation of Southern males would have deemed it culturally blasphemous to smoke marijuana and criticize evangelical fundamentalist Christianity (the type alluded to in the song's third stanza), but the Southern male the Charlie Daniels Band describes in some of their songs has changed in at least two ways. He has a different preference for intoxicating substances as well as social causes to rail against, but he has retained the core of the hell uva fella through his anti-conformity. The rebelliousness is still omnipresent, but it has adjusted its guise to fit the times and further Southern regional distinctiveness.

One of the more humorous songs ever produced by a Southern Rock band also belongs to the "godfather" of the genre, Charlie Daniels and his band (Brant 120). The 1973 Top 10 hit "Uneasy Rider" is a thinly veiled spoof of the 1969 hippie-cult classic film *Easy Rider*. It is set in one of the last bastions of Southern conservatism, Mississippi, which was imaginatively broadened in the minds of a sizeable portion of the rest of the United States to be representative of the entire South. This imaginative geographic expansion includes a regionally based humor that encompasses every state below the Mason-Dixon Line. In other words, the lone state of Mississippi and partially through the likes of this parody of its cultural backwardness, physical boundary grew, imagined or not, to represent the entire region. Scott Romine pointed out that "any

regionalist humor is a matter of imagined geographies” (1). The entire South once again became viewed as a cesspool of racism and ignorance, if it had ever stopped being perceived in that manner.

The song’s plot is simple. A liberal, culturally-hip Southerner’s car breaks down near Jackson, Mississippi. He goes to a bar while his car is being repaired. He almost gets in a fight with local rednecks. He manages to avoid the confrontation by playing on their stupidity and paranoia. He escapes and learns his lesson to stay out of Mississippi.

Even though the song is rather long, in order to fully appreciate this parody, it is given in its entirety. Further, it should be remembered that the song is spoken more like a twangybard’s epic poem than sung.

I was takin’ a trip out to LA  
Toolin’ along in my Chevrolet  
Tokin’ on a number and diggin’ on the radio  
Just as I crossed that Mississippi line, I heard that highway startin’ to whine  
And I knew that left rear tire was about to go  
Well the spare was flat and I got uptight ‘cause there wasn’t a fillin’ station in sight  
So I just limped on down the shoulder on the rim  
I went as far as I could and when I stopped the car  
It was right in front of this little bar  
A kind of a redneck lookin’ joint called the Dew Drop Inn

Well I stuffed my hair up under my hat  
And I told the bartender that I had a flat  
And would he be kind enough to give me change for a one  
There was one thing I was sure proud to see  
There wasn’t a soul in the place ‘cept for him and me  
And he jest looked disgusted an’ pointed toward the telephone

I called up the station down the road a ways  
And he said he wasn’t very busy t’day  
And he could have somebody there in jest ‘bout ten minutes or so

He said now you jes' stay right where yer at  
And I didn't bother to tell the durn fool I sure as hell didn't have anyplace else to  
go

I jes' ordered up a beer and sat down at the bar  
When some guy walked in an' said who own this car  
With the peace sign the mag wheels and four on the floor  
Well he looked at me and I damn near died  
And I decided that I'd jus' wait outside  
So I laid a dollar on the bar and headed for the door

Jes' when I thought I'd get outta there with my skin  
These five big dudes come strollin' in  
With this one old drunk chick

And some fella with green teeth

An' I was almost to the door when the biggest one  
Said you tip your hat to this lady son  
An' when I did all that hair fell out from underneath

Now the last thing I wanted was to get into a fight  
In Jackson Mississippi on a Saturday night  
'Specially when there was three of them and only one of me  
Well they all started laughin' and I felt kinda sick  
And I knew I better think of somethin' pretty quick  
So I jes' reached out and kicked ol' green teeth right in the knee

He let out a yell that'd curl your hair  
But before he could move I grabbed me a chair  
And said watch him folks 'cause he's a thoroughly dangerous man  
Well you may not know it but this man's a spy  
He's an undercover agent for the FBI  
And he's been sent down here to infiltrate the Ku Klux Klan

He was still bent over holdin' on to his knee  
But everyone else was lookin' and listenin' to me  
And I layed it on thicker and heavier as I went  
I said would you believe this man has gone as far  
As tearin' Wallace stickers off the bumpers of cars  
And he voted for George McGovern for president

Well he's a friend of them long-haired hippie type pinko fags  
I betcha he's even got a commie flag  
Tacked up on the wall inside of his garage

He's a snake in the grass I tell ya guys  
He may look dumb but that's jus' a disguise  
He's a mastermind in the ways of espionage

They all started lookin' real suspicious at him  
And he jumped up an' said jes' wait a minute Jim  
You know he's lyin' I've been livin' here all my life

Im a faithful follower of Brother John Birch  
And I belong to the Antioch Baptist Church  
And I ain't even got a garage—you can call home and ask my wife

Then he started sayin' something about the way I was dressed  
But I didn't wait around to hear the rest  
I was too busy movin' and hopin' I didn't run out of luck

And when I hit the ground I was makin' tracks  
And they were jes' takin' my car down off the jacks  
So I threw the man a twenty an' jumped in an' fired that mother up  
Mario Andretti woulda sure been proud  
Of the way I was movin' when I passed that crowd  
Comin' out the door and headin' toward me in a trot

An' I guess I shoulda gone ahead an' run  
But somehow I couldn't resist the fun  
Of chasin' them jes' once around the parkin' lot  
Well they're headin' for their car but I hit the gas  
And spun around and headed them off at the pass  
Well I was slingin' gravel and puttin' a ton of dust in the air

Well I had them all out there steppin' an' a fetchin'  
Like their heads were on fire and their asses was catchin'  
But I figured I oughta go ahead an' split before the cops got there  
When I hit the road I was really wheelin'  
Had gravel flyin' and rubber squeelin'  
An' I didn't slow down 'til I was almost to Arkansas

I think I'm gonna re-route my trip  
I wonder if anybody'd think I'd flipped  
If I went to LA  
Via Omaha. (Charlie Daniels Band, "Uneasy Rider")

The aspects of the protagonist in the song that are relevant to Cash's hell uva fella stereotype are easy enough to discern if taken in the context of the early 1970s.

Examples of rebelling against the status quo and engendering individual and social isolation are prevalent throughout the song.

In stanza one, the narrator/protagonist is leisurely smoking marijuana while driving along on his long road trip to California. His recreational use of marijuana is analogous to the excessive recreational use of alcohol that Cash described being imbibed by his 1940's hell uva a fella. Further, the narrator's use of the adjective "redneck" to describe the bar he winds up at immediately signals to the listener that this man is not sympathetic to the quickly dying racial conservatism that allegedly permeates Mississippi, or, if one agrees with the notion of the expansion of boundaries to encompass the region, the American South in its entirety. By not advocating a more racially segregated society, as will be more clearly seen in later verses, he is asserting his independence and rebelling against what is perceived as the status quo of the South.

In stanzas two through four, it is glaringly obvious that the narrator is an unacceptable alien in his new found environment, and he is conscious that his appearance could bring him trouble. For example, upon leaving his car before entering the Dew Drop Inn, a nice homophonic and alliterative pun on Southern hospitality (Do drop in), he "stuffs his [long] hair up under his hat" in order to avoid looking suspiciously hippified. Further, even his non-mobile automobile is out of place on the outskirts of Jackson, Mississippi, because of its make and accoutrements such as a peace sign, manual four-speed transmission (as opposed to the older, manual three-speed on the column version) and aftermarket wheels. These facts are quickly pointed out by a local patron of the

establishment. So, both his physical appearance and vehicle exemplify anti-conformity and independence, by the divergent standards of 1970's rural Mississippi and larger America.

As the story develops toward the conflict, it becomes obvious that the narrator does not neatly fit into at least one of Cash's criteria of Southern masculinity, bravado and fighting, despite his paltry assault on one of his nemeses by kicking him in the knee. This is a superficial view in some ways because at this juncture the narrator spars with his enemy not in a physical manner, but by using his wits. In stanzas 8-11, he spins an elaborate lie temporarily duping the antagonistic locals into believing that one of their own is an F.B.I. informant "sent down here to infiltrate the Ku Klux Klan" (Charlie Daniels Band, "Uneasy Rider"). Not only does he manage to almost convince the locals that green teeth is a proverbial traitor, but he attacks his political and sexual preferences. The narrator alleges that green teeth voted for the 1972 democratic candidate for president, George McGovern, who was perceived as a liberal antichrist by Southern traditionalists and other more conservative elements of American society. To spin his yarn to an even more absurd level, the narrator claims that green teeth has a "commie flag tacked up on the wall inside of his garage" (Charlie Daniels Band, "Uneasy Rider"). This socio-political affiliation that the narrator claims belongs to his enemy borders on being heretical and treasonous acts in the minds of the rest of the local party. The narrator attacks green teeth's sexuality by claiming he has a close, bordering on sexual intimacy, relationship with "those long haired hippie type pinko fags" (Charlie Daniels Band, "Uneasy Rider") that were perceived as being corruptive to society. The mention of blacks is suspiciously absent, but implied. Even though, the narrator does little in the way

of physical combat at this juncture in the song, he does fight and intellectually defeats his enemies that outnumber him five to one. Further, it should be noted that the narrator does so by attacking the very core of Southern masculinity in the rednecks, as theorized by Cash and as expanded upon by Ted Ownby in his four criteria (371). In summary, the narrator is not a coward in regard to shirking personal battles. He just fights by other means, thereby still essentially adhering to the hell uva fella tradition and its violence.

As the epic song approaches its denouement, the narrator does relate a physically violent side of his nature, albeit, however impishly playful. He uses his car as a weapon, “chasin’ them jes’ once around the parkin’ lot,” reducing them to a slapstick state of “steppin’ an’ fetchin’<sup>23</sup> like their heads were on fire and their asses were catchin’” (Charlie Daniels Band, “Uneasy Rider”). While no harm is done to his enemies through his act of psychological violence, the chase is fraught with the potential for serious injury. Further, in his actions, the narrator humiliates the locals, and by doing so, he emasculates them by eliminating their capacity for physical violence. The chase exemplifies traditional Southern machismo in a more exact sense of Cash’s definition because of its violent potential. The protagonist’s use of violence by other means promotes independence because he relies on no one but himself to gain victory over his enemies. Further, it is this Southern male concept of independence that contributes to its regional isolation, since its adherents, even at the basest level, have little or no need for outside interference.

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<sup>23</sup> The use of the words “steppin’ and fetchin’” allude to Steppin Fetchit, the stage name of the early twentieth-century black comedian, Lincoln Perry, whose character became a stereotype of blacks who always tried to outwit their social superiors. Daniels seems to be using this allusion in an ironic metaphor comparing the actions of the “rednecks” in the song with a famous black minstrel (Watkins “Introduction”).

The Charlie Daniels Band's definition of Southern masculinity as exemplified by the characters in the songs "Long Haired Country Boy" and "Uneasy Rider" still falls within the parameters set forth in the 1940s by Cash when placed in the context of the socio-political climate of the 1970s. Deviations from his definition are merely superficial. They conform to Cash's Southern man by showing a penchant for recreational substance abuse, rebellion against both regional and national social codes and mores, and fighting by other means. All of these lead to both personal and regional independence and isolation.<sup>24</sup>

Even though Cash does not directly address the issue of substance abuse in his definition of Southern masculinity, addiction can be inferred. Not too many social drinkers go to bars and "toss down a pint of raw whiskey at a gulp" with much frequency (Cash 52). Even from a layman's perspective, it can be easily surmised that such a man is an alcoholic and/or has other serious substance abuse problems. Though Cash does not mention alcoholism because it would not fit with his analysis of the Southern male, especially his controlling, independent nature, Cash's Southern man does manifest the less glamorous consequences of substance abuse, and it has caused the ruin of many a Southern man, fictional (Faulkner's Mr. Compson) or real (Gregg Allman). While some Southern Rock songs glorify the pleasures of intoxication, either by the more traditional means of alcohol or by more modern means via drugs such as marijuana, several songs lament the addiction. Three songs that poignantly address addiction are Lynyrd

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<sup>24</sup> It is interesting to note how closely Charlie Daniel's parody of *Easy Rider* treats physical isolation. His protagonist is also geographically isolated when he finds himself in the alien world of Mississippi just as Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda's characters find themselves lost in rural California under similar circumstances.

Skynyrd's "That Smell" and "The Needle and the Spoon" and Molly Hatchet's "Whiskey Man."

Too often, Southern Rock musicians lived the lives they sang about with regard to Cash's hell uva fella tradition and placed themselves outside of mainstream society. This was especially true for Lynyrd Skynyrd and the band's lead singer, Ronnie Van Zant. Before the release of the hit single "That Smell" off 1977's *Street Survivors* album, Lynyrd Skynyrd had taken a long rest from years of near constant touring and Rimbaudian lifestyles. During this hiatus, the band, especially Ronnie Van Zant, had time to reflect on the emptiness and dangers of their decadence. They began "cleaning up." Ronnie Van Zant was reported to have drunk only on occasion, and only beer at that, started jogging two miles per day and was on a high protein diet (Brant 177 & 180). As a result of newly found temperance, Van Zant and Allen Collins wrote and sang about the dangers of excessive substance abuse.

Whiskey bottles, and brand new cars  
Oak tree you're in my way  
There's too much coke and too much smoke  
Look what's going on inside you

[chorus]  
Oooh that smell  
Can't you smell that smell  
Oooh that smell

The smell of death surrounds you

Angel of darkness is upon you  
Stuck a needle in your arm  
So take another toke, have a blow for your nose  
One more drink fool would drown you

[chorus]

Now they call you prince charming  
Can't speak a word when you're full of ludes  
Say you'll be alright come tomorrow

But tomorrow might not be here for you . . . .  
(Lynyrd Skynyrd, "That Smell")

The fairly comprehensive pharmacopeia of intoxicating substances referenced in "That Smell" is a warning to others via a classic appeal to experience. The substance abuse is a testament to the durability and toughness of those who used them to excess and overcame their addictions. As Ownby points out, "Drama came in the suggestion that the singers [and by proxy the characters in their songs] had looked the worst effects of heroin and cocaine in the face and overcome them" (375).

Ownby's contention is further supported when one considers a live version of "That Smell" from Lynyrd Skynyrd's 1980 *Gold Double Platinum* album when Ronnie Van Zant adlibs in "You know I've been there before." So, there are more than empty warnings about the dangers of addiction present in the music. Even though addiction is not addressed by Cash, the ability to overcome such a horrible plight can be interpreted as another example of the independent toughness of the Southern male. In a modern reformulation, Cash's Southern male is so tough that he can conquer alone even the most insidious of foes.

Similarly, Lynyrd Skynyrd's "The Needle and the Spoon" by Ronnie Van Zant and Allen Collins makes an even grimmer reference to addiction. This song is wholly

devoted to intravenous heroin abuse, which is the drug and its form of use considered most dangerous in the 1970s and even today.

Thirty days, lord and thirty nights  
I'm comin' home on an airplane flight  
Mama waitin' at the ticket line  
Tell me son why do you stand there cryin'

[chorus]  
It was the needle and the spoon  
And a trip to the moon  
Took me away, took me away . . .

Lord, they're gonna bury you boy  
Don't mess with the needle  
Now I know, I know, I know.  
(Lynyrd Skynyrd, "The Needle and the Spoon")

Like "That Smell," the song relies on an alleged personal experience by Ronnie Van Zant with heroin and his independent conquering of addiction to relay a message of strength in a hell uva fella sense. This suggestion of personal conquest over heroin addiction may be somewhat a stretch of the truth because by most accounts Van Zant's drugs of choice were alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine ingested nasally (Brant 191). Whatever the truth may be, the point is clear. First, avoid anything too excess, especially hard drugs. Second, only a man of the intestinal fortitude that Cash described is strong enough to overcome these powerful addictive substances. Van Zant the person and Van Zant the protagonist of his songs, becomes an example of the toughness innate in Southern men. Those men who are aligned with Cash's hell uva fella tradition have the ability to conquer by themselves what would be hopeless addiction in other, lesser men through sheer will power. For

example, unlike other musicians of the era that had fatal experiences with drugs such as Janice Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, and Jim Morrison, the Southern male, through a will to power reminiscent of Nietzsche's *ubermensch* with an added regional flavor, can conquer his addictions.

Molly Hatchet, among many other notable Southern rock bands, addresses the evils of the Southern man's more traditional chemical nemesis in "Whiskey Man." It, like the two Lynyrd Skynyrd songs of similar theme, demonizes excessive substance abuse and proves the personal resilience of a true Southern man who overcomes alcohol, although probably only temporarily.

Hey whiskey man, you're running as hard as you can,  
You drink your whiskey too much more than you can stand.  
You have your highs, you have your lows,  
Nobody knows which way you go . . .

[chorus 2]

Whiskey man, don't you play that hand too long.  
Whiskey man, don't you play that hand too long.  
Hey don't you know,  
I use to be there myself,  
I tried to kick the habit, with nobody else's help.

I have my highs, I have my lows,  
But nobody knows which way I'll go.  
(Molly Hatchet, "Whiskey Man")

Excessive use of intoxicating substances, traditionally liquor, is a major component of Cash's hell uva fella tradition as manifested in 1970's Southern Rock. Many songs glorify drunken revelry and the licentious behaviors that invariably accompany it in classic orgiastic rock and roll fashion. That being said, many Southern Rock songs also

preach the inevitable detrimental consequences of this vice, but they tend to do so in a fashion that continues to exemplify the strength of the individual Southern male in his ability to conquer addiction.

Another aspect of Cash's hell uva fella stereotype of Southern masculinity involves amorous pursuits. In this area, Cash described his regional *ubermensch* as "lov[ing] harder than the next man" (52). Too often, however, these relationships, invariably heterosexual in orientation because homosexuality would be unthinkable, ended in lachrymose failure. Like its cousin country music, Southern Rock is filled with songs lamenting the loss of love. Oftentimes the lyrics and music are nearly indistinguishable from country music, proving that the genres are closely related. Usually, as is the case in the storyline of the Allman Brother's truncated lamentation "Whipping Post," the male protagonist has fallen victim to an evil Jezebel who has used him for monetary gain. Specifically, in this song, the female antagonist's hunger for money and infidelity compound his anguish by her becoming involved with a friend.

I been run down, I been lied to,  
I don't know why I let that mean woman make me a fool.  
She took all my money, wrecked my car.  
Now she's with one of my goodtime buddies,  
Theyre drinkin' in some crosstown bar.

[chorus]

Sometimes I feel, sometimes I feel,  
Like I been tied to the whipping post,  
Tied to the whipping post,  
Tied to the whipping post,  
Good Lord, I feel like I'm dyin.'  
(Allman Brothers Band, "Whipping Post")

It would seem that the loss of love and the ensuing heartache felt by the Southern male protagonist would refute characteristics necessary to the epitome of Southern masculinity as defined by Cash and expanded upon by Ownby, but that is not the case. It can be speculated by relating to the other characteristics of Cash's Southern male, and his penchant for short-lived, physically gratifying sexual encounters, that this relationship was the result of a furious tryst turned more serious by a woman wanting money. This woman's "love 'em and leave 'em" approach to relationships, despite her ultimate goal of monetary gain, is more akin to what is expected of a Southern male than a woman because of her lack of regard for the feelings of her partner. Further, if this was a tryst or not, the repeated notion of Southern male resilience comes into play as it did with Southern men with addiction problems. Their misery, no matter how bad or sincerely felt, is only temporary. The toughness of the individual Southern male will prevail as it allegedly does against all seemingly insurmountable problems. Directly referenced or not, the definition of Southern masculinity demands victory over emotional pain, as it does with all tribulations. Taking into account the conquering of psychological or emotional problems by Cash's Southern man as portrayed in other songs like those aforementioned ones that address addiction, it is evident that the morbidly depressed protagonist of "Whipping Post" will triumph. By following Cash's hell uva fella tradition, consciously or not, he will either be healed by the distance of time or through the comfort of another woman. One way or the other, the strong, lone, Southern man of Cash's tradition will prevail. He will fix his own problems, reasserting that Southern males and the South itself have no need for interlopers to fix their problems for them.

Another way the Southern male finds reprieve from loss in love is by simply leaving. This vagabond's solution to the problems is a common theme in Southern Rock, country music, and it is not without precedent in Southern culture. In the aftermath of the Civil War when the South was defeated spiritually and physically, males often found themselves with neither the economic means to provide for their families nor the psychological capacity to deal with their impoverished state. And above all things else, provision for family was a patriarchal duty ingrained in the Southern male psyche by decades of tradition. Faced with an inability to provide for family, the Southern male had no choice but to flee from the situation through three equally unproductive means: psychological escape through alcohol abuse somewhat like Faulkner's Jason Compson III, physical and eventual psychological escape via geographic relocation, or total escape through suicide to avoid the issue like Quentin Compson. Similar escapist responses were found throughout the United States during the Great Depression, but they persisted and became commonplace in the South as is supported by their continuation as a dominant theme in the regional music be it country or Southern Rock. This ironically titled era of economic stagnation found a sizeable portion of downtrodden males from across the United States, but especially from the hard hit region of the Cotton Belt, seeking relief by geographical relocation; it was the zenith of hoboism.

Freedom is a major characteristic of Cash's Southern masculinity, be it freedom of choice in such areas as occupation or freedom from incarceration.<sup>25</sup> The desire for freedom is both directly addressed in the music and illustrated via recurring symbolic

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<sup>25</sup> Incarceration, the woes of being in it and avoidance of it, are recurring themes in both Southern Rock and country music. For example, consider such songs as "Folsom Prison Blues," "Midnight Rider," or even Elvis Presley's "Jail House Rock" with their overt themes about prison.

imagery of cowboys, trains, and the itinerant life of a ramblin' man. All three are symbols frequently used in Southern Rock because of their association with personal independence and will be addressed at some length later. This freedom takes tangible forms such as avoiding incarceration or more abstract guises such as being free from emotional pain. Again, the Southern male's strength is proven by his ability to overcome pain in whatever form and by whatever means necessary, provided it is done independently of assistance from others.

Three songs, Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Tuesday's Gone," Blackfoot's Southern Rock meets heavy metal song "Train, Train," and the Marshall Tucker Band's "Can't You See," utilize train imagery as a means of escapism and thereby eventual conquest over emotional pain via geographical relocation. Lynyrd Skynyrd's song uses personification to ask the train (a thing, not a person) to provide him with escape from a woman that, for some unstated reason, the distraught protagonist feels he must geographically distance himself.

Train roll on, on down the line,  
Won't you please take me far away?  
Now I feel the wind blow outside my door,  
Means I'm leavin' my woman behind.  
Tuesday's gone with the wind.  
My woman's gone with the wind . . .

Train roll on many miles from my home,  
See, I'm riding my blues away.  
Tuesday, you see, she had to be free  
But somehow I've got to carry on . . . .  
(Lynyrd Skynyrd, "Tuesday's Gone")

The protagonist is aware that he will triumph over his depression and rebound to a normal state by solving the problem through avoidance. Further, in conquering his problem, he once again proves he is a resilient Southern man of Cash's definition. In the end, he is in total control of his life and needs no help from others, except the train.

Blackfoot's "Train Train" has a much less melancholy melody than do most Southern Rock songs that deal with loss and emotional pain. In fact, the music is as loud and aggressive as any produced by a pure heavy metal band such as the Texan metal band Pantera. As an interesting aside about the song, it begins with a harmonica solo, an instrument long associated with train-riding vagabonds, which increases in tempo before bursting into a thunderous guitar cannonade. The furious guitar cannonade continues as the lyrics are introduced to the music.

Oh, here it comes  
Well, train, train, take me on out of this town  
Train, train, Lord, take me on out of this town  
Well, that woman I'm in love with, Lord, she's Memphis bound  
Well, I'm leaving here, I'm just a raggedy hobo  
Lord, I'm leaving here, I'm just a raggedy hobo  
Well, that woman I'm in love with, Lord, she's got to go  
Well, goodbye pretty mama, get yourself a money man . . . .  
(Blackfoot, "Train, Train")

As is the case with "Tuesday's Gone," the protagonist chooses to abandon the source of his emotional malaise, a woman overly interested in monetary gain. Also, he directly refers to himself as a hobo. This alludes, once again, to issues of freedom that are so intertwined in Cash's hell uva fella tradition. Itinerancy, according to Ownby, is the ultimate form of freedom for Cash's Southern man because in such a state he is beholden

not to spouse, family, occupation or geographical area; he is responsible only for himself (Ownby 371).

A third song that addresses issues of loss of love, and that also uses train imagery, is the Marshall Tucker Band's "Can't You See." The protagonist seeks escape from the wiles of a woman of dubious character by taking up life on the tracks: "I'm gonna take a freight train down at the station, Lord I don't care where it goes . . ." (Marshall Tucker Band, "Can't You See"). But unlike the preceding two songs, the outcome appears much bleaker, even morbid. The protagonist alludes to solitary suicide: "[I am] Gonna climb me a mountain, the highest mountain, Lord. [I am] Gonna jump off, ain't nobody gonna know." In another, he alludes to pining away in some solitary grotto saying, "[I am] Gonna find me a hole in the wall. [I am] Gonna crawl inside and die." The protagonist considers these as two viable alternatives to geographical escape from "My lady, now a mean old woman, Lord, never told me goodbye" (Marshall Tucker Band, "Can't You See"). Despite the welcomed possibility of death as an escape, the protagonist still retains some degree of his Southern masculinity regardless of which route he chooses. One way or the other, he will independently overcome his woe, proving his strength in a perverse sense and achieve freedom even if that freedom is via his death.

Even though the issue is not directly addressed in this paper, the old Southern concept of being chivalrous towards women did not hold much sway with 1970's Southern Rock musicians. In fact, songs like Lynyrd Skynyrd's "I Ain't the One" and "What's Your Name" regard women as little more than sexual distractions. It can be postulated that this lack of chivalry stems from disdain for being dependent upon anyone. For example, "I Ain't the One" refers to the protagonist's denial of parenthood resulting

from a one night stand with a groupie. Further, as Ownby has noted, Southern Rock differs from country music in that it rarely mentions motherhood, an institution held sacred in older country songs and in Southern culture (372). In this way, Southern Rock deviates from the tenets of Southern masculinity with one notable exception, and that is Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Simple Man." This song upholds a tradition much older and different than that of Cash. It is a tradition that celebrates the virtues of a good home life and the moral lessons taught a young child by his mother in regards to becoming an upright Southern man. In this song, the mother tries to instill patience, simplicity, restraint, spirituality, and godliness in her young son.

Mama told me when I was young  
Come sit beside me, my only son  
And listen closely to what I say.  
And if you do this  
It will help you some sunny day  
Take your time . . . don't live too fast,  
Troubles will come and they will pass.  
Go find a woman and you'll find love,  
And don't forget son,  
There is someone up above.

[chorus]

And be a simple kind of man.  
Be something you love and understand.  
Be a simple kind of man.  
Won't you do this for me son,  
If you can?

Forget your lust for the rich man's gold  
All that you need is in your soul,  
And you can do this if you try.  
All that I want for you my son,

Is to be satisfied . . . .  
(Lynyrd Skynyrd, "Simple Man")

"Simple Man" is a melancholy and didactic song that is unique in the Southern Rock genre. It supports the ancient traditional values of the South such as the sanctity of home, motherhood, religion, simplicity, and restraint, which have no other place in 1970's Southern Rock (Ownby 373). The song advocates a more traditionally moral form of Southern masculinity that is deeply rooted in Protestant values handed down through generations of Southerners but rarely put into effect because of its difficult, if not impossible, moral standards. In those ways, the song is an aberration in a genre that, for the most part, carefully follows Cash's hell uva fella tradition in a modernized form with its antithetical values and independent stance on life for Southern males.

Here, I want to return to the topic of common allusions in Southern Rock, for the image of the cowboy recurs again and again in Southern Rock and is frequently employed in the next few songs. This use of cowboy/Western symbolism is somewhat ironic since Southern Rock generally maintains such a close identity to the region from which it was spawned. Despite the irony, Ownby successfully argues that "Probably the clearest way Southern Rock musicians confronted issues of their heritage and tried to live up to its most confrontational side lay in their reshaping of the image of the cowboy" (377). He cites historian Bill Malone's premise that the images of the cowboy and mountaineer symbolize fearless freedom and independence that once were necessary and distinctly manly traits required for frontier survival (377). Even though musicians from other rock genres used cowboy/Western symbolism on occasion, Southern Rock

musicians ubiquitously used that symbolism in some form during the 1970s. For example, many of the musicians wore cowboy hats and other Western accoutrements and/or used the image on their album covers. This rustic symbol of freedom and toughness embodied by cowboy imagery is in direct line with Cash's hell uva fella; however, there were some modifications made by Southern Rock bands during the 1970s. While Ownby does recognize the use of the country/Western trope in Southern Rock, he overlooks its primary utilization by the bands to symbolize personal freedom and independence. Ownby insists the symbols were used to sanitize the racial violence so prevalent between whites and blacks in the South during the decades prior to, and largely through, the 1970s. However, he does accurately note the change in their physical appearance. The cowboys depicted in Southern Rock of the 1970s were not smiling and singing, non-lethal Gene Autrey types, but rather were sinister-looking outlaws always poised for mortal combat over the slightest provocation.

As Ownby attempts to explain why this rougher, meaner version of the cowboy was embraced by Southern Rock musicians in the 1970s, he speculates that "the violence represented by the cowboy was an appealingly safe form of violence for the late 1960s and 1970s" (378). He further argues that these figures were largely the product of distorted imaginations so that [Southern Rock musicians] "could forget the most memorable recent scenes of white men doing state-sanctioned violence to African-American men, women, and children and replace them with images of noble white men protecting their honor through courageous individual action" (Ownby 378). His explanation for Southern Rock musicians' fascination with cowboys seems too closely allied to racial components of Cash's hell uva fella tradition and not enough with

the ubiquitous notion of freedom and independence. While the racial components may be true, music that speaks to the contrary by Lynyrd Skynyrd and others must be considered. As I have argued earlier, the degree of racial tolerance in Southern Rock remains questionable, but the solution is found in the individual's perception of what constitutes racial tolerance. For this reason, it is plausible to contend that the cowboy image utilized by these musicians was employed both as an icon of freedom and possibly as a means to gloss over the more unglamorous aspects of recent Southern history during the tumultuous Civil Rights Era.

Whatever the answer may be regarding the reasons for the use of cowboy imagery in Southern Rock, its copious employment by the groups is undeniable. Two songs solely dedicated to the cowboy/Western way of life are the Marshall Tucker Band's "Fire on the Mountain" and the Outlaw's "Ghost Riders." "Fire on the Mountain" is a narrative of epic proportions in content but not in length. It is the tale of a nineteenth-century Carolina native who is smitten with gold fever and emigrates with his family out West during a perilous six month journey. Once they arrive at their unspecified Western mining boomtown, the narrator finds little more in the gold prospecting industry than futile toil, drunkenness, insatiable sexual vice, and ultimately his own death: "Shot down in cold blood by a gun that carried fame, all for a useless and no good worthless claim" (Marshall Tucker Band, "Fire on the Mountain").

Judging by the lyrical content of "Fire on the Mountain," this Southern male protagonist turns Western gold prospector for several reasons. First, it is safe to assume that he genuinely wants and expects a better life for himself and his family. Second, he finds freedom in the sheer movement, not unlike hobos or rambling men, because he is

not tied to anything other than his family which he controls. Third, there is freedom to be found in earning a living, hopefully a lucrative one, by being dependent on no one other than himself. Finally, he was in a frontier environment where law enforcement was almost nonexistent, and a man engaged not in some sanitized courtroom battle when he was wronged, but in a bloody trial by battle where masculine strength decided the outcome. This preference for personal independence and freedom is directly related to Cash's observation that Southern males relish being independent (371). Regardless of the morbid outcome of his decision to move west, the narrator achieved his goal of personal freedom on at least three levels, and that is a primary goal of a hell uva a fella who feels constrained.

The Outlaw's "Ghost Riders" is a song also replete with cowboy/Western images, and even has a chorus of "Yipie I ay Yipie I oh," but it is quite different from "Fire on the Mountain" in verse and music. It is both ghost story and a homily sung in cowboy vernacular with a moral twist that tells the tale of a lone "cowpoke" who encounters a "devil herd [of cattle]" being pursued forever across space and time by a gang of cowboy specters damned to this Sisyphean endeavor as punishment for their sinful, earthly lives (Outlaws, "Ghost Riders"). The imagery of both cattle and cowboy is frightening, as is the haunting musical score, and these scare tactics are used to infuse in both the cowpoke and listener the moral point of the song:

. . . Their brands were still on fire and their hooves were made of steel  
Their horns were black and shiny and their hot breath he could feel  
A bolt of fear went through him as they thundered through the sky  
He saw the riders coming hard . . . and he heard their mournful cry

[chorus]  
Yipi I ay Yipie I oh  
Ghost riders in the sky.

Their faces is gaunt their eyes were blurred their shirts all soaked  
with sweat  
They're ridin' hard to catch that herd but they ain't caught 'em yet  
'Cause they've got to ride forever in the range up in the sky  
On horses snorting fire as they ride hard hear them cry

[chorus]  
The riders leaned on by him he heard one call his name  
If you want to save your soul from hell a riding on our range

Then cow-boy change your ways today or with us you will ride  
Tryin' to catch this devil herd . . . a-cross these endless  
skies. (Outlaws, "Ghost Riders")

Like many Southern Rock songs, the moral instruction offered to the lone cowboy by these phantom riders concerns the consequences of being a hell uva fella. Analogous to the ill-advised quest of Goethe's Dr. Faustus for ultimate knowledge, aspiring to reach the pinnacle of Southern masculinity in life is not without its downside, for the wages of such sin is death and damnation. The only way to avoid these ghostly cowboys' perdition is to repent and "change your ways" (Outlaws, "Ghost Riders"). Therefore, even though the characters in this haunted homily exhibit many traits of Cash's hell uva fella through implication, the song itself does not embrace the lifestyle, especially its radical individualism.

Cowboy/Western imagery is a trope frequently employed in 1970's Southern Rock. While there is some contention over its ramifications, it is undeniable that it conveys a sense of freedom and independence so vital to Cash's hell uva fella definition of Southern manhood. As Ownby has pointed out, but not in regards to cowboy imagery,

freedom and independence are foremost in the commandments for this very accurate stereotype of Southern masculinity as portrayed in Southern Rock (371).

As this study moves towards its end, one song categorized as Southern Rock serves as a capstone because of its celebration of the South and Southern Rock. The Charlie Daniels Band's 1975 hit "The South's Gonna Do It Again" from the *Fire on the Mountain* album is an anthem that celebrates Southern Rock itself. It is a lyrical catalog of then-contemporary Southern Rock musicians, ironically written and performed by a band often associated with country music rather than Southern Rock. In further irony, its music is not really of the Southern Rock genre, but it is set to a harmony that mixes Texas swing, African-American Blues, a bit of New Orleans jazz, and a country music fiddle solo (Ownby 369). Further, the song's chorus demands that its intended audience of Southerners, "Be proud to a rebel 'cause the South's gonna do it again" (CharlieDaniels Band, "The South's Gonna Do It Again"). As Ownby asks in the introduction of an article on the subject of male masculinity and Southern Rock, "What was it they wanted the South to do again? What traditions were worth upholding and reliving? Were they going to secede again? Fight again?" and finally with a degree of unwarranted smugness asks, "Lose again?" (369). This distinctly male musical movement, Southern Rock, was rebelling against the status quo in a modernized version of Cash's hell uva fella tradition. In some ways this song is more the *piece de resistance* of the genre than Lynyrd Skynyrd's renowned tribute to the late Duane Allman, the unforgettable (at least among Southern Rock aficionados) "Freebird," as other critics would argue (Brant 116). The song neatly encapsulates Southern male pride via a tribute to many of the bands that sang about hubris and lived it in the 1970s.

Well the train to Grinder's Switch is runnin' right on time  
And the Tucker boys are cookin' down in Caroline  
People down in Florida can't be still

When old Lynyrd Skynyrd's pickin' down in Jacksonville  
People down in Georgia come from near and far  
To hear Richard Betts pickin' on his red guitar

[Chorus]

So gather round gather round children  
Get down well just get down children  
Get loud well you can be loud and be proud  
And you can be proud here  
Be proud to a rebel 'cause the South's gonna do it again

Elvin Bishop's sittin' on a bale of hay  
He ain't good lookin' but he sure can play  
And there's ZZ Top and you can't forget  
That old brother Willie's getting' soakin' wet  
And all the good people down in Tennessee  
Are diggin' barefoot Jerry and the CDB . . . .  
(Charlie Daniels Band, "The South's Gonna Do It Again")

All the bands mentioned in "The South's Gonna Do It Again" have provided unique and lasting contributions to the genre of Southern Rock which in turn modified and reignited the concept of Southern male independence, as elucidated decades before by W.J. Cash in his seminal definition of the topic.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

Southern Rock as unique regional phenomenon was short-lived. As an internationally popular and commercially successful genre, in somewhat fickle Top-40 terms, it lasted barely a decade. Its influence, however, endures in the continued playing of its music on 1970's Rock Stations, album production and touring by many of the bands, and newer rock bands from the South such as Pantera, Jackyl, and Tesla, who were admittedly heavily influenced by their Southern Rock predecessors. These newer Southern Rock bands saw international popularity and commercial success well into the 1990s.

More important than its continued popularity and influence on a newer generation of musicians from the South is 1970's Southern Rock's perpetuation of the stereotype of Southern masculinity via transmogrification from an older generation steeped in the racism and cultural-backwardness of the pre-Civil Rights era across the transitional period of the 1970s and to Generation X and now their progeny. The perpetuation of this stereotype of the Southern male as being one of Cash's hell uva fellas may not necessarily be to the betterment of the South's portrayal in international eyes in the current days of receding regionalism and ubiquitous globalization, but it does play a major role in preserving traditional Southern characteristic of freedom both on personal and regional levels and their accompanying values via the ancient medium of bard and song.

To its detractors, Southern Rock is at best bad music about bad men. To its admirers, it is a musical genre that speaks of a people with a fiercely unique and complex regional heritage and continues to preserve some of the South's traditional masculine values such as personal independence. Perhaps the Texan metal band Pantera summed up the meaning of the hell uva fella tradition in Southern Rock best when they described themselves, and by association the entire genre, through the name of an album title *Cowboys from Hell*.

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