

Charles L. Hughes



COUNTRY
Soul

**Making Music and Making Race
IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH**

Country Soul

Country Soul

Making Music and Making Race in the American South

Charles L. Hughes

The University of North Carolina Press

Chapel Hill

This book was published with the assistance of the Fred W. Morrison Fund for Southern Studies of the University of North Carolina Press.

© 2015 The University of North Carolina Press

All rights reserved

Manufactured in the United States of America

Set in Miller by codeMantra, Inc.

The paper in this book meets the guidelines for permanence and durability of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council on Library Resources. The University of North Carolina Press has been a member of the Green Press Initiative since 2003.

Cover photograph: © Bill Carrier, API Photographers Inc., The Stax Collection, Memphis

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hughes, Charles L., 1982–

Country soul : making music and making race in the American South / Charles L. Hughes.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4696-2243-9 (cloth : alk. paper)—ISBN 978-1-4696-2244-6 (ebook) 1. Popular music—Alabama—Muscle Shoals—1961–1970—History and criticism. 2. Popular music—Tennessee—Memphis—1961–1970—History and criticism. 3. Popular music—Tennessee—Nashville—1961–1970—History and criticism. 4. Popular music—Alabama—Muscle Shoals—1971–1980—History and criticism. 5. Popular music—Tennessee—Memphis—1971–1980—History and criticism. 6. Popular music—Tennessee—Nashville—1971–1980—History and criticism. 7. Soul music—Alabama—Muscle Shoals—History and criticism. 8. Soul music—Tennessee—Memphis—History and criticism. 9. Country music—Tennessee—Nashville—History and criticism. 10. Popular music—Southern states—History and criticism. 11. Music and race—Southern states. I. Title.

ML3477.H84 2015

781.642089'00976—dc23

2014028957

For my mother,
LEE ANN HUGHES,
1948–1997

Contents

[INTRODUCTION / There's a Red-Neck in the Soul Band](#)

[1 / We Only Had This One Thing in Common: We Liked All Types of Music
The Birth of the Country-Soul Triangle](#)

[2 / I Got What I Got the Hard Way
The Music and Mythology of the Memphis Sound](#)

[3 / Selling Soul
Black Music and Black Power in Memphis](#)

[4 / Take the White Music and Make It Sound Black
The Muscle Shoals Sound in the 1970s](#)

[5 / Pride and Prejudice
Race and Country Music in the Era of Backlash](#)

[6 / The South's Gonna Do It Again
The Racial Politics of the New Southern Music of the 1970s](#)

[7 / Disco and Down Home Blues
Country and Soul at the End of the 1970s](#)

[CODA / On Accidental Racists
Interracial Friendship, Historical Memory, and the Country-Soul Triangle](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Notes](#)

[Bibliography](#)

[Index](#)

Illustrations

Rufus Thomas, 1954, [24](#)

Dan Penn and Rick Hall, early 1960s, [29](#)

Arthur Alexander, 1962, [30](#)

Joe Tex, 1966, [41](#)

Willie Mitchell, 1969, [48](#)

The Royal Spades, 1960, [50](#)

Musicians at Hernando's Hideaway, 1965, [52](#)

Estelle Axton, late 1970s, [54](#)

Sam & Dave session at Stax, 1966, [63](#)

Chips Moman, 1968, [69](#)

Wilson Pickett at FAME Studios, 1966, [76](#)

Deanie Parker, 1976, [86](#)

Stax billboard, early 1970s, [88](#)

Al Bell and NATRA award, 1970, [98](#)

The Staple Singers, 1972, [100](#)

Rick Hall, 1969, [108](#)

Candi Staton, 1969, [110](#)

George Jackson, 1976, [119](#)

The Fame Gang, 1969, [120](#)

Charley Pride, 1981, [135](#)

Swamp Dogg, *Cuffed, Collared & Tagged*, 1972, [146](#)

Joe South, 1971, [151](#)

Furry Lewis and Don Nix, early 1970s, [158](#)

Charlie Rich, Ron Alexenburg, and Billy Sherrill, 1973, [175](#)

Country Soul

Introduction: There's a Red-Neck in the Soul Band

In 1975 a black singer named Latimore released a single called “There’s a Red-Neck in the Soul Band.” Over a propulsive groove, Latimore tells the story of a visit to a “club in the ghetto” where a large audience of African American fans have gathered. Latimore’s protagonist asks one clubgoer why the crowd is so big and receives a simple answer: “There’s a red-neck in the soul band [and] he’s gettin’ down.” When the protagonist finally gets inside the crowded club, he is surprised to see “a tall, skinny white boy” playing guitar with the otherwise all-black ensemble. Latimore adopts a twangy country accent when relating the white guitarist’s words to the audience: “Every time I start to playing this ol’ guitar, I get a funny feelin’ and—by God—I start wonderin’ about my own family tree.” As the record fades, Latimore offers a simple moral to his story: “It makes no difference what color you are, when the spirit hits you, you’ve got to move!”¹ It was only a minor hit, but “There’s a Red-Neck in the Soul Band” illuminates one of the most important chapters in U.S. cultural history.²

Latimore had good reason to think that listeners would understand the racial surprise at the core of his song. In the 1960s and 1970s, nothing symbolized the rift between white and black in the United States more than the musical genres of country and soul. Journalists and scholars presented country as the authentic voice of working-class whites and celebrated soul as the aesthetic and economic property of African Americans. Politicians and activists described country as the soundtrack of white conservative backlash to the civil rights and Black Power movements heralded by soul. Record labels, radio stations, and retailers used this language as a central part of their promotional strategies, tailoring country and soul releases to racially specific market segments. Listeners also embraced the dichotomy, and the supposed divide between the two genres became the basis for activism and even violent conflict from Mississippi to Vietnam. To this day, whether in the pages of political journalism or on the stages of *American Idol*, country and soul remain ubiquitous markers of racial difference.

Despite these perceptions, the two genres have shared roots. Not only did each draw from the same musical lineage, but they were intimately connected throughout the southern recording industry in this period. Country and soul records were made by the same people, recorded in the same places, and released by the same record companies. Indeed, even as the genres became opposites in the national consciousness, they were inextricably linked on the production level.

The key players in this process were the integrated cadre of studio players, songwriters, record producers, and executives who built the southern recording industry. This book tells their stories. It specifically explores the activities of musicians in Memphis and Nashville, Tennessee, and Muscle Shoals, Alabama, an interconnected recording economy

that I term the “country-soul triangle.”³ In the 1960s and 1970s, the musicians who worked in this triangle produced a vast catalog of popular and acclaimed recordings that brought international renown to studios like Stax and FAME and made each city’s signature “sound” a marker of quality and authenticity. The musicians won accolades from the national music industry, which heralded them as exemplars of professionalism and versatility, and from local leaders who championed them as crucial to their respective communities. Triangle musicians created hits for everyone from Bob Dylan to Bob Marley, but they were most identified with country, soul, and their musical hybrids. The styles and the people who created them traveled between the recording studios of Memphis, Muscle Shoals, and Nashville, making the region a center for this renaissance in U.S. popular culture. Backing up everyone from Aretha Franklin to Hank Williams Jr., the musicians of the country-soul triangle produced much of the period’s most enduring and relevant music.⁴

They also became a favorite metaphor for the contested state of the South in this turbulent era. Politicians, writers, and the business community pointed to the triangle’s commercial boom, cross-racial sound, and integrated studios as a sign of southern economic renaissance and social progress. But they also exploited the boundaries between country and soul by heralding them as oppositional expressions of racial authenticity and political purity. This seeming paradox defined a broader societal uncertainty about the continuing tension between interracial cooperation and racial division, which became the dominant debate in U.S. racial politics in the era of civil rights, Black Power, and white backlash. The relationship between country and soul was the South—and the United States—in microcosm.

The triangle’s musicians stood at the center of this potent symbolism. They were the first to promote their recordings as symbols of integration by championing the interracialism of the “Memphis sound” or the transgressive potential of black country artists like Charley Pride and white soul singers like the Box Tops. Conversely, they capitalized on polarization by making and marketing records that appealed to a racially divided audience, whether that meant the Black Power soul of the Staple Singers or the backlash country of Merle Haggard. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, triangle musicians both challenged and reinforced the racial perceptions surrounding their music and made little attempt to reconcile the contradiction. Maintaining that contradiction, in fact, was the most important part of their job.

Through their work, the musicians of the country-soul triangle became pivotal actors in the larger trajectory of U.S. racial politics in the twentieth century. Both literally and figuratively, they produced the cultural markers of race that defined this watershed moment and thus reshaped the ways people in the United States (and internationally) understood and articulated the supposed similarities and differences between white and black. “There’s a Red-Neck in the Soul Band” is a singular encapsulation of how the

musicians who created country and soul both reflected and directed the era's cultural narratives.

Soul's popularization in the 1960s and 1970s depended on the music's simultaneous promotion as the expression of both the ideals of integration and an assertively black identity. Triangle musicians promoted the soul music that emerged from southern studios as a symbol of interracial goodwill. At the same time, soul's importance to civil rights and Black Power activism and conceptions of modern blackness led the musicians to claim their work as a forceful demonstration of racial advancement.⁵ This was particularly true in the second half of the 1960s, when "soul" became an accepted synonym (or even replacement) for the earlier "R&B" genre designation and a broader signifier for politicized blackness. Some nationalists dismissed soul music as the compromised commercialization of authentic black traditions, but a larger group claimed the genre as the apex of black culture's longer journey from cultural marginalization and economic appropriation to social acceptance and commercial prominence. To this day, "soul" remains an important keyword for discussions of historical and contemporary blackness as an aesthetic philosophy and sociopolitical identity.⁶

A large part of soul's cultural resonance in these years derived from its positioning in opposition to country.⁷ Country music had long been considered a symbol of whiteness, but the association became particularly poignant in the late 1960s. This largely resulted from what Diane Pecknold describes as country's emergence as "a dominant metaphor for ... the collapse of the New Deal order" and as the soundtrack for "New Right" conservatism, which took much of its language and constituency from the backlash to the civil rights movement.⁸ But despite the powerful association between country music and white conservatism, triangle musicians demonstrated that the rhetoric around country was just as racially complicated as the one surrounding soul. As they asserted country as the voice of traditional southern whiteness, they also promoted it as the forward-thinking soundtrack of the modern South. Central to this assertion of country's progressivism was its overlaps with soul.⁹ Even as artists and executives foregrounded the music's race-specific appeal, they used soul sounds—even disco—and personnel to suggest that country was the culturally progressive soundtrack for a reinvigorated "New South." Musicians, politicians, writers, and many fans continue to use country music and the concept of "country" to denote a brand of white southernness that toggles between tradition and redefinition.¹⁰

The musicians of the country-soul triangle played a complex and significant role in the rise of country and soul as musical genres and cultural symbols, but—despite their centrality—no scholar has fully analyzed their experiences. Most discussions of the relationship between black and white musicians in the 1960s and 1970s South have focused on soul music and presented integrated soul studios as an analogy for the national civil rights movement. Numerous writers—most influentially Peter Guralnick, in his

compelling 1986 book *Sweet Soul Music*—have celebrated these studios as embodiments of what Guralnick calls a “Southern dream of freedom” that paralleled the national push for integration and countered the region’s ugly legacy of white supremacy.¹¹ According to Guralnick and his followers, the harmony ended in the late 1960s when the rise of Black Power and the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis intruded on the studios and destroyed the earlier spirit of cooperation, just as those events ruptured the interracialism of the early civil rights movement. This led to the commercial and cultural decline of southern soul, which was finally destroyed by the rise of disco and other northern-associated forms in the late 1970s.

This story is usually buttressed by two connected assertions. The first is that southern soul helped redeem the white South from its racist past. Barney Hoskyns claims that southern soul “turned young whites against their own backgrounds of bigotry and prejudice,” and white musicians like Steve Cropper and Dan Penn have become the most commonly cited embodiments of the “Southern dream of freedom.”¹² (Guralnick even calls Dan Penn “the secret hero” of the southern soul story.)¹³ The second is that southern studios were a transcendent space in which racial conflict or even identity did not exist, what Vron Ware and Les Back call “a kind of innocent non-racialized world [that] was lived and realized in sound.”¹⁴ The musical hybrids produced in these studios—which Brian Ward provocatively calls “mulatto” music—affirm their status as prophetic sites of interracial collaboration in an otherwise hostile environment.¹⁵ At least, that is, until everything supposedly collapsed in the late 1960s.

This narrative remains the standard interpretation of integrated southern music and has become a crucial element to larger appreciations of the South in the 1960s and 1970s. Unfortunately, it is both inaccurate and misleading. Interracial ensembles continued to have great success in the country-soul triangle through the 1970s, and some studios—like Stax, FAME, and Muscle Shoals Sound—had their greatest success after 1968. Additionally, while southern soul declined in popularity by the end of the 1970s, it never disappeared. Finally, this narrative pays little attention to the complex role that country music and the Nashville recording industry played in this history, despite the fact that triangle soul musicians—both black and white—played a crucial part in developing country’s sound and significance in the 1960s and 1970s.

These deficiencies are closely linked to a more troubling problem: the “Southern dream of freedom” fundamentally misrepresents how race worked in the country-soul triangle. Despite the utopian claims, African American musicians consistently objected to mistreatment from whites and worked to equalize the racial dynamics of southern studios from the very beginning. It was never an “innocent non-racialized world,” at least not for the black musicians. This fiction is made more harmful by the fact that it implicitly credits whites with the racial breakthrough and blames African Americans for destroying the integrated magic. White players are congratulated for having the courage and vision to

play soul music with black people, while African Americans get scolded for abandoning these sympathetic whites in favor of divisive racialist politics. A full examination of the country-soul triangle reveals a richer and more complicated story.¹⁶

Such an examination requires a new approach, so I analyze triangle musicians as workers and their studios as working environments. I choose this labor-based analysis—still relatively uncommon in studies of popular music and essentially unprecedented in studies of country and soul—because it significantly demystifies a story that has been routinely romanticized.¹⁷ Many writers describe triangle musicians as vessels for authentic racial identity and the “Southern dream of freedom,” but the musicians defined themselves as versatile professionals whose extensive training and hard work allowed them to play a wide variety of music, and to work across racial lines. They were craftspeople, not conduits; or, as Elijah Wald describes early blues performers, “pros, not primitives.”¹⁸ Over their careers, the triangle’s musicians literally and figuratively “performed” whatever music and racial symbolism were economically and politically advantageous at the moment.¹⁹

Contrary to ill-fitting civil rights movement analogies, the experience of race in the country-soul triangle was inextricably linked to the work of making records. Labor historians have shown how other types of integrated workplaces possess a site-specific set of racial expectations and opportunities that do not necessarily correspond to broader societal codes or political trends. Writing of an integrated auto plant, for example, Kevin Boyle describes a “volatile mix” of “social groups battling over the boundaries of proper behavior” and “individual workers [carving] out places for themselves.” These contests led to “negotiations” that “overlapped, crisscrossed, and collided” and produced moments of both collaboration and conflict.²⁰ The recording studios of the country-soul triangle exhibited just such complexity, and exploring them through this lens helps release them from the limitations of the traditional civil rights narrative.²¹

At the same time, though, triangle studios differed from most other integrated workplaces in one key respect. They were interracial work environments that helped produce the era’s racial divide. Country and soul became internationally recognized shorthand for the distance between white and black, so the “negotiations” between the white and black musicians who made them offer a crucial addition to our understanding of integrated laboring in the United States. This work follows the example of “There’s a Red-Neck in the Soul Band,” in which Latimore explores the complexities of racial identity in the United States by telling a story about musicians at work.

Perhaps the most important benefit of a labor-based approach is that it illustrates that the racial partnership at the heart of the country-soul triangle was fundamentally unequal. There is an assumption in much of the scholarship on the 1960s and 1970s that the integration of southern studios was synonymous with racial equality, or even that the fact that black and white musicians worked together in the South must have meant that racial

divisions did not exist in musical spaces. Still, as Brian Ward notes, “power relationships within the recording and broadcasting industries in the South were still defined along essentially racial lines.”²² The triangle’s musicians understood that records could be made in an interracial context and still represent a society that was separate and unequal.²³

It had been this way since the beginning of the U.S. recording business in the early 1900s, when—as Karl Hagstrom Miller describes—industry leaders created and policed a “musical color line.” This “musical color line” paralleled the rise of Jim Crow segregation and established a “firm correlation between racialized music and racialized bodies” that structured the subsequent recording industry.²⁴ During this period white southerners were labeled “hillbilly” or “old-time” regardless of their musical influences, while black southerners of all stylistic stripes got clumped together under the category of “race music.” Country and soul were the direct descendants of those two genres, and they became the latest chapter in a commercial environment where—as Miller puts it—“black people performed black music and white people performed white music.”²⁵ Triangle musicians, even (or perhaps particularly) those who worked in integrated studios and pursued musical crossover, structured their work around their recognition of this “musical color line.”

Of course, it was far easier to transcend the “musical color line” if you were white. In the 1960s and 1970s, as in earlier eras, white musicians had greater opportunities to move into black-identified styles like soul than their African American colleagues did with white-identified genres, especially country. Additionally, even though they defied segregation in important ways, some black musicians in Memphis, Muscle Shoals, and Nashville questioned or even resisted the entry of whites into black-identified musical spaces. African Americans did not have the same access to white-controlled environments; and, even in nominally “black” musical spaces, they often lost professional opportunities to their white counterparts. This disparity fueled the racial tensions that existed throughout southern studios. Indeed, the apparent interracialism of the country-soul triangle became an ironic illustration of racial privilege.

This privilege ultimately defined the triangle’s larger historical trajectory. By the 1970s, musicians in Memphis, Muscle Shoals, and Nashville used soul music to enrich—both creatively and financially—white people, white-owned businesses, and white-identified genres. Nashville musicians incorporated soul into country as a means of maintaining relevance and expanding profitability. And, although the “Memphis sound” and “Muscle Shoals sound” had roots with black artists, white performers became increasingly important sources of revenue and notoriety for studios in the two cities. As Muscle Shoals producer Rick Hall said, the triangle’s musicians became famous for “[taking] the white music, and [making] it sound black,” and an astonishing number of white performers came to the area to add some soul to their recordings.²⁶ This process provoked controversies over racial appropriation and accompanied a larger departure of black performers from

triangle studios. Ultimately, this transition provoked the decline in southern soul as much as the popularization of disco and had a far greater effect than the rise of Black Power.

The marginalization of African American musicians has been reiterated in much of the historical appreciation of Memphis, Muscle Shoals, and Nashville in the 1960s and 1970s. Particularly in post-Guralnick discussions of integrated southern soul, but also in much of the country literature, the focus has been on white musicians. This has rendered many of their black colleagues passive or secondary participants in the broader story of musical innovation and cultural progress. Whites like Steve Cropper, Rick Hall, Willie Nelson, Dan Penn, and others (almost always male) are credited with developing innovative musical blends that demonstrated their racial open-mindedness and thus ultimately helped to liberate the South and nation. On the flipside, black southerners are mischaracterized as the authentic voices who helped whites to become better people in the 1960s and then conveniently faded into the background by the end of the next decade.

Latimore's "There's a Red-Neck in the Soul Band" again provides a perfect encapsulation. In the late 1970s, country musicians used the sounds and symbols of soul music to achieve unprecedented levels of national success while soul artists like Latimore faced a shrinking audience and a growing association with the past. And, just as the black band offers the white guitarist a shot at liberation in the song, the complexity of the larger history has been rewritten as a story of white accomplishment through black assistance. Latimore presents his story as a celebratory moment of musical integration, but it actually reflects the racial ambivalence that lay at the core of the country-soul triangle.

I centralize this ambivalence throughout this work. I begin in chapter 1 by tracing the triangle's development through the experiences of Arthur Alexander, a black singer-songwriter who launched the Muscle Shoals recording scene and became one of the earliest southern soul stars. Alexander and the white musicians at FAME—most notably producer and studio owner Rick Hall—understood that their success required them to literally perform a racial contradiction. They created a cross-racial blend of styles that reflected the many sounds they learned from years of listening and live performance, but they also understood that these genres—particularly country and soul—remained separated by the "musical color line" that structured the South's recording industry. In other words, Alexander and the FAME musicians made records that appealed to a diverse audience but marketed them in ways that affirmed the ideology of racial division. Additionally, though they were integrated in the studio, Alexander faced racial discrimination both in Muscle Shoals and later in Nashville, while Rick Hall and the white musicians at FAME used their success with Alexander to attract other black artists to Muscle Shoals. The creation and consequences of Arthur Alexander's "You Better Move On" offer a potent crystallization of the country-soul triangle's central dynamics.

Southern soul owed much of its popularity to the mid-1960s emergence of the "Memphis sound," a phenomenon that I discuss in chapter 2. From the beginning, the

Memphis sound was a seeming incongruity. Writers and fans heralded it as the era's "blackest" pop music even as they also credited it to the interracial mix of black and white musicians (and of country and soul) in Memphis and other southern cities. By the end of the decade, the Memphis sound became an internationally recognized symbol of racial progress and reconciliation. In fact, despite its black roots, the larger appreciation of the Memphis sound as both sound and ideology was increasingly framed around its redemptive effect on white people. This erasure of African Americans paralleled a broader distortion in which southern recording studios became known as colorless utopias that were free from racial conflict. This notion remains central to the historical presentation of southern soul and denies a more complex history that can only be revealed by understanding how the Memphis sound developed as both music and mythology.²⁷

Many of the deeper racial tensions obscured by the idea of the Memphis sound came to a boil in the late 1960s, when southern soul became both a symbol and an instrument of the Black Power movement. Chapter 3 charts this process, focusing specifically on the activities of Stax Records in Memphis. During this period, Stax—under the leadership of new chairman Al Bell—amplified the musical and lyrical “blackness” of its recordings, used nationalist rhetoric in its advertisements and public statements, and allied with African American political organizations in order to force the issue of racial disparity in the music business. This led to substantive changes in the label’s musical approach and internal hierarchy. It also angered some of the label’s white staff members and challenged Stax’s long-standing image as a site of integration. Even as they promoted Black Power, though, Bell and others at Stax never abandoned the integrationist discourse of the Memphis sound, nor did they stop using white musicians. In fact, under Bell’s leadership, many of Stax’s biggest sessions took place with an all-white band in Muscle Shoals. The story of Stax Records in these years reveals the multifaceted role of Black Power politics in soul music, the country-soul triangle, and the U.S. recording industry.

Black Power had a similarly complex effect on Muscle Shoals, a story that I take up in chapter 4. After a decade of successes that began with Arthur Alexander, the late 1960s saw an explosion in soul recordings at both of the city’s major studios, FAME and the newly opened Muscle Shoals Sound. The name of the latter studio coincided with the development of a “Muscle Shoals sound” as a corollary to its famed Memphis counterpart. The Muscle Shoals sound was similarly based on the ostensible enigma of authentically black soul recordings made by an integrated workforce. In the contentious Black Power years, the Muscle Shoals sound allowed white musicians in Muscle Shoals to assert their legitimacy within (and control of) the area’s soul scene. This not only structured their relationships with the numerous labels—including Atlantic, Capitol, and Stax—that sent black artists to record in Muscle Shoals in these years but also attracted a growing number of white pop, rock, and country artists, who came to FAME and Muscle Shoals Sound to make soul-influenced records. The most notable and infamous example of this is the white pop group the Osmonds, who recorded their controversial smash “One Bad Apple” at

FAME in 1971. By the mid-1970s, the primary beneficiaries of the Shoals' soulful style were white.

As soul became the soundtrack of Black Power, a related phenomenon took place in country music. In chapter 5, I examine the tight association between country and the racial backlash of the New Right. The Nashville-based industry allied with conservative politicians and causes in the hopes of making their music the soundtrack to the post-civil rights backlash that propelled Richard Nixon to the White House in 1968 and transformed U.S. politics. At the same time, Nashville's musicians continued using black-identified sounds and (occasionally) black personnel to craft their increasingly white-associated music. This tension played out vividly in the career of African American country superstar Charley Pride. Country's establishment as an expression of white identity took place in explicit opposition to soul's reputation as the voice of assertive blackness, which created a series of fascinating juxtapositions from the studios of Nashville and Muscle Shoals to the battlefields of Vietnam. These juxtapositions and their consequences form the basis of my analysis.

Country's association with racial backlash provoked a significant reaction among some white musicians and audience members. In chapter 6, I explore the development of three insurgent genres—"swamp music," "Outlaw country," and "southern rock"—that asserted their racial tolerance and cultural progressivism as an explicit alternative to country's conservatism and racial exclusivity. All three genres took creative inspiration (and sometimes had literal origins) in the studios of the country-soul triangle, and their artists foregrounded their love of soul music as part of their larger critique of the restrictions of Nashville. They became symbols of a musical New South renaissance that accompanied an economic boom and political resurgence. Still, the artists and audiences for the new southern genres were no more integrated than those of mainstream country; increasingly, the musical demonstration of post-civil rights southern progress had a white face. This had dual effects on African American musicians in the country-soul triangle: it resulted in a further loss of employment opportunities and framed their work as the nostalgic voice of the past. By the end of the 1970s, southern soul lost its cultural and economic cachet even as country stood at a period of unprecedented crossover. This moment is the topic of the final chapter.

As the Reagan era dawned, country and soul remained creatively and commercially connected throughout the triangle even as they diverged in cultural meaning in the larger United States. Chapter 7 completes the story. Country interpolated disco, the newest sound in black-identified music, to affirm the genre as the soundtrack of the modern South and changing nation. Southern soul, meanwhile, ended the decade as a primarily regional and heavily nostalgic music, with the visionary politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s replaced by a backward-looking focus on cultural tradition. Facing commercial decline and cultural irrelevance in the wake of disco, soul musicians turned to the past, celebrating—in the words of the period's most popular southern soul song—the "Down Home Blues"

of the black South's roots. Many of these recordings (including "Down Home Blues") were produced at Malaco Records, a Mississippi-based label that recruited many triangle soul veterans to join its personnel and marketed itself as the "last soul company." These diverging paths signaled broader shifts in southern lives and livelihoods in the 1980s, reflected changes in the cultural positions of black and white southerners, and demonstrated the continuing importance of the country-soul triangle in the U.S. cultural landscape. It thus offers a fitting place to close.

In "There's a Red-Neck in the Soul Band," Latimore and his collaborators needed just five minutes to illuminate this rich and complicated history. Unfortunately, I am neither as precise nor as concise, so it will take me a few hundred pages. To make matters worse, you surely cannot dance to mine. Despite these flaws, I hope the reader will bear with me.

One: We Only Had This One Thing in Common: We Liked All Types of Music

The Birth of the Country-Soul Triangle

Arthur Alexander loved country music. So when he stepped up to the microphone in a fledgling recording studio in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, in 1961 to record his composition “You Better Move On,” it made sense that the young singer brought a noticeable country flavor to his performance. He delivered the aching lyrics with a graceful and resonant twang that was complemented perfectly by the tasteful accompaniment of the young studio musicians who backed him. Along with the country influence, Alexander incorporated the current sounds coming from R&B, bringing the stately phrasing and subtly Latin rhythms of that era’s black pop artists into seamless dialogue with his more countrified influences. The studio players were awed by Alexander’s marriage of the two genres, as was Rick Hall, the session’s producer and owner of the small studio that bore the audacious name of FAME. Hall saw Alexander as a potential hit artist, and not just because of his prodigious talent and unique sound. Arthur Alexander was the first African American to work in the studio.

Hall and the white musicians at FAME saw Alexander’s blackness as a significant opportunity. For one thing, they were excited by the fact that after years of being influenced by black singers on radio and records, they would finally get to work with an actual African American. (The fact that he shared their broad tastes, incorporating country and pop sounds into his music, made him all the more interesting.) But they also recognized the commercial possibility represented by Alexander’s race. Hall and the FAME musicians believed that the singer’s hybrid sound and dark skin might simultaneously break him on the pop charts and resonate with the R&B audience that FAME’s all-white roster had not been able to access. Of course, they also knew that his blackness would make country stardom almost impossible, but they hoped that his country-influenced songwriting might win the favor of Nashville executives and lead to a profitable series of covers by (white) country artists. Their hopes were confirmed upon the record’s release. “You Better Move On” reached the pop Top 25, launching the Muscle Shoals recording scene and making Alexander into a prototype for the southern R&B and soul stars of the 1960s.

The creation of “You Better Move On” appears to affirm the historical presentation of southern soul as a space of interracial collaboration. Alexander’s work with the white musicians at FAME Studios demonstrates the cross-racial blending of music and personnel that has led many to use southern soul as a triumphant example of black-white collaboration in the 1960s. The record has frequently been cited as a key example of the way that the South’s recording studios became an oasis of friendship in the turbulent civil

rights era. Alexander's biographer, Richard Younger, even suggests that "if skin color was an issue on the streets, it never came into play" during Alexander's work in Muscle Shoals.¹ At the core of these presentations is the record's seamless musical blend of country and R&B.

But the hybrid sound of "You Better Move On" actually reveals that skin color was the *central* issue for Arthur Alexander and his colleagues at FAME. Even as the musicians synthesized country and R&B on record, the making and marketing of "You Better Move On" also reinforced these genres' importance to what Karl Hagstrom Miller calls "the musical color line." Developed in the early 1900s, this division erected both economic and ideological barriers between racially identified genres like country and R&B. Not only did black and white musicians work in separate and unequal music economies, but their music was presented as racially exclusive even when its origins or sound troubled that essentialism. The success of this musical color line in establishing the contours for the southern recording industry meant that country and R&B were ubiquitous icons of racial difference by the 1950s. Then, in the middle of that decade, the simultaneous rise of the civil rights movement and racially hybrid rock 'n' roll made the relationship between country and R&B into both metaphor and battleground for the nation's racial politics. With "You Better Move On," Alexander and his FAME colleagues entered this conversation.

They were prepared for this critical role by the balancing act they performed on a daily basis as working musicians. They demonstrated the fallacy of racially exclusive musical genres in their playing even as they marketed their recordings in a manner that confirmed their separation. And even as they worked interracial, Alexander's interactions with his white colleagues displayed many of the same inequities that characterized the rest of U.S. society. He played an uncomfortable role as the literal and figurative embodiment of blackness for the white musicians in Muscle Shoals, and his career stalled in the aftermath of "You Better Move On" in large part because he was unable to overcome the limitations of the "musical color line." Meanwhile, Rick Hall used Alexander's success to promote FAME Studios and its musicians as an integrated and country-influenced source of black R&B. Hall got rich while Alexander was left marginalized.

The racial complexity at the core of "You Better Move On" established the template for recording in Muscle Shoals and predicted the larger history of the country-soul triangle. In the coming years, the triangle's musicians mapped out the shared and divergent spaces between country and R&B (and later soul), negotiating the abstract politics of racialized sound and the tangible politics of a racialized workspace and marketplace. This forced them to engage the contradictions and manipulate the contours of the interracial spaces shared by black and white music and musicians. The story of "You Better Move On" illuminates the ways they succeeded and failed.

Like their counterparts throughout the country-soul triangle, Arthur Alexander, Rick Hall,

and the FAME musicians were born into a world where southern music symbolized the nation's larger racial divisions. As they matured, they witnessed and ultimately contributed to a series of changes in musical practice that forever altered the U.S. cultural landscape and provoked a vast expansion in the southern recording industry. In the mid-twentieth century, the expansion of radio and records transformed the way individuals in the South and elsewhere heard, bought, and made music. These transformations revolved around the relationship between racially identified musical genres, and they established the ideological and practical foundations for the country-soul triangle.

The person who provoked the first transformation is not a musician or writer but President Franklin D. Roosevelt. In the early 1930s, the Roosevelt administration chose the Muscle Shoals area—specifically the hydroelectric plant at the Wilson Dam—as a major site for the ambitious Rural Electrification Administration (REA), through which it hoped to bring electric power to the 90 percent of rural Americans (many living in the South) who had none as of 1930.² Resources poured into the region, and its population increased significantly. One new resident was Arthur Alexander's father, who moved to the Shoals in 1935 to work for the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), a hydroelectric project that became a primary REA engine. His son Arthur was born five years later, one of several TVA children who became contributors to the city's recording scene.³

But rural electrification's influence on Muscle Shoals music went far deeper than the employment provided by the TVA. In the 1930s and 1940s, the REA was a key part of a massive expansion of radio listenership throughout the southern United States. This led to new work for southern musicians and affirmed the importance of southern-identified genres like country and R&B on the national soundscape. In the 1930s and 1940s, a growing body of listeners heard an expanding variety of musical programming that simultaneously defied the supposed separations between musical categories, including "black" versus "white," and also reinforced them.⁴

Many in the national radio industry assumed that southern listeners like Arthur Alexander, Rick Hall, and their families would want to hear programs tailored to them, so they rushed to create programs that spotlighted the South. The primary beneficiaries were what were then called "hillbilly" and "race music," which had earlier been the twin catalysts of a record boom in the 1920s and now stood at the center of a second revolution in music consumption. Hillbilly—later renamed "country" in an effort to distance the genre from its culturally derided roots and identify it more broadly with rural America—received the greatest immediate boost thanks to the growth of "barn dance" programs like Nashville's Grand Ole Opry. Race music—which, as evidenced by its name, denoted less a specific set of musical characteristics than a general grouping of any style associated with African Americans—did not get anywhere near the boost of hillbilly/country, but black-identified styles also received greater exposure over the airwaves. At the same time, rural listeners blended these sounds with the various national pop styles of the day,

enjoying a wide variety of programming that defied the racially or regionally determined expectations of the national music industry.

These eclectic tastes and the exponential growth in radio listenership led to a vast expansion in professional opportunities for southern musicians. In the 1920s, during the initial hillbilly and race-music boom, the music industry was based almost entirely in the North. Record labels brought artists to record in northern cities or sent remote teams to record southerners in their home locales, while many musicians born in the South relocated to New York or Chicago to launch recording careers. Once there, they promoted themselves as authentic exponents of southern identity (as well as black or white identity) even as they used northern songwriters, musicians, and producers.⁵ By the 1940s, though, southern musicians could make money and reach a large audience in the South. In this new economy, eclecticism became a primary mark of professionalism. Musicians gained familiarity with a variety of different styles, and audiences expected live performers to perform a cross-generational, cross-regional, and cross-racial mixture of music. Arthur Alexander, Rick Hall, and others in the country-soul triangle grew up with this alchemical approach at the center of their musical consciousness.⁶

Still, this heterogeneous musical work—like the radio landscape itself—was structured by racial disparity. For one thing, most stations in the South and elsewhere kept black and white music segregated in their programming day. Programmers scheduled black-oriented shows in small segments of the broadcasting week, if at all, so many listeners had only one or two chances a week to hear gospel, jazz, or R&B. There were, of course, important exceptions to this, like Memphis's WDIA, which in 1949 became the first station in the United States to devote all of its programming to African American listeners.⁷ But the majority of radio stations gave black musicians a much smaller space than their white counterparts.

This disparity meant that many southern listeners gained far greater familiarity with country music than with black-identified styles, which helps explain how both black and white triangle musicians reacted to country music. African American musicians' love for country on the radio is often invoked as a sign of southern soul's uniquely cross-racial origins, but many black musicians admitted that this deep affinity was partly due to country's disproportionate presence on southern radio. "Growing up in the country," recalled southern soul singer Millie Jackson, "we didn't have black radio, so I've always been a country-rocker at heart."⁸ Conversely, the lack of black-identified musical programming helps explain the memories of southern whites who describe their introduction to black music as a wondrous epiphany that contrasted with or even cancelled out the country music and racial segregation of their childhoods. In this respect, even radio's liberatory aspects were themselves defined by racial exclusion.

The same tension between integration and segregation occurred on jukeboxes, which became increasingly common in the South during the 1930s and 1940s. Even though some

jukeboxes stocked both black and white records, many cleaved firmly along racial lines.⁹ In the wake of the Great Depression, when home phonograph and record sales dwindled to almost nothing, jukeboxes became the very lifeblood of the record business and the only way that many individuals—in the South and across the country—consistently heard recorded music. During World War II, a vinyl shortage halted most record production and further reinforced radio’s dominance. As the Depression subsided and the war ended, phonograph sales increased and ultimately surpassed the heights of the 1920s.

The ubiquitous presence of radio stations, coupled with increasing demand for home phonographs and records, led to the development of a new record industry in the South. In the 1940s and early 1950s, a linked network of studios, mail-order retailers, and independent labels opened across the southern states. Like radio, this new economy followed a paradoxical path when it came to the segregation of genre. Musicians created and sold records that combined their many interests into new and exciting syntheses that disrupted many of Jim Crow’s underlying assumptions about racial mixing. Moreover, they sometimes recorded this music in a racially integrated setting. But the most popular and significant products of the southern recording industry in these years—country and R&B—retained their broader resonance as symbols of racial difference.¹⁰

In the 1940s and 1950s, country music affirmed its close association with whiteness. Abandoning the hillbilly trappings of the early period, both in terms of image and sound, country artists updated their music and iconography to reflect newly popular versions of white southern “tradition” or myths of the “Old West.” New country variants like honky-tonk and Western swing offered a remixed version of these tropes, featuring singers with twangy voices and cowboy clothes delivering material that called back to the string-band traditions of hillbilly while also appealing to a modern national audience. Both honky-tonk and Western swing bore the clear influence of black (and Mexican) music, but country’s close association with whiteness only intensified in the postwar period.¹¹

At the same time, R&B (abbreviated from “rhythm and blues”) emerged in the late 1940s as a contemporary version of race music. The term, coined by *Billboard* writer Jerry Wexler, was specifically designed to provide a more dignified title for black-oriented records, and—like race music—R&B encompassed most of the secular music that was made and purchased by black people. It quickly became the dominant identifier for African American popular music in this period and a point of racial identification and pride. As rock ’n’ roll artist Little Richard put it, “R&B stood for ‘real black.’”¹² Of course, the R&B business was dominated by institutions controlled by white people, many of whom had initially been interested in marketing music by white artists. One of the most important of these institutions was the Nashville radio station WLAC.

WLAC had broadcast country and pop since the 1930s but took a new direction in 1946 thanks to a group of local black college students. They called deejay Gene Nobles during his regular late-night show and asked him to play “some boogie, or some blues.” He

agreed and asked them to bring some records down to the station, since WLAC did not have any. The response to these records was overwhelming and the station manager agreed to Nobles's request to change the show's format.¹³ The only catch was that Nobles had to find his own sponsorship, so he partnered with Randy Wood, the white owner of a small Tennessee mail-order record retailer.

Like WLAC, Randy Wood started with white artists. He had not intended to be in the music business when he returned to his hometown of Gallatin, Tennessee, after serving in World War II. He opened an electronics store and put a few records in the back as an accessory to his selection of phonograph equipment, but the music soon outsold his more expensive items.¹⁴ Wood initially sold pop and classical recordings, but he observed that a growing number of customers came into the shop looking for the R&B records they heard on WLAC. These records were not widely available in rural areas, so Wood started a mail-order retailer that he advertised on Nobles's program, cohosting a regular segment that featured the latest R&B hits available through his catalog. Soon, listeners from around the mid-South and eventually the whole country were inundating Wood with requests for records by black artists. Randy's Record Shop became a major force in the national popularization of R&B, especially after Wood began releasing his own records in partnership with several small independent labels.¹⁵

Neither Nobles nor Wood had a particularly keen ear for R&B, so Wood asked another young white deejay, Richard "Hoss" Allen, to select the records for his WLAC segment. Allen eventually replaced Nobles on WLAC, and he grew more popular than Nobles thanks to his unique delivery. Allen "sounded black," notes historian William Barlow, and—while he sometimes lapsed into racial caricature—Allen's loose, slang-filled patois made him a favorite among both black and white listeners.¹⁶ He was replaced by a third white man, John Richbourg, who went by the on-air handle "John R." Even more than his predecessors, "John R." became a national R&B celebrity. Artists and producers flocked to his show to pay their respects and promote their current projects, while labels courted his approval and involved him in creative decisions; he even released a few records himself in the late 1960s. His skills gained him a wide and admiring audience. "He had so much soul that people in the black community thought he was black!," remembered soul star James Brown, whose early records were championed by Richbourg.¹⁷

The confusion caused by Allen's and Richbourg's on-air vocal style suggests that WLAC was a site of racial liberation. But this should not be overstated. Black-oriented programs remained a small and segregated part of WLAC's schedule; the station did not hire a black on-air personality until 1968; and—unlike some other southern stations—it never embraced the civil rights movement.¹⁸ Ultimately, WLAC's greatest contribution to the struggle for black cultural advancement, and the development of the country-soul triangle, was demonstrating R&B's sizable economic potential. "Probably the biggest thing we did was to prove that black music was commercial and that a black radio station

- [The Laughing Monsters: A Novel online](#)
- [download online Attachment and Sexuality \(Psychoanalytic Inquiry Book Series\) pdf, azw \(kindle\)](#)
- [click The Best Laid Plans](#)
- [download The Everyday Language of White Racism \(Wiley-Blackwell Studies in Discourse and Culture\)](#)
- [download online Approaching the Great Perfection: Simultaneous and Gradual Methods of Dzogchen Practice in the Longchen Nyintig \(Studies in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism\)](#)

- <http://drmurphreesnewsletters.com/library/Meteor-in-Action.pdf>
- <http://serazard.com/lib/ISO-IEC-20000-Certification-and-Implementation-Guide---Standard-Introduction--Tips-for-Successful-ISO-IEC-20000-Cer>
- <http://yachtwebsitedemo.com/books/Character-as-Moral-Fiction.pdf>
- <http://unpluggedtv.com/lib/The-Everyday-Language-of-White-Racism--Wiley-Blackwell-Studies-in-Discourse-and-Culture-.pdf>
- <http://www.rap-wallpapers.com/?library/Is-It-True--The-Facts-Behind-the-Things-We-Have-Been-Told.pdf>