

Article

Hell Hounds, Hillbillies, and Hedonists: The Evangelical Roots of Rock n' Roll

Clay Motley

Department of Language and Literature, Florida Gulf Coast University, 10501 FGCU Blvd,
South Fort Myers, FL 33965-6565, USA; cmotley@fgcu.edu; Tel.: +1-239-590-7440

Academic Editor: Lawrence W. Snyder

Received: 7 January 2016; Accepted: 1 March 2016; Published: 7 March 2016

Abstract: This essay contends that much of the creativity driving the formation of popular folk music, such as blues, country, and early Rock n' Roll, in the American South during the early twentieth century grew from the religious tension between concepts of "sacred" and "secular" rooted in evangelical Protestantism. This essay examines the rebellious impulse of Rock n' Roll as, in the absence of religious boundaries, tensions, and influences, it grew beyond its Southern roots.

Keywords: blues music; country music; Rock n' Roll; South; Protestant; Christianity; secular

1. Introduction/Background

Rebellion is one of the defining features of Rock n' Roll. This can take the form of rebellion against the conventions of the previous generation, established morals or aesthetics, gender and sexual norms, the dominant economic or political order, or some combination thereof. In 1953, just as Rock n' Roll was about to break onto the national scene, the film *The Wild One* captured the genre's youthful, alluring, and sometimes menacing rebelliousness when Marlon Brando's character, Johnny, is asked what he is rebelling against, and he intensely replies, "What do you got?" [1].

Rock n' Roll's rebellious dynamic can sometimes be nothing more than flaunting of parental authority or taste, with sounds, slang, and clothes sure to annoy and confuse the older generation. More radically, it can take the form of the 1960s counterculture's psychedelic call to "Tune In, Turn On, and Drop Out", hailing not only a new society, but a new perception of reality [2]. Rebellion is by definition oppositional, seeking to resist or replace the existing order. When The Who's "My Generation" shocked mainstream sensibility in 1965 with the lyric, "Hope I die before I get old" [3], the band was voicing the growing postwar sentiment that their elders' beliefs were utterly bankrupt. In 1974, musician Frank Zappa captured Rock n' Roll's iconoclastic tendencies by declaring with approval that the electric guitar, "can be the single most blasphemous device on the face of the earth" ([4], p. 43).

Although Rock n' Roll can be "blasphemous", or at least antagonistic toward aspects of the established order, this essay will analyze how Rock n' Roll and its musical antecedents developed within the strict religious limits of the American South's dominant evangelical Protestant culture in the first half of the twentieth century. Some of the most influential blues, country, and early Rock n' Roll musicians rebelled against numerous things— notions of work, social class, style, and race—but they never rebelled against what they believed to be the ultimate authority—God. The musicians discussed in this essay violated their religious beliefs, often willingly defying their own religious faith's prohibition against sensuality and secularism, but they did not fully rebel against the dominant religious culture because they never abandoned or opposed their religious faith. They maintained their religious belief system, even as they feared they were damned within that system because of their "sinful" actions.

This essay argues that the tension between concepts of “flesh” and “spirit” inherent in the evangelical Protestantism of the early twentieth century South was an important creative force in blues and country music, and this influence was still clearly present in the first generation of Rock n’ Roll musicians, such as Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, and Jerry Lee Lewis. However, this tension largely disappeared after the first generation of Rock musicians, when the genre quickly became a national and then international music that was often a corporate commodity, increasingly removed from its Southern roots.

By 1977 the nihilistic British punk band The Sex Pistols could rhetorically snarl on their first single “God Save the Queen”, “When there’s no future/How can there be sin?” because they had already destroyed “sin” as a concept [5]. However, the music and culture that created Rock n’ Roll, eventually paving the way for The Sex Pistols, very much believed in “sin”. In a sense, it is easier to rebel when there are no boundaries, no consequences, or “no future”, as The Sex Pistols repeat 17 times in their single, because there is little or nothing to lose. The musicians examined in this essay felt their “sinful” actions risked their eternal soul. This essay will examine the evangelical Christian influence on blues, country, and Rock n’ Roll—particularly related to the tension between the flesh and the spirit—and then examine Rock n’ Roll’s rebellious impulse in the absence of religious boundaries, tensions, and influences.

2. Evangelical Protestantism in the American South

Before directly examining Southern folk music in light of the region’s religious culture, it is important to briefly sketch the main features of evangelical Protestantism in the early twentieth-century American South. While Flannery O’Connor, the ever-observant Catholic novelist in the Protestant South, cautioned that “anything you say about Southern belief can be denied in the next breath with equal propriety” ([6], p. 818), it can be generalized that variations of a pervasive, energetic, highly personal, form of evangelical Protestantism has dominated the region from the early nineteenth century until today.

The term “evangelical” is notoriously slippery. Even Billy Graham, America’s most famous evangelical preacher in the second-half of the twentieth century, when asked what an evangelical Christian was, responded, “That’s a question I’d like to ask somebody too” [7]. Historian David Bebbington claims that the central features of evangelicalism are an emphasis on the Bible as the ultimate authority, the saving power of Jesus, the necessity of a conversion experience to be “saved”, and encouraging non-Christians to accept Christ as their savior. The National Association of Evangelicals has endorsed this definition as “helpful” and uses it on their website to inform others about their basic beliefs [8].

Historian Charles Reagan Wilson adds that in the South “Evangelical religion prizes religious experience over other aspects of faith, offering a tangible way to deal with the burdens of sin and guilt that its Calvinist-inspired view of human nature often inculcates” ([9], p. 169). This personal religious experience could take the form of an intense conversion experience—being “saved”—or directly, often publically, being influenced by the Holy Spirit in a variety of ways. Because evangelical Protestantism offers “the individual direct access to the divine, unmediated by institutions, creeds, theologies, or ritualism” ([9], p. 8), evangelical churches typically do not fit more urbane and liberal “mainline” Protestant notions of denominational structure, authority, or even, at times, worship.

The evangelical emphasis on salvation—their own and others—stems from their central belief in the sinful nature of humans and our Fallen world. Historian Donald Mathews describes that Southern evangelical Protestantism has emphasized from its nineteenth-century beginnings “the total depravity of man, the wrath of God, and the necessity of repentance” ([10], p. 13). Jon Sensbach notes that, “Evangelicalism embodies and has shaped so much that seems quintessentially southern—the preoccupation with sin and guilt, the emotional search for redemption” ([11], p. 20). Due to this emphasis on Original Sin, evangelicals believe there is a sharp dividing line between the secular and the sacred, as the “Fallen” world is not what God originally created; thus “secular” becomes at times

synonymous with “sinful.” Randall J. Stephens writes, “The fact of human sinfulness was taken for granted by most southern evangelicals” ([12], p. 25). Darren Dochuk adds that anything leading to what was perceived as “secularization was immediately suspect in the evangelical mind” ([13], p. 16).

Although institutional racism and segregation during the Jim Crow era separated Southern blacks and whites, especially when worshipping, both black and white working-class Southerners shared many important religious beliefs. This is not meant to gloss over the significant differences between Southern “black” and “white” religious traditions, styles, and histories. To cite a few examples, Africans brought to America had radically different religious traditions from their European enslavers, a “sacred mentality” where “the line between purely religious and purely secular” was not made, “and some of this blurring remained well after freedom” ([14], p. 170). During the post-Reconstruction era of lynchings, African American Christians in the South had a distinct identification with Christ’s crucifixion, and “affirmed the moral sublimity of Christ for having lived his life amid persecutions like their own” ([15], pp. 178–79). At the most extreme, sometimes the differences between black and white worship seemed so profound that “typically each group thinks nothing very religious is going on in the worship services of the other” ([16], p. 37).

Despite these very real differences between “white” and “black” Christianity in the South in terms of history, theology, and worship style, there are many significant similarities vital to the topic of this essay. The distinctive African roots of African-American Christianity began to fade after emancipation when first and second-generation freed men were “determined to divest themselves of the behavior patterns of the slave past”, which included “the religious practices which had been so crucial to slave culture” ([14], p. 162). Amiri Baraka argues that as black churches grew more autonomous, they “began to take on social characteristics that, while imitative of their white counterparts in many instances, developed equally, if not more rigid social mores of their own” ([17], p. 48). Charles Reagan Wilson claims that, “the predominant style of religion in the South is a shared tradition, one that reflects black influence as much as white. Distinctive African American church practices reinforce southern evangelicalism” ([9], p. 132). While there are differences between white and black evangelical worship in the South, by the early twentieth century there were many beliefs held in common, and this essay will focus on some of those key common beliefs.

One of the common beliefs of southern evangelicals is their attitude toward the “secular” world. Albert Murray, a scholar of African American music and culture, describes the general Southern evangelical attitude toward the world: “The church is not concerned with the affirmation of life as such, which in its view is only a matter of feeble flesh to begin with. The church is committed to the eternal salvation of the soul after death, which is both final and inevitable. Human existence is only a brief sojourn in a vale of trials, troubles, and tribulations to be endured because it is the will of the Creator, whose ways are mysterious” ([18], p. 38). Therefore, at best, “worldly” matters were temporal and of no value during the long march through this life on the way to Heaven; at worst, they could be sinful snares of a Fallen world that must be avoided.

While evangelical Protestants mistrust the Fallen, secular world, they also ironically believe it to be highly alluring because of its many tempting, sensual pleasures. Southern Protestants created stern codes for moral behavior intended to prevent the faithful from being ensnared by the world’s sinful pleasures. For example, the Assemblies of God—the denomination of Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis—prohibited “drinking, smoking, gambling, picture shows, dance halls, swimming in public, and even life insurance” ([19], p. 93). Southern state and local governments got involved in shielding its citizens from sinful temptations by passing local “blue laws”, which kept stores and other businesses closed on Sundays, particularly any place that served liquor. As Samuel S. Hill notes, the only sensual experiences typically condoned by the dominant southern religion are, “hearing and speaking . . . Words are sacred, an utterly reliable guide to reality” ([20], p. 10), as reflected in the South’s strong sermonizing culture. Conversely, most other forms of sensual experience have traditionally been met with distrust to varying degrees as too secular and potentially sinful.

Despite—or perhaps because of—Southern Protestantism’s intense mistrust “worldly” sensuality, a unique strain of Southern hedonism emerged. In the seminal *The Mind of the South* (1941), W. J. Cash describes this streak of Southern hedonism as a “hell of a fellow”, which was to “stand on his head in a bar, to toss down a pint of raw whisky at a gulp, to fiddle and dance all night...to fight harder and love harder than the next man” ([21], p. 50). Historian Ted Ownby writes of the divided soul of God-fearing Southerners drawn towards hedonistic pleasures: “The two forces operated against each other in an emotionally charged dialectic, the intensity of each reinforcing the other” ([22], p. 17). Historian Paul Harvey points to evidence of this Southern religious tension by noting that the states that compose the evangelical “Bible Belt “ also have “the highest rates of violence, incarceration, divorce, alcoholism, obesity, and infant mortality” in America ([23], p. 6). To put it another way, if drinking one beer damns your soul as much as twelve beers, and you have decided you are going to drink beer, then why stop at one and limit your forbidden fun?

Most significantly, this streak of “sinful” Southern hedonism does not typically function as a rebellion against the church—it is not a rival set of moral values or a challenge to God’s authority. Rather, “sinful” behavior is fully recognized as such by the “sinner”. Rock n’ Roll pioneer Jerry Lee Lewis alludes to Luke 16:13 when he declared, “I’m draggin’ the audience to hell with me. How am I gonna git ‘em to heaven with [the song] ‘Whole Lotta Shakin’ Goin’ On’? You can’t serve two masters; you’ll hate one an’ love the other” ([24], p. 245). Lewis is affirming his belief in the strict religious system that sharply divides the world into “saved” and “damned”, “secular” and “sacred”. He manages to keep his faith in this religious system despite believing he will wind up on the “wrong” side of it. Lewis knows who is “master”; he also believes he is a bad “servant”. W.J. Cash speaks to this when describing the religious burden of the “hell of a fellow”: “But even as he danced, and even though he had sloughed off all formal religion, his thoughts were with the piper and his fee” ([21], p. 55).

Many of the most influential blues, country, and Rock n’ Roll musicians in the first half of the twentieth century grew up in the religious culture of evangelical Protestantism, with the church often being where they first learned to play and love music. However, as they moved away from playing overtly Christian “gospel” music, evangelical Protestantism held that they were participating in secular, sinful activities that were part of a Fallen world. The dominant religious culture held that God and the Devil, salvation and damnation, are at war with one another; each human soul is a battlefield, and the stakes could not be higher. In this harsh, all-or-nothing religious culture, the entire burden for salvation or damnation is on the individual, causing Georgia’s Flannery O’Connor to state, “while the South is hardly Christ-centered, it is most certainly Christ-haunted” ([6], p. 818). The South’s prolific production of Gospel music—music often performed in church with explicit Christian themes, exemplified the South as “Christ-centered”, but many blues, country, and Rock n’ Roll musicians were examples of the South at its most “Christ-haunted”.

3. The Blues and Southern Soul

Much of Rock n’ Roll’s rebellious spirit is inherited from its primary musical precursor, the blues. Blues music developed as the music of Saturday night, performed in the free time and place when African Americans in the Jim Crow South could express themselves in ways discouraged or impossible in other spaces. Adam Gussow argues that “black southerners evolved blues song as a way of speaking back to, and maintaining psychic health in the face of, an ongoing threat of lynching ([25], p. xii). Being a blues musician was in itself an act of resisting the neo-slavery labor system in the South, since blues musicians could avoid the hard physical labor that was the lot of most African Americans during this period. Mississippi bluesman David “Honeyboy” Edwards describes this when remarking, “When the white man sees you with that guitar he thinks, ‘You got that machine so I know you ain’t goin’ to do no work” ([26], p. 125).

In a society that defined “secular” pleasures of the flesh as sinful, the blues often reveled in the pleasures of this world, in terms of its lyrics, the lives of blues musicians, and the sensuous atmosphere

of the juke joints. Albert Murray argues that contrary to the “fundamental assumptions” of the church, a blues musician is, “an agent of affirmation and continuity in the face of adversity” ([18], p. 38). However, many of the most influential blues musicians were not nearly as free as their music implies. They were Christ-haunted, operating within the limits of their evangelical Protestant faith; they were Cash’s “hell of a fellow” who enjoyed sensual pleasures but never abandoned the belief that those very pleasures were forbidden and sinful. Certainly some blues musicians experienced no religious angst due to their profession; but many of the most influential early blues musicians were forced to negotiate between an earnest religious faith and their “secular” desires to play blues and enjoy the few pleasures afforded to them. Angela Davis identifies this irony: “The most pervasive opposition to the blues, however, was grounded in the religious practices of the historical community responsible for the production of the blues in the first place” ([27], p. 123). The blues should be understood, in part, as growing out of this religious context, because many of its most influential musicians maintained this evangelical Protestant faith, even as they frequently violated it.

This discussion of the blues will be limited to rural blues musicians of the very early twentieth century who, in the words of Charles Reagan Wilson while describing Charley Patton, “came as close as anyone to defining a new art form, the blues, out of the folk ingredients of African American music in the Delta” ([9], p. 119). Unfortunately, our modern perception of the blues has been excessively shaped by folklorists like Alan Lomax and the efforts of the 1960s “folk revivalists” who brought attention to blues musicians fitting their notions of pre-modern, un-commercial “folk” artists. This resulted in an intense focus on rural, acoustic, male blues guitarists, to the detriment of the urban “Blues Queens” of the 1920s, commercial-minded composers like W.C. Handy, and urban musicians, who did not fit the revivalists’ interests in re-discovering a music which gave voice to an oppressed people. I fully recognize the diversity and breadth of styles and artists that contribute to the multi-faceted genre called “the blues”, and I do not wish to add to the perception that the history of the blues is the history of the rural bluesmen of the Mississippi Delta.

My intent is to focus on the religious tensions between notions of “secular” and “sacred” as the new genre of blues music was first coalescing into a popular and controversial music form. Not only did the blues first take recognizable form in and around the Mississippi Delta at the turn of the century, but these religious tensions are most pronounced in the lives and music of the earliest professional blues musicians. As the blues moved from its rural roots to urban areas, such as Memphis, Chicago, and Detroit, the “Christ-haunted” features became less pronounced. This fits the well-defined dynamic that homogenous, rural societies tend to hold on to religious beliefs and other cultural practices more staunchly than the more heterogeneous and mutable urban ones [28]. For example, the hedonistic activities that had to be hidden in rural juke joints on Saturday nights in the Delta, could more easily and publically be enjoyed on Beale Street in Memphis or Maxwell Street in Chicago. The evangelical Protestant suspicions of “worldly” music and pleasures were strongest in the rural South, and thus exerted the most pressure on the blues at its genesis.

Although the historical origins of the blues are murky at best, it is clear that it took root most strongly in the deep South of the Mississippi Delta, north Louisiana, and east Texas around the turn of the twentieth century. The blues was born from African Americans’ hard physical labor in the Jim Crow era, such as the field hollers of people plowing behind mules or picking cotton, or the rhythmic work songs of groups hoeing rows, chopping trees, or driving rails in unison. It did not take long for these proto-blues songs (in terms of rhythms, rhyming patterns, and lyrical themes) to join with a guitar or fiddle and move out of the daylight and into the Saturday night juke joints, fish fries, and “balls” where African American laborers blew off steam and reveled in hard-earned, hedonistic free time.

Ironically, juke joints—which were rural, ramshackle dwellings used to hold Saturday night parties—functioned similarly to churches in that they were one of the few autonomous social spaces available to African Americans in the Jim Crow South, with the significant difference that nearly every activity occurring in juke joints was prohibited by the community’s evangelical Protestant culture:

hard-drinking, gambling, raucous dancing, sex, and violence—all set to the “soundtrack” of blues music. The juke joints of rural South were the African American epitome of W.J. Cash’s aforementioned concept of the “hell of a fellow” ([21], p. 50), where a religious prohibition on sensual pleasures fuels hedonistic backlashes. Francis Davis points out, “The blues has never been big on moral or social uplift; the only deliverance most of its singers promise is sexual” ([29], p. 19). Bluesman Eddie “Son” House recalled, “Them country balls were rough! ... Nearly every other Saturday night or two somebody got stabbed or got shot or something” ([30], p. 79).

In one sense, we can regard the blues as contesting the community’s religious orthodoxy, seemingly preferring the here and now to the hereafter, and the “fleshpots of Egypt” to the “Promised Land” after death. Blues historian Robert Palmer writes, “blues singers didn’t have to respect social conventions or the church’s shopworn homilies; they were free to live the way they wanted and to tell the truth as they saw it” ([31], p. 17). There is certainly some truth to this view, and the lives and songs of many bluesmen support it. Early Delta blues songs like “My Black Mamma” [32], “Shake It and Break It” [33], and “Drunken Hearted Man” [34] attest to the sensuality of the blues and the juke joint environment of this period. Bluesman Robert Johnson enjoyed the freedom of a traveling musician compared to the harshly circumscribed life of a rural sharecropper, including the easy money, drink, and women that accompanied his profession. In several of his songs, perhaps most famously in his “Traveling Riverside Blues” (1937), he brags of his freedom of travel and sexual prowess: “I’ve got women in Vicksburg/Clean on into Tennessee/I’ve got women in Vicksburg/Clean on into Tennessee/but my Friar’s Point rider, now, hops all over me” [35]. In a very rural, relatively isolated society in terms of media and travel, where the church was the absolute social and moral authority, secular and sensual sentiments expressed in blues songs were very transgressive and alluring.

Another example of overt hedonism in the early rural blues comes from Charley Patton, who was born around 1891 and who was one of the most popular and influential bluesmen during his relatively brief life. Patton was not only famous for his music, but also for his womanizing and general debauchery, which is captured in his 1929 song “A Spoonful Blues” [36], which is an ode to physical desire and antisocial behavior. Patton repeatedly growls during the song that “All I want in creation is a . . . ,” leaving the object of his desire unnamed. Similarly, he adds that he will kill a man, slap his woman, slap a judge, and get in a fight “about a . . . ” leaving the cause of his aggression unnamed each time. The song’s purposeful omissions allow the audience to fill in the blanks with details juicier than Paramount Records would allow, and it suggests that his desires are too numerous to be contained in a song. In a song barely over three-minutes long, Patton points toward his un-named sensual desire no less than seven times. In sound and lyrics, the song paints the picture of a man exploding with energy to do everything the law and church will not allow.

Because the blues defied the demands of the local church to avoid the sinful, “secular” pleasures of the world, it came to be known as the “Devil’s music.” Angela Davis writes that “black consciousness” in this period, “interpreted God as the opposite of the Devil, religion as the not-secular, and the secular as largely sexual. With the blues came the designations ‘God’s Music’ and ‘Devil’s music’” ([27], p. 4). According to the church, in the war between God and Satan for human souls, bluesmen were casting their lots with the Devil and were active instruments of perdition. Midcentury bluesman James “Son Ford” Thomas describes this belief: “The blues is nothing but the Devil. If you play spirituals, and you used to play the blues, the next you know, the Devil gets in you, and you’re going to start right back playing the blues. You can’t serve the Lord and the Devil, too” ([37], p. 5). While Son Ford accurately describes the general community’s belief in the stark dichotomy between the church and the blues, in fact many early rural blues musicians were not wholly outside of the dominant religious culture or even completely hostile toward it. Despite the church’s very overt opposition to the blues, many blues musicians continued to hold their traditional religious beliefs even as they frequently defied those beliefs.

Blues musicians may have appeared, as Robert Palmer claims, “free to live the way they wanted” ([31], p. 17) because that was the brash image they projected to the larger community;

however, the many rural blues musicians in the South who retained their evangelical Protestant beliefs would probably not describe themselves as completely “free” and socially autonomous as others imagined. Instead, they had to reconcile the irreconcilable: making the music that they enjoy, with the belief that this music and attendant activities are sinful and damning. In contradiction to the assertion that the bluesmen had broken “free” of their community’s social restrictions—including its religious beliefs—Steven Calt writes: “As the Bible was the sole book of [the bluesman’s] acquaintance, and the church the sole repository of values for him, the Mississippi blues singer was unable to mount any intellectual opposition to his own condemnation. Although the Bible said nothing about blues-singing, the fact that pastors said that God stood firmly against it was enough to cow its practitioners, particularly when they lived in a stultified plantation environment” ([38], p. 169). This dynamic did not afflict every blues musician during the genre’s formative years in the early twentieth century, but it is an unmistakable and influential tension affecting much of the earliest blues musicians.

Despite the posthumous mythology of Robert Johnson selling his soul to the Devil, in reality there are few, if any, instances where a bluesman made a clean break with his or her religious faith, permanently casting a lot “with the Devil” or the “secular” world of blues and juke joints. Instead, early bluesman who shared the religious faith of the community maintained an uneasy tension, unable to leave behind the faith of their youth and community, yet unable to ignore the call to play blues and enjoy its benefits. Francis Davis writes of Delta blues pioneer Son House, “House’s own songs suggest that he thought of the blues as wicked, and of his talent for them as grim fate. This is what gives his work its drenching intensity: the suspicion that he recognizes the blues as both his only means of self-expression and a form of blasphemy” ([29], p. 108).

For example, Charley Patton and Son House both grew up in traditionally religious households in the Mississippi Delta with fathers who were elders in the church. House, describing his early attitude towards the blues, states he was “Brought up in church and didn’t believe in anything else but church, and it always made me mad to see a man with a guitar and singing those blues” ([30], p. 30). Patton had a similar upbringing and a dramatic early lesson about the sharp divide between “secular” and “sacred” music when at the age of fourteen his father caught him playing the guitar (an instrument synonymous with “sinful” music in the African American community) and then beat the boy as a warning ([31], p. 50).

House and Patton had strong enough religious knowledge and faith for both to seriously consider careers as preachers. House went farther in this direction than Patton, preaching his first sermon at the age of 15 and serving as a minister at two different churches during his late teens through to his mid-twenties ([31], p. 79). Patton “received a thorough religious education and knew the Bible well” [39]. Although Patton never had a formal congregation, he preached numerous times in Delta churches, and more frequently used his considerable musical talents to perform sacred music in church [39].

Despite Patton’s and House’s overt and sustained religious faith and even semi-formal or formal religious vocations, they eventually became full-time bluesmen. In keeping with the concepts of the “Hell of a Fellow” and the “Christ-haunted South”, neither discarded their religious faith when it became clear that they were confirmed bluesmen. Instead, they lived with the paradox. For example, for several years House was a bluesman by night and a preacher by day, but his blues playing, drinking, and womanizing eventually caught up with him, and his congregation fired the fallen preacher ([30], p. 80). Although House’s formal career as a preacher ended, he spoke of his religious faith throughout his long life, despite continuing his career as a bluesman. Even nearly four decades after House preached his last official sermon, he would give long monologues during live performances where he: “often lamented the sinfulness of the music he sang, and how the blues had become his calling rather than the ministerial career to which he had once aspired The failed preacher finally had a large congregation in front of him, and even if they did not come to hear the holy Word, he would make sure that they got a dose of religion in the process” ([40], pp. 377–78). It seems House never personally reconciled the tension between his “sacred” and “secular” callings, but he at least used his music as an

outlet for both his desires for this world and the hereafter. No one who saw House play, whether in a 1920s juke joint, during a 1960s concert, or on YouTube today, can doubt his intensity and sincerity as he sings about whisky, women, and God.

Similar to House, during Charley Patton's successful career as a bluesman he "would periodically repent, renounce loose women and alcohol, and take to studying his Bible in preparation for a preaching career... But his conversions never lasted very long" ([31], p. 52). Although Patton's "interest in religion continued throughout his life" [39], he primarily cast his lot with blues music and its attendant lifestyle that Patton's own faith defined as sinful. The most telling detail of Patton's conflicted nature comes from the fact that he recorded gospel music at the same time as he was making blues records, but he released each style of music under different names.

Patton recorded 10 religious songs during his career, including religious material in three of his four recording sessions with Paramount [39]. His blues records were released under his real name, but his gospel pseudonym was the preacher "Elder J. J. Hadley", which was inspired in part by his record label (correctly) believing that the "African American consumers who bought gospel music would shy away from tunes written by a bluesman with questionable morals" ([40], p. 138). Patton died in his early forties due to heart troubles ([41], p. 74). Steven Calt writes, "for many bluesmen, the onset of an illness (signifying, in their minds, a foretaste of heavenly retribution) was a sign to stop singing the blues" ([38], p. 174). Patton's niece reported that on his deathbed the raucous bluesman repeatedly preached his favorite sermon about Revelation. Fittingly, it was the same sermon that Patton preached during a brief spoken interlude on his 1929 song "You're Gona to Need Somebody When You Die" [39].

Patton's deathbed display of his religious faith, despite his career as a bluesman, is similar to the most famous Delta Bluesman, Robert Johnson, who wrote on his deathbed (at age 27, likely poisoned by a jealous husband): "Jesus of Nazareth, King of Jerusalem, I know that my Redeemer liveth and that He will call me from the Grave" ([42], p. 10). Because of the persistent, unfortunate posthumous legend of Johnson selling his soul to the Devil, many of Johnson's current admirers view his career strictly through the lens of religious struggle. However, there are few confirmed facts about Johnson's personal life, including details of his religious faith, and only two of the 29 songs he recorded directly reference the Devil. Therefore, it is important not to turn Robert Johnson into some kind of blues existentialist superhero (see Griel Marcus's *Mystery Train* for the most overheated and influential example) [43].

While it is essential not to romanticize Johnson's religious struggles, those struggles are undeniable in the songs, "Hellhounds on My Trail" (1937) [44], and "Me and the Devil Blues" (1937) [45]. Their power lies primarily in Johnson's intense, beautiful, and haunting delivery. As Robert Palmer points out, other bluesmen of Johnson's era sang about the Devil, often in boasting ways, but they "never recorded anything as chilling and apparently dead serious" as these two songs ([31], p. 127). In "Hellhounds" Johnson appears to be running from Divine judgment. He evokes a wintry landscape where "blues fall down like hail" as he yearns to pause for a moment with a female lover; however, "I've got to keep movin'/Keep movin' ... There's a Hellhound on my trail" [44]. In "Me and the Devil Blues", rather than fearing divine judgment, Johnson sings of accepting his fate, of walking "side-by-side" with the Devil as "I'm going to beat my woman until I get satisfied" [45]. The song hauntingly ends with Johnson declaring that he does not care about where they bury his body—since presumably he is beyond the benefits of a Christian burial—and instead his body can be buried by the highway side so his "evil spirit can get a greyhound bus and ride" [45]. In these two songs, the joy of travel and hedonism found in "Traveling Riverside Blues" [35] is gone, leaving only a haunting despair about—as W.J. Cash describes with the "hell of a fellow,"—"the piper and his fee" ([21], p. 55). Based on Johnson's deathbed confession of faith, the "hellhounds" weighed heavily on his mind.

Although the blues was not uniformly "Christ-haunted", it is clear that many of its earliest and most influential musicians struggled deeply when defying their own evangelical Protestant beliefs that defined their desires and activities as "worldly" and therefore "sinful". This conflict did not stop

many musicians from continuing their careers, which they believed risked the damnation of their soul, but rather this conflict between “secular” and “sacred” became part of their music, and thus is at the foundation of the blues. While the blues helped African Americans in the Jim Crow South cope with and resist social injustices, many blues musicians did not rebel against their own religious faith or a belief in their own sinfulness.

4. Christ-Haunted Country Music

At approximately the same time the blues was emerging from African-American folk culture, “country” music was forming as a commercially popular musical genre largely from the South’s working class white culture. Paul Harvey points out that although Southern churches were racially segregated, “they shared common cultural frames of reference, expressed especially through music. Visions of Jesus among working class and rural southerners, too, ran parallel in the segregated institutions” ([23], p. 123). As detailed above, black and white Southerners in the early twentieth century shared many similar theological perspectives, rooted in their evangelical Protestant beliefs, including an adversarial stance toward the “secular” world and a mistrust of sensual pleasures. Therefore, like the blues, there is a strong Christ-haunted tension at the core of country music, although it is exhibited significantly differently than in the blues for reasons that will be explored below.

Country music’s preeminent historian, Bill C. Malone, identifies religion as the greatest influence on the formation of country music, writing that southern religious life “affected both the nature of songs and the manner in which they were performed” ([46], p. 10). The primary religious difference between blues and country music is that the blues mainly operated in opposition to the dominant religious culture; however, country music during the same period normally celebrated Christian piety and reinforced the dominant religious values of its audience, either explicitly or implicitly.

For example, The Carter Family, country music’s first popular performing group, commonly wrote and recorded such gospel songs as “No Depression in Heaven” (1936) [47] alongside secular songs, creating a music that collectively supported, “the sanctity of home, hearth, and mother’s love, sexual innocence, the necessity of a firm religion, the purity of the grave, and the durable hope of a better world beyond it, whose earthly colony was the church” ([48], p. 55). The Carter Family set the template country music would follow for the next two decades. Many country artists comfortably interweaved sacred music in with their more secular tunes; for example, twenty percent of the songs Hank Williams wrote are gospel ([49], p. 111), and he frequently played Southern gospel standards during his radio performances.

The “sacred” and “secular” existed so comfortably in many country musicians’ repertoires because even their secular songs easily fit within the larger religious/moral framework of evangelical Protestantism. When early country music depicted drunkenness or violence it did so in a context that almost always reinforced the church’s morality, such as in Roy Acuff’s “Wreck on the Highway” (1942) [50] that links a lack of religious faith with a whiskey soaked highway crash, and Hank Williams’ “Honky Tonk Blues” (1952) [51], where a prodigal youth experiences the vanity fair of urban honky tonks, only to return to his parents’ farm and the moral order of his home and family. Blues music, as we have seen, does not have a similar tradition of supporting the dominant religious culture; instead, hedonistic subjects like drunkenness, sexuality, and violence were typically celebrated, rather than used as a morality tale.

Despite its confident declarations of Christian piety, country music during the first half of the twentieth century had a dark undercurrent closely related to W.J. Cash’s concept of the “hell of a fellow” ([21], p. 50) and O’Connor’s “Christ-haunted South” ([6], p. 818). As Greil Marcus writes, “All that hedonism was dragged down in country music; a deep sense of fear and resignation confined it, as perhaps it almost had to, in a land overshadowed by fundamentalist religion . . . ” ([43], p. 133). Life as a touring professional musician was rife with fleshly temptations not endorsed by the rural churches most country musicians grew up in, and in whose tenets most believed throughout their lives, despite their frequent falls from grace. To use Hank Williams as an example, Charles Reagan

Wilson writes of his “dark spirituality . . . Williams grew up in the Baptist church, inheriting a strong feeling of Calvinist sinfulness reinforced by the temptations he faced in his life as a working-class entertainer” ([52], p. 79).

Some of this intense yet submerged religious tension stems from the fact that up through the 1950s, country music artists by and large had to publically live by the Carter Family’s concert poster which bluntly declared “This program is morally good” [53], all the while struggling with the guilt of their often spectacular “sinful” transgressions that belied the sacred songs and traditional morality they sang about daily. While the commercial nature of the country music industry—led by major Northern record labels from its beginnings in the early 1920s—would have stifled country musicians’ ability to write songs expressing their Christ-haunted struggles, the artists themselves would not have wanted to even if they could. As Flannery O’Conner observed firsthand, “the religion of the South is a do-it-yourself religion... It’s full of unconscious pride . . . ” ([54], p. 1107). Most Southern Christians rationalized that with stronger faith and avoiding temptation, such sinful transgressions could be a thing of the past; why vocalize one’s sinful struggle when greater piety is attainable with more willpower? For example, when a “deejay offered Hank [Williams] a drink after his June 18 (1949) *Opry* debut: ‘No, I quit’, said Hank. ‘I can’t handle it. I don’t ever expect to take another drop.’ And he truly, truly meant it” ([55], p. 117). Of course, when the flesh again proved too weak to avoid sin, then the guilt and disappointment only deepened the “fall”. To return to Ted Ownby’s argument ([22], p. 17), the two stark sides of Southern fundamentalism, the sacred and secular, reinforced and amplified each other’s extremity.

Before analyzing specific country musicians, it is important to note that the musicians examined below are male singers because the culturally conservative country music industry did not allow for individual female stars until after the scope of this study. Mary Bufwack relates of Nashville’s powerful WSM radio station, the sponsor of The Grand Ole Opry, “the station’s conservative philosophy actually kept women in minor roles for years” ([56], p. 161). Even after World War II, nearly all female singers of any stature had to work “with their husbands or family groups” due to industry gender standards ([46], p. 218). The first “bona fide female country superstar” was Kitty Wells, whose career began in 1952, and “it would be another ten years or so before women would really begin to stand alone as performers” ([46], pp. 223–24). Therefore, by the time Rock n’ Roll was emerging nationally in the mid-1950s, country music was still nearly a decade away from individual female stars being mainstream. The Christ-haunted culture of country music is more apparent in the careers of male superstars because most country stars in this period were male.

One example of country music’s Christ-haunted culture comes from aforementioned popular 1950s country-gospel group, the Louvin Brothers. Born in Sand Mountain, Alabama in the 1920s, Charlie and Ira Louvin grew up singing Sacred Harp music in their family’s Baptist church. Despite their album warning listeners that *Satan is Real*, with songs about not accepting “Satan’s Jeweled Crown” [57], of “The Drunkard’s Doom” [58], and promising the saving “River of Jordan” [59] to all who seek it, Ira Louvin was an extremely troubled person. He was an alcoholic married four times; his third wife shot him three times in the back after he tried to strangle her with a telephone cord ([60], p. 97). When performing drunk, he would occasionally smash his mandolin on stage in anger ([60], p. 85). Ira died in 1965 when a drunken driver struck his car; at the time of his death, a warrant for Louvin’s arrest had been issued on a DUI charge.

Ira Louvin understood “The Drunkard’s Doom” and the allure of “Satan’s Jeweled Crown” better than most, which allowed him to sing of and yearn for the cleansing “River of Jordan” all the more authentically. Reminiscent of Son House and Charley Patton’s preaching, Ira’s brother and musical partner, Charlie, traces the roots of his brother’s problems to a religious struggle steeped in guilt: “My brother was a biblical scholar; a lot of people say he was called to preach. That’s why he led such a miserable life, because he refused to accept the calling” ([60], p. 48). Although he spent his professional career singing gospel music, being told by fans that “Louvin Brothers music caused them to live in a Christian home” ([60], p. 65), he was unable to overcome the contrast between his spurned

“calling” to be a preacher and his frequent lapses into alcoholism and marital infidelity. In fact, one undoubtedly strengthened the other in a dangerous dialectic, described by a former band mate as Ira “having a split personality like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” ([60], p. 84).

Another, more famous, example of Christ-haunted country music is found in the life, songs, and death of country music’s greatest icon, Hank Williams. Williams was the most successful and significant practitioner of honky tonk, the country music genre whose heyday lasted from the mid-40s to the mid-50s. Honky tonk’s amplification allowed it to be heard above the din of the blue-collar barrooms that were its home, and its pronounced beat encouraged dancing. Its lyrics focused more on the economic struggles, heartaches, and beer-filled good times of the Southern working class, and accordingly the lives of honky tonk musicians often bore little resemblance to the rural, religious background of their typical upbringing. Not only has Williams’ music come to epitomize honky tonk, but his alcohol-fueled personal life, filled with marital strife, infidelity, violence, and failure, most fully represents honky tonk’s hard-scrabble ethos, permanently symbolized by Williams being banned from the family oriented Grand Ole Opry—the bastion of traditional country music values—in 1952 due to his drunkenness and unpredictability.

Although Williams has become more famous for his drinking than his piety, his lifelong religious faith was a major component of his career. In addition to the dozens of sacred songs he wrote: “even in beer joints he would sometimes throw everyone off guard with a hymn. Knowing himself to be a backslider, and knowing that he had been weighed in the balance and found wanting in so many ways, he seemed to find rare peace in the hymns of his childhood” ([55], p. 9). Hank preached more than many people were even aware, as he recorded a series of syrupy homilies set to organ music under the pseudonym “Luke the Drifter”, which were eerily similar to some of the in-song sermonizing that Ira Louvin would include in songs like “Satan Lied to Me” [61]. Paul Hemphill writes, “Luke the Drifter was the flip side of Hank’s split personality: the penitent, moralizing about the bad things the other Hank had done” ([62], p. 118).

Although Hank’s religious songs and sermonizing undoubtedly comforted him, serving as a reminder of his childhood faith, and perhaps steeled him on occasion to resist temptation, they also served as a punishment, a penance for his sinfulness that drove the sense of guilt deeper into himself. If, as famous country songwriter Harlan Howard asserts, Hank’s theology boils down to “good is good, bad gets your ass kicked”, Hank suffered grievously for always eventually giving in to the “bad” ([63], p. 35). Paul Hemphill writes, “In the bible Belt South of Hank Williams’ time, a propensity for drink was not something to be handled with hope and forgiveness; it was, rather, the Lord’s business in the eternal struggle with Satan . . . ” ([62], p. 50). More times than not, particularly in the last few years of his life, Hank felt that Satan had won in his struggle against drink, painkillers, and infidelity. Once on tour, fellow entertainer Minnie Pearl tried to keep Hank sober in between sets by driving around with him and singing songs. As they sang his gospel hit “I Saw the Light”, surely calculated by Pearl to help Williams resist his urge to drink, he turned to Minnie and said: “Minnie, I don’t see no light. There ain’t no light” ([62], p. 156).

5. Conclusions

By the mid-1950s, blues, country, and the postwar youth culture were coalescing into the new musical genre that came to be known as Rock n’ Roll. “[Rock n’ Roll] was a genre in its own right, associated with a new matrix of musical sounds, and a new cluster of emblematic cultural values” ([4], p. 97). As noted at the start of this essay, Rock n’ Roll from its inception had a strong rebellious tendency. Even when Rock n’ Roll was at its most “conservative” in the 1950s, it was, “denounced by the over-thirty generation, ridiculed by self-proclaimed arbiters of musical taste, deplored by guardians of sexual morality, attacked by whites who feared its breaking of racial barriers, [and] blamed by the media for juvenile delinquency” ([19], p. xi). However, the first-generation of Rock n’ Roll musicians, most with rural Southern roots, did not rebel against their own evangelical religious faith.

Despite the newness of Rock n' Roll as a musical genre, its musical pioneers, such as Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash, and Jerry Lee Lewis, were working-class Southerners born before World War II, who largely shared the traditional religious faith and outlook of their region. Malone and Stricklin write that Rock n' Roll, "first exploded on the national scene with a southern accent, and most of its early southern practitioners were young men who drew upon country, gospel, and rhythm and blues roots" ([64], p. 102). They also drew upon the Christ-haunted religious anxieties and tensions that Son House or Hank Williams would have easily related to.

For example, in 1957 Jerry Lee Lewis, a 22-year old Bible college dropout from Ferriday, Louisiana, initially refused to record "Great Balls of Fire" because his Pentecostal upbringing balked at singing a sexually explicit song that seemed to celebrate the very hellfire that he was raised to fear [65]. During his argument with Sam Phillips, the owner of Memphis's Sun Records, Lewis echoed the country preachers of his boyhood, telling Phillips that, "The Bible says make merry with the joy of God only. But when it comes to worldly music, rock 'n' roll . . ." ([24], p. 130). Here, Lewis explicitly defines Rock n' Roll as "worldly" music, which to Lewis is synonymous with "sinful". Phillips replied to Lewis that people who made Rock n' Roll music could still be good, but Lewis cuts through Phillip's line of reasoning with the blunt question: "How can the Devil save souls?" ([24], pp. 131–32). In other words, if Rock n' Roll is "worldly" and evil, as Lewis is convinced that it is, then how can any "good" come from it?

Jerry Lee Lewis may have scored some theological points, but Sam Phillips eventually got what he wanted. Lewis went on to record "Great Balls of Fire" that evening, banging on the piano with the fervor of a man burning with sexual lust and fearing the fiery consequences of sin. "Great Balls of Fire", fueled by Lewis's religious tension, became the best-selling record in the history of Sun Records and one of the most iconic songs in Rock n' Roll history ([19], p. 98). Phillips never convinced Lewis that a Rock n' roll musician could do good; Lewis simply gave into the desires he himself defined as sinful. Even as he played the "worldly" "Great Balls of Fire", Lewis still believed that only the sinless and "pure" entered into Heaven, declaring during his argument with Phillips that, "I've got the devil in me" ([24], p. 132).

Jerry Lee Lewis was not the only first-generation rocker who suffered a Christ-haunted conflict between personal religious faith and a career making "secular" and therefore "sinful" music. For example, Elvis Presley "loved, above all, to listen to sacred singers, gospel divas, spiritual quartets, heavenly choirs" ([4], p. 68). Elvis was troubled by his "secular" music career and hedonistic environment, which is captured by an incident between Elvis and Ira Louvin. Upon hearing Elvis say that gospel was his favorite music, Louvin asked Elvis while backstage, "If that's your favorite music, why don't you do that out yonder [on stage], instead of that [Rock] trash?" Elvis responded: "When I'm out there, I do what they want to hear; when I'm back here, I do what I want to do", which resulted in the gospel singer and the rocker nearly coming to blows ([60], p. 81). Elvis's dichotomy of stage/backstage and secular/sacred was an attempt to balance his Rock n' Roll career while still maintaining his religious faith and identity. Despite these efforts, Elvis was clearly troubled throughout his life with the religious implications of his career and lifestyle. Early in their music careers, Jerry Lee Lewis pointedly asked Elvis, "If you die, do you think you'd go to heaven or hell?" Lewis relates that Elvis, "got real red in the face, and then he got real white in the face, and he said, 'Jerry Lee, don't you ever say that to me agin [sic]'" [66]. Elvis's well-known history of Rock n' Roll excess, periodic gospel records, and self-destructive behavior is a clearly identifiable pattern seen in many musicians discussed in this essay.

While Rock n' Roll at its genesis shared the Christ-haunted qualities of its musical forbearers, the religious tension inherent in Rock n' Roll changed quickly as a new generation of Rock musicians emerged who did not share the Southern roots and evangelical Protestant beliefs of Rock's first generation. As Malone and Stricklin write, "Presley, Lewis, and their cohorts were a whole world and a culture away from the iconoclastic, anti-authoritarian hard rock musicians of the 1960sPresley never intended to antagonize any facet of that southern working-class world from which he came" ([64],

p. 106). The first Rock n' Roll musicians would have never dreamed of discarding their region's dominant religious faith; instead, they lived with their "secular" profession and often hedonistic lifestyles while still adhering to their evangelical faith. In 2015, at the age of 79, Jerry Lee Lewis revealed he remained worried about his soul because of the way he led his life, calling it "ungodly": "I was always worried whether I was going to heaven or hell . . . I still am. I worry about it before I go to bed" [66].

Rock n' Roll quickly moved from its rural, Southern and working-class roots, becoming an increasingly urban, national, and then international phenomenon. Accordingly, the nature of Rock n' Roll changed, including its Christ-haunted quality. For the first generation of Rock n' Roll musicians, there were recognized cultural/religious boundaries. While those boundaries were frequently transgressed through songs or personal actions, the boundaries were still recognized. Son House, Hank Williams, and Jerry Lee Lewis may have transgressed what their own religious faith proscribed, but they maintained their religious faith and believed in those boundaries. Rock n' Roll, once it left its Southern cradle, lost its evangelical Protestant context and tensions.

This can be seen during the 1960s, as the cultural center of Rock n' Roll moved from Memphis and the rural South to the radically different coastal cities of San Francisco, New York, and Los Angeles. Jim Morrison, lead singer of the popular late-1960s band The Doors, said, "I am interested in anything about revolt, disorder, chaos—especially activity that seems to have no meaning" ([4], p. 286). The musicians discussed in this essay may have created "revolt, disorder, chaos", in their music and in their lives, but it was not without meaning to them or their larger society. They defined their transgressions as such against an established religious order that they still associated with Jim Morrison and The Doors were harbingers of nihilistic rebellion for its own sake.

1980s punk rock rebel G.G. Alin, himself brought up in a very strict religious household, took this sentiment to its logical conclusion by declaring, "In Rock n' Roll there can be no limits, no rules", and demonstrated this by frequently defecating on stage during his shows [67]. This, then, is the terminus of Rock n' Roll's rebellious impetus. It goes beyond Frank Zappa's statement that the electric guitar, and thus Rock n' Roll, was "blasphemous" ([4], p. 43), because for something to be blasphemous, there has to be something to blaspheme against. The Sex Pistols understood this in their aforementioned "God Save the Queen", when declaring, "When there is no future/How can there be sin?" [5]. Therefore, the question is, what happens to a cultural force partially predicated on rebellion, when there is nothing to rebel against, no larger force to be resisted, when all cultural barriers have been erased, at least in the minds of those rebelling?

The erasure of all social barriers can be understood as liberating, allowing the individual artist to forge meaning according to the dictates of his or her creativity. Greil Marcus argues this point at length in his book *Lipstick Traces*, where he links the twentieth century's avant garde artists from different media, such as the Dada movement in the early twentieth century, with the punk rock ethos, particularly The Sex Pistols. Marcus writes that punk was "something new in postwar popular culture: a voice that denied all social facts, and in that denial affirmed that everything was possible" ([68], p. 2). The belief that all barriers are false constructs of prior generations that do not apply today is attractive, particularly to the young. In this line of thought, with enough creativity and daring, anything is possible, including fashioning the self outside of society's constraints.

The flip side of this "freedom" is that the erasure of cultural and religious boundaries can sometimes erase meaning as well. Even when the Christ-haunted musicians discussed in this essay transgressed their own religious beliefs, those same beliefs created meaning in their lives and to a large extent defined who they were. It does not seem coincidental that once Rock n' Roll shed any misgivings about the pleasures of the "secular" world, that self-destructive hedonism became as much a part of the "Rock n' Roll lifestyle" as the music itself. Far from creating a new society and new vistas of perception, it can be argued that from the 1960s onward one of the defining features of Rock n' Roll is an unceasing body count of talented musicians destroyed in their prime. James Miller argues,

contrary to Greil Marcus's thesis, "the formless pursuit of crude impulses had turned out to be more than dull: it was potentially lethal" ([4], p. 253).

When The Rolling Stones released the bluesy "Sympathy for the Devil" in 1968 [69], they were not concerned about a literal "devil". By that point, "the devil" had become a trope to cultivate a menacing aura for the band, which is lucrative in a genre where rebellion is precious. Not so with the "Christ-haunted" musicians explored in this essay, for whom the devil was a matter of great concern. They could be said, in a sense, to have "sympathy for the devil", in that they took the devil seriously. For better or worse, they created their music within the cultural constraints of their evangelical Protestant culture. Being Christ-haunted like the many Southern musicians examined in this essay was not pleasant, and it was often personally destructive to the musicians and those around them. However, artists often turn tensions into creativity, and the same is true for the rural, Southern folk musicians who were caught between their "sacred" background and their new "secular" profession and yearning. Of course, Rock n' Roll continued to be creative, exciting, and important after it was no longer necessarily associated with its Southern roots and any religious context. However, it is important to recognize the evangelical Protestant context that helped invent and drive one of the world's great musical forms.

Acknowledgments: Research for this article was partially supported by the Research and Creative Activities Program at Western Kentucky University in 2013.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

1. *The Wild One*. Directed by Laszlo Benedek. Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures, 1953. Filmstrip, 35 mm.
2. *Summer of Love*. Written and directed by Gail Dolgin and Vicente Franco. Boston: WGBH Educational Foundation, 2007.
3. The Who. *My Generation*. Decca, 7" Record, 29 October 1965, compact disc.
4. James Miller. *Flowers in the Dustbin: The Rise of Rock and Roll, 1947–1977*. New York: Fireside, 1999.
5. The Sex Pistols. *God Save the Queen*. Virgin, 27 May 1977, vinyl record.
6. Flannery O'Connor. "Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction." In *Collected Works*. New York: Library of America, 1988, pp. 813–21.
7. Jonathan Merritt. "Defining Evangelical." *The Atlantic*, 7 December 2015. Available online: <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/12/evangelical-christian/418236/> (accessed on 4 January 2016).
8. "What Is an Evangelical?" *National Association of Evangelicals*. Available online: <http://nae.net/what-is-an-evangelical/> (accessed on 5 February 2016).
9. Charles Reagan Wilson. *Flashes of a Southern Spirit: Meanings of the Spirit in the US South*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011.
10. Donald G. Mathews. *Religion in the Old South*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.
11. Jon Sensbach. "Before the Bible Belt: Indians, Africans, and the New Synthesis of Eighteenth-Century Southern Religious History." In *Religion in the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture*. Edited by Beth Barton Schweiger and Donald G. Mathews. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004, pp. 5–30.
12. Randall J. Stephens. *The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.
13. Darren Dochuk. *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism*. New York: Norton, 2011.
14. Lawrence W. Levine. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
15. Donald G. Mathews. "Lynching Is Part of the Religion of Our People: Faith in the Christian South." In *Religion in the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture*. Edited by Beth Barton Schweiger and Donald G. Mathews. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004, pp. 153–94.
16. Charles Joyner. *Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999.
17. Amiri Baraka. *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*. New York: Harper, 1999.

18. Albert Murray. *Stomping the Blues*. New York: Da Capo Press, 2000.
19. Glenn C. Altschuler. *All Shook Up: How Rock and Roll Changed America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
20. Samuel S. Hill. "Religion." In *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*. Edited by Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris. New York: Doubleday, 1989, vol. 4, pp. 3–14.
21. Wilber Joseph Cash. *The Mind of the South*. New York: Vintage, 1991.
22. Ted Ownby. *Subduing Satan: Recreation and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865–1920*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990.
23. Paul Harvey. *Moses, Jesus, and the Trickster in the Evangelical South*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012.
24. Nick Tosches. *Hellfire*. New York: Grove Press, 1989.
25. Adam Gussow. *Seems Like Murder Here: Southern Violence and the Blues Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.
26. David Honeyboy Edwards. *The World Don't Owe Me Nothing*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1997.
27. Angela Davis. *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*. New York: Vintage, 1999.
28. Harvey Cox. *The Secular City*. New York: MacMillan, 1965.
29. Francis Davis. *The History of the Blues: The Roots, the Music, the People, 1995*. Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2003.
30. Daniel Beaumont. *Preachin' the Blues: The Life and Times of Son House*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
31. Robert Palmer. *Deep Blues: A Musical and Cultural History, from the Mississippi Delta to Chicago's South Side to the World*. New York: Penguin, 1982.
32. Eddie "Son" House. *My Black Mamma*. Paramount, 78 RPM Record, 28 May 1930, compact disc.
33. Charley Patton. *Shake It and Break It*. Gennett, 78 RPM Record, 14 June 1929, compact disc.
34. Robert Johnson. *Drunken Hearted Man*. Vocalion, 78 RPM Record, 20 June 1937, compact disc.
35. Robert Johnson. *Traveling Riverside Blues*. Vocalion, 78 RPM Record, 20 June 1937, compact disc.
36. Charley Patton. *A Spoonful Blues*. Paramount, 78 RPM Record, 14 June 1929, compact disc.
37. William R. Ferris. "The Devil and His Blues: James 'Son Ford' Thomas." *Southern Cultures* 15 (2009): 5–20. [[CrossRef](#)]
38. Steven Calt. *I'd Rather Be the Devil: Skip James and the Blues*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2008.
39. David Evans. "Charley Patton Biography." *ParamountsHome.org*, 21 November 2005. Available online: http://www.paramountshome.org/index.php?view=article&catid=45:new-york-recording-laboratoriesartist&id=76:charley-patton-biography-part-1-dr-david-evans&option=com_content&Itemid=5 (accessed on 22 December 2015).
40. Ben Wynne. *In Tune: Charley Patton, Jimmie Rodgers, and the Roots of American Music*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014.
41. Ted Gioia. *Delta Blues: The Life and Times of the Mississippi Masters Who Revolutionized American Music*. New York: Norton, 2008.
42. Barry Lee Pearson, and Bill McCulloch. *Robert Johnson Lost and Found*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003.
43. Greil Marcus. *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock "N" Roll Music*. New York: Plume, 1997.
44. Robert Johnson. *Hellhounds on My Trail*. Vocalion, 78 RPM Record, 20 June 1937, compact disc.
45. Robert Johnson. *Me and the Devil Blues*. Vocalion, 78 RPM Record, 20 June 1937, compact disc.
46. Bill C. Malone. *Country Music USA, 1968*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002.
47. Alvin Pleasant Carter. *No Depression in Heaven*. Decca, 78 RPM Record, 8 June 1936, compact disc.
48. Robert Cantwell. *Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound 1984*. Boston: Da Capo, 1992.
49. Bill Koon. *Hank Williams: So Lonesome*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001.
50. Roy Acuff. *Wreck on the Highway*. Okeh, 78 RPM Record, 28 May 1942, compact disc.
51. Hank Williams. *Honky Tonk Blues*. MGM Records, 45 RPM Record, 11 December 1951, compact disc.
52. Charles Reagan Wilson. "'Just a Little Talk with Jesus': Elvis Presley, Religious Music, and Southern Spirituality." *Southern Cultures* 12 (2006): 75–90. [[CrossRef](#)]
53. Davis Gates. "The Unbroken Circle." *The New York Times*, 1 September 2002. Available online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/01/books/the-circle-unbroken.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed on 7 July 2012).
54. Flannery O'Connor. "To John Hawkes." In *Collected Works*. New York: Library of America, 1988, pp. 1106–8.
55. Colin Escott. (1994) 2004. *Hank Williams: The Biography*. New York: Little Brown.

56. Mary A. Bufwack. "Girls with Guitars—and Fringe and Sequines and Rhinestones, Silk, Lace, and Leather." In *Reading Country Music: Steel Guitars, Opry Stars, and Honky-Tonk Bars*. Edited by Cecelia Tichi. Durham: Duke University Press. pp. 153–187.
57. Louvin Brothers. "Satan's Jeweled Crown." In *Satan is Real*. Los Angeles: Capitol Records, 1959.
58. Louvin Brothers. "Drunkard's Dream." In *Satan is Real*. Los Angeles: Capitol Records, 1959.
59. Louvin Brothers. "River of Jordan." In *Satan is Real*. Los Angeles: Capitol Records, 1959.
60. Charles K. Wolfe. *In Close Harmony: The Story of the Louvin Brothers*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996.
61. Louvin Brothers. "Satan Lied to Me." In *Tragic Songs of Life*. Los Angeles: Capitol Records, 1956.
62. Paul Hemphill. *Lovesick Blues: The Life of Hank Williams*. New York: Viking, 2005.
63. Nicholas Dawidoff. *In the Country of Country: A Journey to the Roots of American Music*. New York: Vintage, 1998.
64. Bill C. Malone, and David Stricklin. *Southern Music/American Music*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003.
65. Rolling Stone. "Week in Rock History: Jerry Lee Lewis Records 'Great Balls of Fire'." *Rolling Stone*, 3 October 2011. Available online: <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/week-in-rock-history-jerry-lee-lewis-records-great-balls-of-fire-20111003> (accessed on 27 September 2015).
66. Simon Hattenstone. "Jerry Lee Lewis: I Worry About Whether I Am Going to Heaven or Hell." *The Guardian*, 8 August 2015. Available online: <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/aug/08/jerry-lee-lewis-interview-heaven-hell> (accessed on 5 January 2015).
67. Wil Forbis. "Interesting Motherfuckers." *Acid Logic*, 1 May 2007. Available online: http://www.acidlogic.com/im_gg_allin.htm (accessed on 5 January 2015).
68. Greil Marcus. *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.
69. The Rolling Stones. *Sympathy for the Devil*. Decca, Vinyl Record, 10 June 1968, compact disc.



© 2016 by the author; licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons by Attribution (CC-BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).