

Some Generalizations

1. Commercial country music did originate in the American South, but many of its roots were national. Today it is an international music, but distinctly southern in its connotation.

2. The Anglo-Celtic music that most consider its primary source was not uniquely Southern; it existed virtually everywhere English-speaking people had settled.

3. Some contemporary lyrics still feature elements of plot, much as tales and stories do. This links them to story songs and ballads that once thrived in rural, English-speaking America.

4. Due to slavery's sway, the most uniquely Southern aspect of country music--other than its commercial base--derives from the African-influenced songs of the lowland South. Commercial country has been considerably more white in its fan-base than in its music.

5. Its thematic foundation is rural-vs.-urban. Nearly all its songs assume a vague yet powerful set of values, called "country," rooted in romantic versions of rustic values.

6. Its values are also rooted in a distinct awareness of social class, with poor-but-proud another enduring theme. This is not and has not been the music of big-shots. It has especially spoken for working-class whites who assume a condition identified by historian James Gregory as "plain-folks Americanism."

7. Nashville is and has for five decades been the heart of this music's business. It is not, however, its spiritual core. The latter can be found in the lives of hard working people everywhere, and perhaps at the churches and honky tonks, the rodeos and monster truck rallies where they gather.

8. As was true of the region that spawned it, much of this music has been counter-cultural for it has revealed rootlessness, loneliness, and more than a little desperation in the American psyche. It has by no means been the anthem of a contented people.

9. California has been involved from the start, but it has provided primarily an enthusiastic, heterogeneous audience, as well as attendant professional opportunities, but not much home-grown talent: For every native like Cliffie Stone or Wesley Tuttle or Merle Haggard there have been scores of transplants such as Rose Maddox or Buck Owens or Dwight Yoakam.

10. What historian James Gregory calls The Southern Diaspora energized songs and spread the audience for commercial country music in the twentieth century. Part of the egress, the Okie Migration of the 1920s, '30s, and '40s, in particular, had that effect in California.