

Whiteness and/in Country Music

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In our presentation, we want to investigate if there is a difference in the attitude towards white working class values as expressed in traditional country music, especially “outlaw country,” and new country, especially “bro country.”

Our working hypothesis is that in older country music of the outlaw/protest variety (Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, Kris Kristofferson, Johnny Cash etc.) traditional white working class values which postulate that “if you drink hard you also have to work and pray hard” are more common than more laissez faire “white trash” attitudes. In contrast, contemporary bro country musicians (Jason Aldean, Luke Bryan, Florida Georgia Line, Blake Shelton etc.) focus more on drinking hard and picking up attractive women for a spin in a pick-up truck. We argue that this change in attitude can probably be attributed to with the fact that modern country singers are first and foremost musicians trying to propagate and sell a certain lifestyle, whereas traditional country musicians – such as Johnny Cash – actually stem from the poor white Southern working class that they portray in their songs.

As our theoretical framework for our argument we will consider Bourdieu’s writing on class, secondary sources on white trash, and linguistic studies on the style of country music.