

Southernizing the American Working Class: Post-war Episodes of Regional and Class Transformation

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(This is the first of a series of interchanges on various topics. This exchange was co-ordinated by Board member Nelson Lichtenstein.)

Home folks think I'm big in Detroit City,
From the letters that I write they think I'm fine;
By day I make the cars and by night I make the bars,
If only they could read between the lines.¹

Labor historians might want to listen closely to the lyrics of "Detroit City," Bobby Bare's country music hit of 1964. The southerners who are its subject have fallen between the lines of contemporary scholarship on the post-war working class. Race and gender have dominated arguments that seek to explain the fragmentation of working-class identity and the erosion of labor politics since the 1960s. Whether theorized in terms of segmented labor markets, as in the work of David Gordon, Richard Edwards and Michael Reich, traced through the racialized politics of urban neighborhoods by Ira Katznelson and Thomas Sugrue, or developed as an issue of culture and consciousness as in David Halle's *America's Working Men*, the expanded and increasingly forceful presence of racial minorities and women in the post-war North goes a long way toward explaining the crisis that shattered the New Deal working class.²

But lurking behind America's race and class transformations is a story of regional transformations. The industrial and political reconstruction of the South and the regional redistribution of economic functions constitute one of the great and not yet fully understood changes in 20th century political economy. The implications have been enormous, particularly for the American working class. Southerners have been an

*Many people helped this article mature. My thanks to Lynn Dumenil, Larry Glickman, James Grossman, Michael Kazin, Nelson Lichtenstein, Bill Malone, Nancy Quan Wickham, Donald Palm, Jill Schlessinger, Robert Zleger, the University of Washington History Research Group, and especially Susan Glenn.

¹"Detroit City" by Mel Tillis and Danny Dill, copyright 1962 by Cedarwood Publishing Company, Nashville, TN.

²David M. Gordon, Richard Edwards, and Michael Reich, *Segmented Work, Divided Workers: The Historical Transformation of Labor in the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches: Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Post-War Urban Crisis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); David Halle, *America's Working Man: Work, Home, and Politics among Blue-Collar Property Owners* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). Other important interpretations of the post-war working class include Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the US Working Class* (London: Verso, 1986); Kim Moody, *An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism* (London: Verso, 1988); Michael Goldfield, *The Decline of Organized Labor in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

expanding presence within the working class almost continuously throughout the 20th century and have helped reshape, and in some sense "southernize" working-class life at several junctures.

The rise of the sunbelt South since the 1970s marks the latest phase of this southernization saga. Renamed and rebuilt, the South has been the nation's job magnet in recent decades, drawing investment capital, manufacturing and service jobs, and legions of jobseekers away from the older industrial regions. This southernization of jobs has to some extent also yielded a southernization of labor standards, as the sunbelt shift, in concert with other capital shifts, destabilizes unions and the regulatory regimes that have long supported labor standards in northern states.

Here I want to examine the prologue to recent developments, the bottom-up process of southernization that turned not on capital migration but labor migration. Throughout the half century before the South redefined itself as sunbelt, the region had been feeding its sons and daughters into the cities and factories of the North and West, adding complexity and volatility to the working-class populations of those regions.³

Historians have closely examined one half of that process: the African-American exodus that remade the cities and politics of the North and ultimately forced a civil rights revolution on the nation. That is a regional story as well as a racial one: a story of one group of southerners transforming through their presence and their efforts many of the key institutions and cultural patterns of the regions where they settled and then from that northern base helping to reconstruct the South they had left.⁴

If black Southern migrants loom large in the historiography of the mid-20th century, their white counterparts rarely figure in the literature, especially in labor scholarship. Students of recent labor and social history tend to overlook the internal complexities of the post-war white working class, often assuming that the Catholic-stock groups that dominated the early-century working class did so in the second half as well. But the middle decades of the 20th century witnessed a significant shift in white working-class demography. A massive farm exodus that climaxed in the 1940s and 1950s brought millions of native-born Protestants into the blue-collar work force. Surveys suggest that by the 1960s the American working class had ceased to be primarily Catholic. Protestant blue-collar workers outnumbered Catholics in the Midwest and West as well as the South. Only in the Northeast did Catholics maintain a slim numerical lead.⁵

Many of these Protestant newcomers were from the South. The most rural of all

³The concept of southernization was first used by John Egerton in *The Americanization of Dixie: The Southernization of America* (New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1974). It has since been used to describe recent developments in both popular culture and electoral politics. See James C. Cobb, "From Muskogee to Luckenbach: Country Music and the 'Southernization' of America," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 16 (1982), 81-91; Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995); Kenneth Durr, "When Southern Politics Came North: The Roots of White Working-Class Conservatism in Baltimore, 1940-1964," *Labor History*, 37 (1996), 309-331.

⁴James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Black Southerners, Chicago, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Black Milwaukee* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How it Changed America* (New York: Knopf, 1991); Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Jacqueline Jones examines both black and white migrants in *The Dispossessed: America's Underclasses from the Civil War to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

⁵1964 Survey Research Center survey as cited in Richard F. Hamilton, *Class and Politics in the United States* (New York: Wiley, 1972), 258, 309. See also Arthur B. Shostak, *Blue Collar Life* (New York: Random House, 1969).

regions and the last to industrialize, the South lost at least 11,000,000 of its natives in the decades between 1910 and 1970, with the exodus especially heavy during and after World War II. Approximately one-third of those departing southerners were blacks; two-thirds were whites.

In comparison with their African-American counterparts, white southern migrants made modest impacts on the areas in which they settled. But, particularly for the working class which absorbed most of them, the white southern population stream had consequences. By the end of the 1960s a careful eye could pick out important changes in the styles and outlooks of major sectors of the white working class, changes that had southern origins.

Through various mechanisms white southerners and white southernisms helped reshape the northern working class. The effects ranged from curious to consequential, from the proliferation of stock car racing and barbecue joints to the more serious business of religious faith. At least two southern-white imports had political consequences. The spreading popularity of country music and the three presidential forays of George Wallace would play roles in the reorganization of northern politics, contributing to the rise of organized working-class conservatism. I will not be arguing that white southerners were *responsible* for that political shift—the southernization effect as I understand it was subtle, and had more to do with the transformation of certain symbols than with stark shifts in values and political behavior.

The Migrant Generation

The migration of whites out of the South paralleled to a certain degree that of blacks. Both groups left the impoverished southern countryside, but different parts of it: blacks fleeing the deep South, whites mostly departing from the border South and Appalachians. Both moved substantially into the industrial work force, but in somewhat different locales: black southerners mostly in the major cities of the Northeast and North Central states; whites spreading out through the North Central and Western states, sometimes choosing smaller cities over the major metropolitan areas.

The 1970 census helps us understand the distribution of southerners outside their home region (see Table 1). California led all states as a home for former southerners. Of its population, some 1.8 million persons (9%) were whites of southern birth, mostly from the western South—Oklahoma, Texas, and Arkansas. Also, 569,833 black southerners accounted for another 3% of California's population in 1970. The Great Lakes states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan were the other leading destinations. Together they claimed more than 2.5 million white and 1.2 million black southerners in 1970, the whites accounting for between 4–10% of the populations of those states. These figures count only the migrant generation. Their children and grandchildren would swell the demographic contribution of this massive bi-racial relocation.⁶

Understandings of the southern white migrant experience begin and sometimes end with a pair of powerful literary representations—John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Harriette Arnow's *The Dollmaker*. The first, a story of "Okies" in 1930s California, the second about their "hillbilly" cousins in wartime Detroit, tell similar stories about the traumas of relocation, about proud but backward rural people contending with extreme poverty, cruel stereotypes, and other disorienting experiences. These are themes that also dominate the extensive sociological literature on southern migrants. In

⁶For a fuller display of social and economic data on the two groups of southern expatriates see James N. Gregory, "The Southern Diaspora and the Urban Dispossessed: Demonstrating the Census Public Use Microdata Samples," *Journal of American History*, 82 (1995), 111–134.

TABLE I. Southern-born Whites and Blacks living outside the South* in 1970

State	White southerners		Black southerners	
	Number	% population	Number	% population
California	1,844,788	9	569,833	3
Ohio	1,065,738	10	320,203	3
Indiana	493,472	9	120,189	2
Illinois	487,720	4	464,768	4
Michigan	471,948	5	364,335	4
Pennsylvania	338,629	3	255,516	2
New York	283,050	1	577,291	3
Kansas	202,206	9	33,598	2
New Jersey	198,195	3	242,167	3
Washington	196,828	6	29,388	1
All states	7,376,464		3,410,011	

*Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia.

Source: Calculated from U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1970 Census of Population, Subject Reports: State of Birth* (Washington, DC, 1973), 43-44, 49-50, 55-56, 61-62.

dozens of studies conducted over a 40-year period the image of southern whites as ill-prepared for the challenges of the big city was usually confirmed.⁷

This assessment was quite explicit in the early reports, from the 1930s and 1940s, which often detailed the migrants' many alleged social inadequacies. By the early 1970s the tone of such studies had changed but not the basic conclusions. Robert Coles' empathetic *The South Goes North* (1971) recorded the pained voices of white and black migrant children, lending strength to the prevailing impression that southern whites shared the poverty and social problems of blacks in northern cities. That impression also drew support from several books and dissertations that focused on the 1960s experience of southern whites in Chicago's "Uptown," a poor northside neighborhood that had long been known as a hillbilly enclave.⁸

⁷John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (New York: The Viking Press, 1939); Harriette Arnow, *The Dollmaker* (New York: Macmillan, 1954); Grace G. Leybourne, "Urban Adjustments of Migrants from the Southern Appalachian Plateaus," *Social Forces*, 16 (1937), 238-246; Erdmann Doanne Beynon, "The Southern White Laborer Migrates to Michigan," *American Sociological Review*, 3 (1938), 333-343; Lewis M. Killian, "Southern White Laborers in Chicago's West Side" (unpublished PhD dissertation, Univ. of Chicago, 1949); Rosemary Deyling, "Hillbillies in Steelville: A Study of Participation in Community Life" (unpublished MA essay, Univ. of Chicago, 1949); Eldon D. Smith, "Migration and Adjustment Experiences of Rural Migrant Workers in Indianapolis" (unpublished PhD dissertation, Univ. of Wisconsin, 1953); Harry P. Sharp, "Migration and Social Participation in the Detroit Area" (unpublished PhD dissertation, Univ. of Michigan, 1954).

⁸Robert Coles, *The South Goes North* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971); Todd Gitlin and Nanci Hollander, *Uptown: Poor Whites in Chicago* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970); Lewis M. Killian, *White Southerners* (New York: Random House, 1970), 91-119; Edwin S. Harwood, "Work and Community Among Urban Newcomers: A Study of the Social and Economic Adaptation of Southern Migrants in Chicago" (unpublished PhD dissertation, Univ. of Chicago, 1966); Don Edward Merten, "Up Here and Down Home: Appalachian Migrants in Northtown" (unpublished PhD dissertation, Univ. of Chicago, 1974). More recent studies include William W. Philliber, *Appalachian Migrants in Urban America: Cultural Conflict or Ethnic Group Formation?* (New York: Praeger, 1981); Gene B. Petersen, Laure M. Sharp, and Thomas F. Drury, *Southern Newcomers in Northern Cities: Work and Social Adjustment in Cleveland* (New York: Praeger, 1977).

But as argued elsewhere, the prevailing portrait of lasting poverty and social problems among the white migrants is misleading. Most of what has been picked up in both literary and scholarly representations were the initial resettlement experiences of the least fortunate members of the migrant population. In California the privation of the *Grapes of Wrath* era was real enough for a time, but relatively few of the Oklahomans, Arkansans, Texans, and other white southerners who filtered into California beginning in the 1920s ever saw a San Joaquin Valley cotton camp, let alone lived in a tent. The destinations of most were Los Angeles, San Diego, or the San Francisco Bay Area, where they looked for and generally found industrial employment. And there was little that was exceptional about their social adjustment. Even those who did join the farm labor force in the desperate days of the 1930s made rapid progress out of poverty and usually out of farm work in the 1940s.⁹

So too in the North, economic stability came fairly quickly to most migrants and with it dispersion into socially heterogeneous neighborhoods. "Little Dixies" like "Uptown" Chicago were way stations not permanent communities. Suburbs were the destinations of choice for southerners settling in both the North and the West. Many avoided the large cities from the start, while others left central city neighborhoods as soon as they could.¹⁰

We can clear up some of the misunderstandings about the experiences of southern white migrants with the help of the Public Use Microdata Sample of the 1970 U.S. census.¹¹ Table 2 shows that white southerners were anything but a distressed, marginal population. In both the West (California) and the Great Lakes region (Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin) family incomes of southern-born whites in 1969 just barely lagged averages for the rest of the white population while greatly exceeding those of minority groups. Only one in ten southern white families in the Great Lakes states earned less than poverty line incomes, which was precisely the rate among other whites. The poverty rate for blacks and other minorities was twice as high.

Table 3 shows the suburban residential focus among southern-born whites. In 1970 less than one-third (30.8%) of southern whites lived in a major city compared with 84.6% of African-Americans and 56.4% of Latinos. Almost half (46.6%) of all southern white households were located in the suburbs surrounding major metropolitan areas while another 22.5% lived in small cities and rural areas. Suburban preference among white southerners was still more emphatic in California where 29.1% lived in major cities, 60.4% in suburban ring communities, and 10.5% in non-metropolitan areas.¹²

If southerners proved eager suburbanites, most were not stereotypic middle-class suburbanites. Southern migrants in 1970 were more concentrated in blue-collar occupations than the rest of the white population. Of employed southern-born males in the Great Lakes region 66% earned their livings in blue-collar occupations compared to 50% of other whites. In California the pattern was the same but the blue-collar percentages were lower across the board: 49.1% for southern males; 39.8% for other

⁹Gregory, "The Southern Diaspora and the Urban Dispossessed"; also Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

¹⁰This is made clear in a pair of Chicago surveys reported by Harwood, "Work and Community Among Urban Newcomers," 88-90.

¹¹The Public Use Microdata Samples are machine-readable data files prepared by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. There are six separate files, each a different 1% sample of household records from the 1970 census. This study uses the sample designated 5% State data.

¹²For a more complete breakdown that includes foreign-born whites see Gregory, "The Southern Diaspora and the Urban Dispossessed".

TABLE 2. Household income and poverty status, 1969

	Great Lakes area (OH, IN, IL, MI, WI)				California			
	Southern -born whites	Other whites	Blacks	Latinos	Southern -born whites	Other whites	Blacks	Latinos
Average family income	\$10,111	\$10,533	\$7,429	\$9,232	\$10,163	\$10,983	\$7,049	\$8,062
% of households below poverty line	11.1 (10,022)	10.9 (100,465)	25.0 (10,688)	13.3 (2,181)	10.7 (7,550)	10.3 (46,337)	24.3 (4,179)	19.0 (5,845)
N								

Source: 1970 U.S. Census Public Use Microdata Sample, 5% State sample.

TABLE 3. Households by residential setting, 1970

	Great Lakes area (OH, IN, IL, MI, WI)				California			
	Southern -born whites	Other whites	Blacks	Latinos	Southern -born whites	Other whites	Blacks	Latinos
% in core cities	30.8	29.3	84.6	56.4	29.1	37.0	70.4	40.3
% in suburban ring	46.6	41.4	11.1	29.0	60.4	55.7	28.0	53.7
% in small cities/ rural areas	22.5	29.3	4.3	14.5	10.5	7.3	1.7	6.0
Total	99.9	100.0	100.0	99.9	100.0	100.0	100.1	100.0
N =	(10,022)	(100,465)	(10,688)	(2,181)	(7,550)	(46,337)	(4,179)	(5,845)

Source: 1970 U.S. Census Public Use Microdata Sample, 5% State sample.

whites. Female employment followed a similar trend. Southern-born white women joined the labor force at about the same rate as other white women in 1970 but were more likely to work at blue-collar and service jobs. In the Great Lakes states 52.3% of employed southern-white women worked in those sectors compared with 37.1% of other white women, 59.8% of African-American women, and 53.7% of Latinas.¹³

White southerners consequently comprised a significant element in the blue-collar work force in these states. Although only 6% of the overall 1970 population of the Great Lakes states, white southerners were 10% of the blue-collar population and 13% of the suburban blue-collar population in that region. These figures compare with 12% of the overall working class and 15% of the suburban blue-collar population in California.

Southern-born whites were disproportionately represented at skilled-job levels and in industries that offered, as of 1970, secure, unionized, well-paid jobs. In the Midwest steel, autos, rubber, aircraft, and electrical equipment manufacturing along with trucking and construction attracted large numbers of southerners, each in 1970 claiming work forces that were at least 10% southern white. The concentrations varied from state to state. In Indiana and Ohio 17% of all autoworkers and 20% of all rubber-industry employees were white southerners, as were 18% of Ohio's truckers and 20% of its aircraft industry. In Michigan where the representation of southern whites in the general population was only 5%, 11% of the state's auto and steel workers claimed that background. The auto industry was especially important to southern-white males, employing more than 50,000 of them, one out of every four (24%) southern males in the state's labor force. In California concentrations of southern-born whites were found in auto, steel, and aircraft industries and still more in construction and trucking where white southerners were 15% of the work force. In the state's important oil industry former southerners filled 23% of the jobs.¹⁴

Southernization/Northernization

These numbers force us to revise the prevailing assumptions and set up the questions about southern-migrant influence. Clearly by the 1960s this was no marginal group. So how did these former southerners—who in a state like California accounted for one out of every eight blue-collar workers and one out of six whites in the working class—participate in and affect blue-collar institutions and culture?

This is not an entirely new question. Beginning during the World War II migrations, journalists and scholars joined trade unionists in wondering whether the influx of farm families, supposedly untutored in the ways of the city and the ways of organized labor, might complicate the future of both. Various wartime reports expressed the fears that union loyalty might be weakened, that Protestants and Catholics would not get along, that white southerners would bring a new virulence to racial relations.¹⁵

These concerns gradually faded in the 1950s. Alarmist articles about the "hillbilly" influx disappeared from the popular press, replaced by a growing confidence, especially among sociologists, that southern-white newcomers were joining unions, adopting

¹³Labor force participation rates in the Great Lakes among females 14 years and older were as follows: southern whites (39.1%), other whites (39.6%), African-Americans (45.2%), Latinas (42.1%).

¹⁴Calculated from U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1970 Public Use Microdata Sample (5% State sample).

¹⁵Katherine Archibald, *Wartime Shipyard: A Study of Social Disunity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1947); Deyling, "Hillbillies in Steelville".

TABLE 4. Occupations of individuals in the civilian labor force highlighting blue-collar work

	Great Lakes area (OH, IN, IL, MI, WI)				California			
	Southern -born whites	Other whites	Blacks	Latinos	Southern -born whites	Other whites	Blacks	Latinos
Males: % blue collar % skilled, craft, foreman	66.1	50.3	65.7	66.6	49.1	39.8	54.2	58.8
Females: % blue collar % Service	28.7	16.7	21.4	33.7	15.9	10.7	18.1	34.6
	23.6	20.4	38.4	20.0	23.4	18.2	36.1	19.9

Source: 1970 U.S. Census Public Use Microdata Sample, 5% State sample.

northern norms, and assimilating into northern society. Lewis Killian hinted at these developments in a pair of articles published in 1952 and 1953 based on his study of white southerners in Chicago. The migrants were "making a peaceful, if reluctant, accommodation to northern urban patterns," including the region's racial norms, he concluded. By the 1960s observers were still more confident. In his classic *Working Class Suburb*, sociologist Bennett Berger observed that the large numbers of former Oklahomans and Arkansans living in Milpitas, California were all but indistinguishable in values or lifestyle from other Ford plant workers and residents. These assessments were probably sound. A variety of sources—including survey research—suggest more convergence than difference between former southerners and other blue-collar whites.¹⁶

But was this a case of one-way re-socialization as prevailing wisdom has had it? A case can be made that the northernization of southern whites was matched by the southernization of northern blue-collar culture. Blue-collar political trends in the 1960s invite that interpretation, especially given the highly visible role played by George Wallace. In three presidential campaigns that helped break the back of the old Democratic party, the Alabama governor brought a new face to northern conservatism, adding a blue-collar look and a southern accent to a cause that had previously been led by pin-striped Republicans and Birchers. Indeed it was Wallace's surprise challenge to Lyndon Johnson in 1964 and his strong showing in primary elections in Indiana, Wisconsin, and Maryland that alerted journalists to one of the great political changes of the era: the growing disenchantment of a portion of the white working class, their slide away from the Democratic party and union political direction, and the surge of what has been interpreted as blue-collar conservatism.¹⁷

Southern whites have often been implicated in this trend, both by journalists, who instinctively associate the southern background with virulent racism, and by scholars, who sometimes are less than careful when it comes to stereotyping southern whites. Sociologist Richard Hamilton, in a much cited 1972 study, tried to undercut the evidence of a blue-collar political shift by blaming southern whites. Rejecting the literature on "working-class authoritarianism" that pegged Catholic blue-collar families as racist and culturally conservative, he argued that the change in 1960s blue-collar voting patterns was really a manifestation of "Southern white working class authoritarianism."¹⁸

But we need to look carefully at such facile claims. The racial backlash among working-class whites began long before George Wallace's 1964 campaign and by any measure had more to do with northern Catholics than southern migrants. In a recent

¹⁶Lewis M. Killian, "The Adjustment of Southern White Migrants to Northern Urban Norms," *Social Forces*, 32 (1953), 68. See also his "Effects of Southern White Workers on Race Relations in Northern Plants," *American Sociological Review*, 17 (1952), 327-331. Bennett M. Berger, *Working-Class Suburb: A Study of Auto Workers in Suburbia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960); William E. Powles, "The Southern Appalachian Migrant: Country Boy Turned Blue-Collarite," in Arthur B. Shostak and William Gomberg, eds., *Blue-Collar World: Studies of the American Worker* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 270-281. On the survey research see note 20 below.

¹⁷Recent accounts of the Wallace campaigns include Carter, *The Politics of Rage*; Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 221-244.

¹⁸Hamilton, *Class and Politics*, 460-467. Also Kevin Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1969), 450; Samuel Lubell, *The Hidden Crisis in American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1970), 75.

study of Detroit's "crabgrass" resistance to housing integration in the 1950s and 1960s, Thomas Sugrue looked for but failed to find evidence of extensive southern-white involvement, despite the common belief that "hillbillies" were to blame for some of the disturbances. Arnold Hirsch reaches the same conclusion about white riots and housing battles in Chicago. And no one ever suggested that southern whites were to blame for the backlash struggles in Boston, Brooklyn, or Philadelphia. The fact is that northern whites needed no instruction in racism from southerners.¹⁹

Moreover a priori assumptions about southern whites and their political and racial views are manifestly wrong. Various opinion surveys from the period suggest that relocated southerners shared more or less the same spectrum of opinions as northern whites and that only a minority harbored the kinds of values articulated by George Wallace. In a pair of national polls from the early 1960s, less than a third of former southerners professed hostility toward African-Americans or their claim to equal rights, while almost an equal number expressed strong support for the cause of civil rights. So too in a poll taken in Los Angeles shortly after the Watts riot, whites born in the South were no more likely to oppose integration than former residents of the Northeast and Midwest, and were only slightly more prejudiced than white native Californians. The order was reversed in a 1967 Chicago sample: a smaller percentage of former southerners expressed racist views than was true for whites born in that city. These small polling samples may not be accurate, but at the very least they encourage us to be careful about unidimensional descriptions of former southerners or any other population group. By the 1960s former southerners were spread across the political map, not unlike the broader blue-collar population into which they had steadily integrated.²⁰

Still, I think we can sketch a southern story here, but it has to be one that examines the interactions between whites from the South and North and even more critically pays attention to southern institutions and symbols that somewhat independently of the migrants became important to blue-collar northerners. George Wallace was one of those symbols, and with the Wallace phenomenon we can model the sequence of interactions that marked the partial southernization of white working-class culture.

Wallace brought North a brand of politics not well known outside the South, a synthesis of class and racial agendas that found an eager audience among certain aggrieved sectors of the white working class. In his major campaign effort, 1968, expatriate southerners clearly played a critical role but not the simplistic one implied by

¹⁹Thomas J. Sugrue, "Crabgrass-Roots Politics: Race, Rights, and the Reaction against Liberalism in the Urban North, 1940-1964," *Journal of American History*, 82 (1995), 551-578 and in the same issue: Arnold R. Hirsch, "Massive Resistance in the Urban North: Trumbull Park, Chicago, 1953-1966," 522-550. See also Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*; Jonathan Rieder, *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn Against Liberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

²⁰The two national surveys are reported in Paul B. Sheatsley, "White Attitudes Toward the Negro," *Daedalus*, 95 (1966), 277; and Hamilton, *Class and Politics*, 474, footnote 20. The Chicago and Los Angeles samples are in Donald J. Bogue and Richard McKinlay, *Militancy For and Against Civil Rights and Integration in Chicago: Summer 1967 Report #1* of University of Chicago Community and Family Study Center (Aug. 1, 1967), 14-17; Richard T. Morris and Vincent Jeffries, "The White Reaction Study," in Nathan Cohen, ed., *The Los Angeles Riots: A Socio-Psychological Study* (New York: Praeger, 1970). On the basis of extensive interviews in 1966 with a Los Angeles sample, Howard S. Elinson reports no important differences in viewpoints of southerners and other working-class whites in "Folk Politics: The Political Mentality of White Working-Class Voters" (unpublished PhD dissertation, UCLA, 1967), 100. The only contrary data I have found were reported in Angus Campbell, *White Attitudes Toward Black People* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1971), 44-45.

Hamilton and some others. Former southerners did not provide the bulk of his northern votes, those came from a variety of other sources, including Catholic blue-collar families. It was in the role of start-up audience and campaign cadre that relocated white southerners made their critical contribution.²¹

Judging by the pattern in some communities where former southerners lived in substantial numbers—San Pablo, California, where the governor received 22% of the vote; Akron, Ohio, where he received 20%—Wallace probably received a disproportionate share of the votes of the white migrant group. But more important than their votes was the role of some expatriates in the campaign. Stories from various settings suggest that sons and daughters of the South often set up initial campaign organizations, carried the petitions that put Wallace's name on the ballot, and in other ways spark-plugged many of the northern and western state campaigns. James Canfield's study of the Wallace effort in the working-class suburbs north of Detroit provides confirmation. He surveyed campaign workers and found that nearly half of the activists were former southerners.²²

But the significance of the Wallace efforts lay in its impact not among former southerners but among their neighbors. Expatriates may have helped create the initial enthusiasm for the tough-talking Alabaman but it soon carried further, into communities like Gary, Indiana and Newark, New Jersey where most of the supporters were northern-born Catholics. Gary, a racially tense steel town with a substantial Polish population, became more of a Wallace stronghold than any of the communities with large southern-born populations. Gary turned out for Wallace in his first northern foray, giving him a majority of its blue-collar vote in the 1964 Democratic primary. Support was almost as strong for his 1968 third-party bid. A pre-election survey found 38% of Gary's blue-collar workers supporting him.²³

Wallace broke into such blue-collar and often Catholic enclaves with a political message and image that belonged to the South yet resonated powerfully at this particular historical moment for certain angry portions of the northern white electorate. This southern politician spoke a political language that high-profile northern politicians would not use. As Dan Carter makes clear in his recent biography of the governor, Wallace's efforts in 1964 and 1968 were different from the "crabgrass" campaigns of the sort that Sugrue describes in Detroit or that Arnold Hirsch, Mike Davis, and others have written about. Those efforts were localized and rhetorically limited. Crabgrass leaders kept their arguments tightly focused on immediate issues, fighting integration in the name of neighborhood preservation and property rights. But until Wallace came along this was not a struggle that connected easily to a larger political vision or to organized party politics.²⁴

²¹Kenneth Durr's very recent article "When Southern Politics Came North" appeared too late to help this effort. A study of Baltimore white working-class politics it shows in more detail than I have the evolution of backlash political rhetoric.

²²Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, describes a number of start-up incidents; James Lewis Canfield, *A Case of Third Party Activism: The George Wallace Campaign Worker and the American Independent Party* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 32–35. For other observations about ex-southerners see Jody Carlson, *George C. Wallace and the Politics of the Powerless: The Wallace Campaigns for the Presidency, 1964–1976* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1981), 88; Lubell, *The Hidden Crisis in American Politics*, 75, 84; Lillian B. Rubin, *Busing and Backlash: White Against White in a California School District* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 147–154.

²³Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, *The Politics of Unreason: Right Wing Extremism in America 1970–1970* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 363–365.

²⁴Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, especially 294–370; Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*; Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 151–219.

The Goldwater campaign had tried to supply a vision in 1964, packaging property rights and anti-integrationism with arguments about the dangers of intrusive government, but Goldwater's efforts yielded little in blue-collar neighborhoods. In the 1960s Republican conservatives still had trouble addressing working-class voters. They could talk about anti-communism, law and order, and anti-integration, but they lost blue-collar families on labor rights and safety-net issues.

It took a George Wallace to show the way. Wallace came North in 1964 and 1968 speaking a plainfolks' political language that had been used often by southern Democrats since William Jennings Bryan. Heir to the South's neo-populist tradition, he mixed social and racial conservatism with elite-bashing and gestures to ordinary working people. Attacking "eastern money interests," "pointy-headed professors," and "bearded bureaucrats" in the same breath with communists and Martin Luther King, he declared for the "little people," the "average man on the street," the "working man" in terms that Republicans could not yet match.²⁵

Nor could northern Democrats. By the 1960s the northern Democratic party and most of the labor movement were committed to a civil rights agenda. Wallace stepped into the vacuum. His segregationist populism echoed some of the instincts of that segment of blue-collar whites who felt squeezed or left behind by the changing agendas of northern liberalism. The major media worked hard to catch Wallace in ethnocentric slips, playing up remarks and associations that might suggest anti-semitism and anti-Catholicism. Organized labor chipped away at his class credentials, reminding workers that Alabama was a right-to-work state. In the end his support was never as broad as its potential. Homegrown backlash politicians who learned from him, like Louise Day Hicks in Boston, Sam Yorty in Los Angeles, and Frank Rizzo in Philadelphia, did much better with the same constituencies. And ultimately so did the Republicans, once they hit on their pseudo-populist "Silent Majority" strategy. But Wallace had shown the way. It had taken a southerner to reintroduce the crossed language of class and race into northern politics.²⁶

Working Man's Blues

If a southern political style found a niche in the blue-collar North, certain religious and recreational interests from the same region also found audiences. Evangelical churches of various sorts (especially Pentecostal and Southern Baptist) accompanied the southern outmigration and over the years extended their reach outward from an initial base among the migrants. But this is a complex subject that must be left for a different time. To trace the southernization of American Protestantism is to go beyond the class and temporal boundaries of this article. Most of the effects of the evangelical diaspora have come into view since the 1970s and extend beyond the white working class.²⁷

²⁵Lipset and Raab, *Politics of Unreason*, 340–350, 407. See also Lewis Chester, Godfrey Hodgson, and Bruce Page, *An American Melodrama: The Presidential Campaign of 1968* (New York: Viking Press, 1969), 261–294; Thomas Byrne Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1991), 76–80.

²⁶Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, 299–300, finds no evidence that Wallace was anti-Catholic or anti-semitic, though some of his associates were. On other backlash candidates see J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 115–138; Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*; John C. Bollens and Grant B. Geyer, *Yorty: Politics of a Constant Candidate* (Pacific Palisades, CA: Palisades Publishers, 1973).

²⁷See Gregory, *American Exodus*, 191–222; James Davison Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983).

We turn instead to two southern-origin institutions that played a more easily tracked role in the transformation of white working-class culture and politics during the critical 1960s. Country music became emblematic of a certain version of white working-class culture by the end of that decade, bringing with it new media heroes, symbols, and avenues of political expression. Rock'n'roll was to some extent also a southern product, but with very different social and political implications. Transgressing racial and class boundaries where country music tended to reinforce them, rock competed with country for more than record sales. By the late 1960s these two commercial media with their strikingly different social visions summarized many of the changes and fragmentations of post-war blue-collar life.

The roots of both music genres lay principally in the South. Country emerged as a definable commercial medium with the advent of radio and recording in the 1920s. Initially called hillbilly music, it incorporated elements of the blues along with song and instrumental forms that evoked white rural America. The white South provided much of the initial audience and most of its performers, but World War II opened national and even international markets, as southern GIs and war workers took their musical tastes North and West (and to Germany and Japan) and as soldiers from other regions learned to like the music while stationed in the South. By the end of the 1960s listener surveys revealed that country music appealed largely to whites of blue-collar or lower-middle-class occupations and modest educational attainment. In the North, former southerners accounted for a vigorous portion of this market, thus approximating the start-up role they played in the Wallace crusades. But again the product had spread far beyond that base. Country music had also become popular in immigrant-stock communities, especially in blue-collar taverns where the records of Johnny Cash, George Jones, and Loretta Lynn now competed with Frank Sinatra and Nelson Eddy for juke box dimes. Adults in the mid-range, 25 to 49, age group were the primary consumers.²⁸

The social repositioning of country music was aided by the explosive emergence of rock'n'roll. Rock, it may be argued, was less a product of the South than of southern outmigrations, especially the African-American exodus. The fusions, innovations, and commercial breakthroughs that marked the musical evolution from country blues, to electric blues, to R&B, to rock'n'roll became possible in part because of the massive relocations of black artists and audiences to the cities of the North. White southerners also had a role. When the R&B sound jumped the color line in the mid-1950s it was with the help of young white southerners like Carl Perkins, Buddy Holly, and Elvis Presley.²⁹

Almost from the start country music and rock'n'roll were locked in a dance of competition and social definition. George Lipsitz correctly stresses the working-class

²⁸Richard A. Peterson and Paul Di Maggio, "From Region to Class, the Changing Locus of Country Music: A Test of the Massification Hypothesis," *Social Forces*, 53 (1975), 497-506. Other important sources on the development and diffusion of country music include Bill C. Malone's two books *Country Music USA* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968) and *Southern Music American Music* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1979); D. K. Wilgus, "Country-Western Music and the Urban Hillbilly," *Journal of American Folklore*, 83 (1970), 157-179; Archie Green, "Hillbilly Music: Source and Symbol," *Journal of American Folklore*, 78 (1965), 204-222; George O. Carney, "Country Music and the Radio: A Historical Geographic Assessment," *Rocky Mountain Social Science Journal*, 11 (1974), 19-32. For an example of its place in tavern life see E. E. LeMasters, *Blue-Collar Aristocrats: Life-Styles at a Working-Class Tavern* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975), 143-144.

²⁹George Lipsitz, *Class and Culture in Cold War America: A Rainbow at Midnight* (New York: Praeger, 1981), 195-225.

basis of early rock'n'roll but the new medium would develop a very different relationship with that audience than its country music cousin. Right from the start rock was transgressive. This aggressive new medium signed itself as the music of youth, sex, and at certain junctures, racial interaction. After the English invasion of the mid-1960s, it was also the music of cultural rebellion. By the late sixties rock belonged to an aggressive youth culture that expressed few connections to any class, least of all the working class, as it challenged conventional standards of morality, patriotism, work, and lifestyle.³⁰

For young working-class whites who joined the rock revolution, the music often led in complicated directions. Although barely acknowledged in accounts of the sixties that fix the New Left and Counterculture as middle-class social movements, white working-class young people contributed to both, including some specifically working-class variants. New Left-linked organizations like Rising Up Angry and the Young Patriots Organization represented the iceberg tip of a subculture of working class discontent that had nothing to do with George Wallace and blue-collar conservatism. It showed up occasionally in new forms of labor militance, as at the General Motors Lordstown Ohio plant in 1970. More commonly, it led young working-class whites away from politics, away from the institutions and values of their elders, away from class identification, work identification, into what may have been a more anomic form of alienation than anything found on the era's college campuses.³¹

Rock was not the only medium troubling the white working class. As the 1960s progressed, television jettisoned the blue-collar and modest middle-class representations common to the fifties (*The Honeyymooners*, *The Life of Riley*, *I Love Lucy*) in favor of professional-class sit-coms (*Father Knows Best*, *Leave it To Beaver*). Hollywood was changing its formulas at the same time, replacing western action movies with slick James Bond-type spy thrillers, turning from heart-of-America symbolism to Kennedy-model glamour, wealth, and power. The two screens would become still more unfriendly to working-class self-esteem by the end of the decade when they followed the academic disciplines into portrayals of "working-class authoritarianism." The film *Joe* about an enraged construction worker who slaughters Hippies, and the equally unflattering sit-com, *All in the Family*—with its crude Archie Bunker character, completed the visual media's turn against the white working class.³²

Country music, alone among the major expressive media, moved in a different direction, taking advantage of a marketing opportunity to reach out more emphatically than ever to the urban working class. With its obvious southern and even more obvious religious and rural symbolism, country music had initially alienated urban Catholic audiences. But in the 1950s and 1960s the medium executed a number of changes in look and theme that changed its appeal. Songs about cowboys and green mountain

³⁰Lipsitz presses for a more open reading of rock'n'roll (and for that matter country music) than I have implied here in his *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 99–162. Simon Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock'n'Roll* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981) argues that the music has never had much to do with class.

³¹Stanley Aronowitz treats these matters in *False Promises: The Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973); and in *The Politics of Identity: Class, Culture, Social Movements* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

³²Stanley Aronowitz, *The Politics of Identity*; Lipsitz, *Time Passages*, 39–75.

homes gave way to contemporary themes and settings, while the western stage regalia that had long been standard changed to sport coats, chiffon dresses and rhinestones.³³

Automotive culture may have provided the symbolic meeting place between rural-origin traditional audiences and the newer urban working-class country music fans. Cars and trucks replaced horses and locomotives as the central icons of the post-war country song. Tying into the car mechanics and stock-car-racing mania that also swept northward during these decades, country song writers elevated long-haul trucking to cult status. The truck driver would become the cardinal hero of the post-war country song, perhaps because he brought rural and urban symbolism together in a comfortable compromise. An 18-wheel cowboy, master of his own fate, in song legend he roamed the wide open spaces managing the machinery of modern life without losing independence.³⁴

Other elements needed less adjustment. Country music has always been about problem solving, about everyday people and their everyday problems. It is largely a literary medium, instrumentation and rhythm matter less than words and drama. Sometimes jokingly called "three minute soap operas," country song texts most often fix upon issues of love, family, morality, and honor—commonplace themes that easily resonated in many working-class households.³⁵

While most of these elements have remained fairly constant since the medium began reaching urban audiences, the 1960s witnessed a change in country music's social references that clearly had something to do with the particular way that the music served white working-class audiences in that decade. Race, class, and gender symbols—always key parts of the country music lexicon—took on new prominence and more controlled meanings than in other eras.

Race has always been an implicit part of country music's marketing and appeal. Since its commercial inception this had been understood as white people's music, however much it borrowed from black musical traditions. In the 1960s the racial marking became explicit as Nashville positioned itself against the racially integrated imagery and personnel of rock n' roll and as George Wallace and other segregationist politicians claimed country music for the backlash cause.³⁶

Also by tradition, this was common people's music, having long employed symbols keyed to broad audiences of southern whites. Artists presented themselves as "plain folks," downhome and unpretentious, while song texts pressed the message with frequent references to humble origins, dangerous and demanding work settings (especially trucks and coal mines) and occasional swipes at the silver spoon crowd.³⁷

³³Ivan M. Tribe, "The Hillbilly Versus the City: Urban Images in Country Music," *John Edwards Memorial Foundation Quarterly*, 10 (1974), 41–51; Anthony O. Edmonds, "Myths and Migrants: Images of Rural and Urban Life in Country Music," *Indiana Social Studies Quarterly*, 28 (1975/76), 67–72.

³⁴Robert Shelton, "Meet a New Folk Hero, the Truck Driver," *The New York Times*, Dec. 4, 1966; Malone, *Country Music USA*, 296–297.

³⁵A good place to start an examination of country music's social themes is Patricia Averill's encyclopedic dissertation, "Can the Circle be Unbroken: A Study of the Modernization of Rural Born Southern Whites Since World War I Using Country Music" (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1975). Also Alex Freedman, "The Sociology of Country Music," *Southern Humanities Review*, 3 (1969), 358–362.

³⁶A number of prominent musicians signed on to help the Wallace campaigns, including Hank Snow, Marty Robbins, Autry Inman, Teddy Wilburn. See Malone, *Country Music USA*, 317; Averill, "Can the Circle Be Unbroken", 664.

³⁷Charles Conrad, "Work Songs, Hegemony, and Illusions of Self," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 5 (1988), 179–201.

So too gender, or rather masculinity, had been an inescapable theme, arguably *the* central theme of country music. The endless sad songs about broken romances; the loser songs about convicts, ramblers, and fleeing lovers regretting life's wrong turns; even the songs about mama and honky tonk angels (the usual female personae of the 1960s) in some manner almost always problematized the male and his life choices.³⁸

Much of this came together in a pointed way in the late 1960s and served to give the medium a particular political reputation. Usually country music is open to many political interpretations. In the 1930s and again in the 1970s it was possible to find songs expressing liberal or even radical views. But rarely in the 1960s. In that decade country music provided the soundtrack for the revolt of the Silent Majority.³⁹

Patriotism was the cardinal issue around which country music's political identity was reorganized. The racial politics of the era was handled for the most part subtextually, although an occasional song like Guy Drake's 1970 hit, "Welfare Cadillac Blues" put some of it into words. But there was nothing euphemistic about the way the industry responded as the Vietnam War heated up. With almost a singular voice, country music defended American involvement in Vietnam and beyond that an image of an "old fashioned" patriotic Americanism. A flood of flag-waving songs climbed the country music charts beginning in 1965, among them Johnny Wright's "Hello, Vietnam" and "Keep the Flag Flying," Barry Sadler's "Ballad of the Green Berets," Loretta Lynn's "Dear Uncle Sam," Autry Inman's "Ballad of Two Brothers," and Nancy Ames' "He Wore a Green Beret."⁴⁰

Another stream struck back at anti-war protests and other challenges to rock-ribbed values. When Tom T. Hall's song posed the question, "Mama, Tell Them What We're Fighting For," Ernest Tubb answered with "It's for God Country and You Mom" then followed with two others: "It's America" and "Love it or Leave it." Protestors were also the target in Johnny Seay's "Day of Decision," Bobby Bare's "God Bless America Again," Stonewall Jackson's "The Minutemen are Turning in the Graves," Bill Anderson's "Where Have all the Heroes Gone?" and Terry Nelson's "Battle Hymn of Lt. Calley."⁴¹

With these and other compositions of the late 1960s and early 1970s country music marked out a politics (remarkably consistent for a commercial medium) of patriotism and traditionalism, particularly attuned to a certain fraction of the white working class. The artist who best synthesized and symbolized the project was Merle Haggard.⁴²

Born in poverty, the son of Oklahomans who had migrated to California during the Depression, Haggard had started his career in the early 1960s singing sad songs about

³⁸Averill, "Can the Circle be Unbroken".

³⁹Paul Di Maggio, Richard A. Peterson, and Jack Esco, Jr., "Country Music: Ballad of the Silent Majority," in R. Serge Denisoff and Richard A. Peterson, eds., *The Sounds of Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972); and in the same volume Jens Lund, "Fundamentalism, Racism, and Political Reaction in Country Music", 86-91. See also Averill's compilation of political references in "Can the Circle Be Unbroken," 665-683, 1197-1206.

⁴⁰These titles are from Averill, "Can the Circle Be Unbroken," appendix B, 1184-1206. Most appeared on Billboard Top Ten lists or in *Country Song Round-up*.

⁴¹*Ibid.* See also Malone, *Country Music USA*, 311-320.

⁴²The unanimity of political perspective was not accidental. When Glenn Campbell recorded "The Universal Soldier" in 1965 the response was so hostile that according to one source he felt compelled to apologize. See Averill, "Can the Circle be Unbroken," 32. Malone, *Country Music USA*, 318, cites other examples of artists who suppressed their personal politics in order to serve the market.

the lonely outsiders who often populated country tunes: truck drivers, hoboes, fugitives, and convicts (a two-year stint in San Quentin prison adding authenticity to the effort). By 1968 he was one of the biggest names in the business. In a sequence of hit songs that earned him international attention, he took up the banner of white working-class conservatism. The first, "Workin' Man Blues" plays with class identity. With a quick aside about welfare ("That's one place I won't be"), the song builds a blues anthem around hard work, male responsibilities, and a life of struggle. "I'll keep working," Haggard promises, "long as my two hands are fit to use." Woeful rather than angry, the political intent of the song is muffled, although it is clearly intended for a mobilized audience. As the song ends and the music fades, Haggard tacks on a dedication: "This song is for the workin' man."⁴³

Haggard's next composition, "Okie from Muskogee," turned up the political volume. In unforgettable lyrics it celebrates the virtues of flag-waving Muskogee, Oklahoma, where, "we don't smoke marijuana" and "the kids still respect the college dean." The tone is light, slightly ironic—"shaggy" hippies and even draft card burners are rendered as silly rather than threatening figures. But the message is uncompromising. Muskogee becomes the figure for Haggard's vision of America lost: small-town America, homogeneous, virtuous, and brave ("We like livin' right and bein' free"), an America of plain people and simple, old-fashioned ways ("We still wave Old Glory down at the courthouse, white lightning is still the biggest thrill of all").

The song "fired his career into another orbit," in the words of journalist Paul Hemphill. Hailed as the ballad of the Silent Majority, "Okie from Muskogee" quickly came to symbolize the grievances of the angry white working class. A follow-up song "The Fightin' Side of Me" made the anger more apparent, with Haggard warning: "When you're running down my country, hoss, you're walking on the fightin' side of me." The press had found a new face and new voice, a new leader for the blue-collar backlash. As Wallace slipped from the headlines, Haggard took his place, another southern-origin symbol, "the poet laureate of the hard hats" wrote one journalist.⁴⁴

By the end of the 1960s Haggard's conservative populism was stamped all over country music and both were intertwined with the culture of the blue-collar North. By no means did all or even most white working-class northerners share the views that Haggard, Tubb, and the other "Fightin' side" artists were propounding, but for those who did, this mass-market medium had become an instrument of cultural and political mobilization. Like the Wallace initiatives, but on a larger and more subtle scale, country music had found an audience in the conservative sectors of the white working class, an audience that was struggling to gain a public voice. Ray Stevens caught the essence of the medium's relationship to this particular audience in his 1970 song, "America, Communicate With Me." Confused and distressed by the "flaring headlines," the song's protagonist maintains his faith in "the same great country" while pleading: "America, my country 'tis of thee; America, communicate with me."⁴⁵

⁴³"Workin' Man Blues" by Merle Haggard, copyright 1969, Tree Publishing. On Haggard's career and influence see Merle Haggard, *Sing Me Back Home: My Story* (New York: Times Books, 1981); James N. Gregory, "Country Music and the Okie Subculture" in James J. Rawls, ed., *New Directions in California History* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988).

⁴⁴Paul Hemphill, "Merle Haggard," *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 1971, 98-103.

⁴⁵"America, Communicate with Me" by Ray Stevens, copyright 1970 by Ahab Music Company, Inc. as transcribed in Averill, "Can the Circle Be Unbroken," 673.

No longer at home with much of the northern Democratic party, alienated as well from the leadership of important unions like the UAW, conservative blue-collar whites were looking ... and country music gave them some of what they were looking for. In the plain-folk symbolism, in the music's evocation of patriotism, in its affirmation of the traditional ordering of race and gender, indeed in its powerful commitment to traditionalism in general, country music helped many northern blue-collar workers move away from liberalism into a new kind of conservatism that made room for the white working class, a southern-style conservatism.

Country music, the Wallace campaigns, and other southern-origin symbols and institutions were part of a multidimensional exchange that remade American patterns of class, race, and region in the middle decades of the 20th century. Instruments of southernization, they were also, and perhaps more properly, instruments of regional convergence. What we are ultimately describing is the syncretistic re-formation of the white working class: the erosion of culturally salient differences between northern and southern whites and the emergence of new lines of difference that had more to do with vision, politics, and, frequently, age.

A decade or two earlier northern Catholics had laughed at the "crackers" and "hillbillies" joining them in the factories, despising the newcomers even as they shared with them a commitment to the Democratic party. The laughter had not entirely disappeared by the late 1960s but now Catholics and southerners found more common ground, some of it in institutions and symbols that had once belonged to the South. Together now they might share an affection for country music, and now some from each background embraced the political vision associated with George Wallace or Merle Haggard. Others rejected that vision—again both northerners and southerners—holding to the labor liberalism of Hubert Humphrey or turning toward the anti-war or liberation politics emerging in different quarters, or to the anti-politics of the "doper" set. Convergence along a regional dimension, fragmentation along the political—the white working class came out of the 1960s sounding and acting much differently than when the decade began.

Southernization Top Down

It is easy to mark the onset of second-stage southernization. Jimmy Carter's election in 1976 set off a wave of media fascination with things southern, from Billy Beer to the Texas two-step. With trendy New York nightclubs and Hollywood stars now sporting the urban cowboy look, country music jumped the class line just as earlier it had jumped regional boundaries. Though "red neck chic" would last only a few years, fading almost as rapidly as Carter's popularity, it so scrambled the cultural markings that commercial products like country music and stock-car racing would cease to have meaningful regional or class referents.⁴⁶

⁴⁶Country music also changed, as James Cobb reminds us in his article "From Muskogee to Luckenbach: Country Music and the Southernization of America." Still a "white" medium, by the mid-1970s it made room for "outlaws" like Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings and for a very different discourse on gender, including by the 1980s some of the music world's clearest expressions of feminism. Other sources on "Redneck Chic": John M. Coggeshall, "Goin' to the Dawgs?: The Rustication of American Culture," *Western Folklore*, 11 (1985), 122-132; Bill AuCoin, *Redneck* (Matteson, IL: Great Lakes Living Press, 1977).

Carter's South was a "northernized" or as John Egerton put it "Americanized" South that no longer stood apart from the rest of the nation. Three decades of reconstruction had fractured southern apartheid, upgraded the economy from cotton monoculture to a diversified mix of military, manufacturing, and services, and had equipped the region with two new political parties. All of which positioned the South to play a new role in the American political economy. No longer politically isolated, the South of the late 20th century would hold the balance of power in both parties, resulting in a string of southern presidents (three out of the last four counting George Bush), increasingly powerful southern congressional caucuses, and a variety of federal policies from defense spending to deregulation that directly benefitted the region. No longer labor-rich and industry-poor, the sunbelt South would also invert the economic relationships of the previous century, becoming a premier job and investment center. Now it would be the North's turn to send job seekers across the Mason-Dixon line.⁴⁷

The ascendancy of sunbelt politics and sunbelt capital in the last quarter of the 20th century remade the American working class in more profound ways than the bottom-up cultural processes that we have been examining. Calling the South "the Achilles heel of American unionism," Mike Davis ascribes the breakup of the Fordist political economy and the downward spiral of unions and high-wage industrial employment in part to sunbelt firms like Delta Airlines and Brown & Root construction that have come out of the low-tax, low-regulation, anti-union South and moved against northern competitors just as global market forces were driving down profit margins in the 1970s and 1980s. Add to that the proliferation of electrical equipment plants, automobile parts facilities, and steel mini-mills in the Piedmont manufacturing belt, the development of high-tech nodes in the Texas and North Carolina research triangles and the story of the late 20th century regional reorganization takes on momentous proportions.⁴⁸

Indeed, with a little retelling of some familiar stories we can easily make southernization one of the central themes of 20th century political economy and class development. In two periods the South helped reorganize American industrial life. Between World War I and the Vietnam era black and white working-class southerners left the South and remade the cities, the politics, the racial relations, and the working-class cultural life of the North and West. Since the 1970s southern elites have capitalized on the fragmented political structures and aging economic institutions of the northern industrial belt and built a pace-setting regional economy that may well set the terms for industrial relations everywhere in the United States in the next century.

⁴⁷Egerton, *The Americanization of Dixie*; David R. Goldfield, *The Promised Land: The South Since 1945* (Arlington Heights, IL: H. Davidson Inc., 1987); Dewey W. Grantham, *The South in Modern America: A Region at Odds* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994); Steven C. Ballard and Thomas E. James, eds., *The Future of the Sunbelt: Managing Growth and Change* (New York: Praeger, 1983); James F. Lea, ed., *Contemporary Southern Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); Joe P. Dunn and Howard L. Preston, eds., *The Future South: A Historical Perspective for the Twenty-First Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

⁴⁸Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream*, 137.