

SOUTHBOUND: MIGRATION THEMES  
IN SOUTHERN MUSIC

Charles Vaught  
Kenneth B Perkins  
Mary Ann Sheble  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute &  
State University

. Is there a significant migration theme in southern popular music which matches the positive population shift toward the Southern states? First, an allegory: "What do you do here?" the little prince asked. "I sort out travelers, .." said the switchman. "I send off the trains that carry them: now to the right, now to the left." "They are in a great hurry," said the little prince. "What are they looking for?" "Not even the engineer knows that," said the switchman. "Were they not satisfied where they were?" asked the little prince. "No one is ever satisfied where he is," said the switchman. (Saint Exupery: *The Little Prince*)

The economic and the ecological paradigms are most commonly used to explain why people move, and what they move to. The economic model treats migration as a response to factors such as differentials in available resources, and opportunities for employment (Stouffer 1940, 1960; Lowry 1966). Imbalances in the economic structure pull individuals into distinct migration streams. By the ecological model, such processes are aspects of the larger growth and succession of society (Simmons 1968).

. The attempt by population researchers to avoid the ecological fallacy to explain decisions to migrate has led to two micro models (Robinson 1950). A social-psychological model uses the cost-benefit or utility concept, applied to the individual. Relying on behaviorist concepts and terms, like the economic model, it emphasizes resources and differential opportunity for employment. A second micro-level schema explains turnover

of migration in economic terms. Areas which offer a plenitude of jobs may have a small net gain in immigration, compared to the large number of people who circulate in and out (Morrison & Wheeler 1976). This model avoids stress on economic factors which pull individuals, and views humanity as less rational. It poses new questions of why people move, and particularly, why they move from areas with adequate employment opportunities to areas where such employment or wage levels may be lower (Beale 1975; Ross et al 1979).

. By the frontier hypothesis, Turner said, "Whenever social conditions .. tended to press upon labor .. there was the gate of escape to the free conditions of the frontier .. Men would not accept inferior wages and a permanent position of social subordination when this promised land of freedom and equality was theirs for the taking." (Turner 1893) Some have rejected Turner's thesis on the presumption that the western frontier served primarily as an opportunity for farmers, but we believe that the Turner thesis may be more applicable today than when formulated. The frontier may no longer provide opportunity for farmers, but it survives as a chimera for discontented workers.

. Lee (1961) used Turner's migration theory arguing that even when the frontier ceased to exist it continued as a state of mind. The mental frontier is described not so much as a force but as a "cluster of causes united in a single term" (Morrison & Wheeler 1976 3). The idea that one could always move somewhere else entered the vocabulary of motives, to become an inclining mechanism for peoples' decisions to move (Mills 1940). For the descendants of Turner's restless mass, the vision of an unexplored frontier somewhere else has become a part of the popular culture.

. Many are locked into industrial

hierarchies with no real chance of upward mobility (Chinoy 1955; Offe 1976). Increasing numbers are forced into the service sector, where they labor at low-paying, unfulfilling jobs (Mills 1951; Braverman 1974). Workers find themselves alienated, their labor degraded, and its purpose banal. According to Marx (1947), they are denied realization of their "species essence", the human productive potential. From this, we infer a motive to go against the binding socio-economic structure, and a proclivity for protest, as envisioned by Turner. The symbolic frontier assumes greater significance when we view the movement in post-industrial society as more than the rational migration of persons becoming suitably matched to available jobs (Lee 1970). The individual's decision to migrate may be a real form of protest reacting to conditions of domination and exploitation, which come out in cultural forms.

#### THE PROBLEM

. Here, we explore prevailing themes of migration in contemporary southern popular music. In the past decade, the earlier pattern of migration from southern regions to the cities of the north has been reversed (Beale 1975; Sale 1975; Campbell & Johnson 1976). There is some indication that the South has replaced the West as the mythological "Mecca" for both displaced native and non-natives in large metropolitan centers (Long & Hansen 1975; Black 1977). If this frontier vision has become part of the popular culture, it should appear in the music of this culture (Chalfant 1977). If the South serves as a chimerical corollary to Turner's safety valve, songs conveying a migration image would be expected to connote a move to the South, rather than the reverse.

. Specific to the protest notion, we hypothesize that music associated with the South will express discontent with the social condi-

tions in areas outside the South, and the resolution of these dissatisfactions will be a move to the southland.

#### METHOD

. A sample of 344 songs published from 1965 to 1978 was compiled in music anthologies containing the top one hundred rock and country albums and single recordings for each year. These were systematically selected from collections in local music stores and record shops. Songs by foreign performers and those not associated with "southern rock" were excluded.

. The data inventory applied categories reflecting major paradigms of migration theory, and songs were further classed by analytical category. Migration themes were determined by phrases which referred to a more or less permanent move from one geographic origin to a specific destination. This excluded "rambling" songs and trucking songs, and songs about migrant occupations.

. To manage the richness and flavor of the lyrics, we used a grounded theory perspective (Glaser & Strauss 1967). We combined our a priori schema formed from theoretical concepts of migration with specific themes and sentiments that emerged during analysis. This allowed more comprehensive treatment of the lyrics.

#### FINDINGS

. Of the 344 songs, 77 (22%) contained some form of migration theme. Only 5 of the songs dealt with a destination outside the South. Of these, two indicated California, one mentioned the Caribbean, and one mentioned Canada. The fifth mentioned "riding my thumb to Mexico." That migration trends out of the south have been reversed is clearly indicated in the popular music of the region.

. The 50 songs performed by "southern rock" artists were significantly more likely to include the migration theme (38%) than the 294 songs (19%) of the more

commercialized Nashville country music category ( $\chi^2=8.1$ ,  $df=1$ ;  $N=344$ ). This supports the contention that commercial music is fabricated by technicians, for businessmen who view the audience as passive consumers. The less commercial music arises from the people actually performing it, more nearly reflecting cultural and social conditions (Vullaimy 1977).

. There were three prevailing types of themes in the songs: 1) the Odyssey fantasy, typifying the Turner thesis (Morrison & Wheeler 1976); 2) love of place, where the south is a siren drawing men back; 3) an alienation protest motif reminiscent of Turner's original argument.

#### THE SOUTH: IMAGE OF ELSEWHERE

. The Odyssey fantasy was the most salient sentiment in songs with migration imagery. Of the migration lyrics, 32 (42%) said "The South is calling me", or "I'm Southbound." This was a non-specific reference to the South as where to go. The reason seems to be: "Because the South is there, and I am here." A central message was that one had the right to pick up and go, if one wished. There was the implication that nothing should be allowed to interfere with one's freedom to leave for the South, if desired, regardless of job, loved ones, or other obligations. Even for the one who does not travel on, the temptation is still there, and it is comforting to have the conviction that one could go, if one wanted. "Once in a while in my mind I go bummin'/ goin' nowhere with no worry of time/ runnin' along, chasing after a train/ leaving the straight life behind." The South may serve as a summary symbol for home and a more affective and sociable way of life. As one artist puts it: "I'm goin' back to where I can have fun without spendin' a dime/ I'm Southbound."

#### THE SOUTH AS A SAFETY VALVE

. The next category (33% of the

lyrics) was alienation and protest. Such sentiments were the most readily recognized, suggesting dissatisfaction, estrangement, or separation from one's fellows, where a move to the South was a way out. These feelings appeared in the lyrics as non-class-specific. They included the economically successful white collar worker as well as the laborer punching a time card. "To workers I'm just another drone/ To Ma Bell I'm just another phone/ I'm just another consensus on the street/ and I feel like a number/ I feel like a stranger in this land." For the affluent it is the same: "This coat and tie is choking me/ And in your high society/ You cry all day .. We've been so busy/ Keeping up with the Jones'/ Four car garage/ And we're still building on." The blue collar laborer went south to the Gulf to "get his head straight," and the white collar couple went to Texas to find the "basics of love."

. These lyrics reveal a critical awareness of the problems of work in post-industrial society. They reveal the rationalization, the contradictions of capitalist wage earning and the problems of "city life". "Down at the well/ They've got a new machine/ Foreman says it cuts/ Manpower by fifteen." On capitalism: "The little bee sucks the blossom/ The big bee gets the honey/ The little man raises cotton/ The big man gets the money" On city life: "When you've got a house on the hill/ You're payin' everyone's bills/ And they tell you you're gonna go far/ Boy, you've got our feet in L.A./ But your mind's on Tennessee." On a move to the South: "If times don't get no better/ I believe I'm gonna have to go/ Well, you know I'm goin' down South/ Where the weather suits my clothes."

#### THE SIREN CALL OF THE SOUTH

. The last category of 11 songs (15%) stressed the attraction of place in the South. "Carolina, I hear you calling/ I just have to

close my eyes and I'll be there/  
Carolina, I hear you calling/ I  
can almost see the mountains in  
your hair." Many of the songs  
expressed love of place in femin-  
ine terms, like "sweet Virginia",  
and "Georgia".

. In reference to love of place,  
the return migration idea was  
most in evidence. Many songs in-  
dicated that a native had wandered  
far, but was coming home: "Well,  
I thought I'd go out to Tulsa/ To  
ride in a rodeo/ But red beans  
and rice/ Sure would be nice/  
Back by where the river flows./  
It's a long way back to Vicks-  
burg/ And the Mississippi River's  
muddy and wide/ But it don't  
seem like much/ When sweet Louis-  
iana's on the other side."

#### RESIDUAL CATEGORIES

. Two other sentiments appeared  
in 9 songs. Of these, 7 mentioned  
a "forced out" theme, because of  
women, or because of modern "pro-  
gress". For example: "California  
blues, I know you well/ Could be  
I loved her more than she could  
tell/ But it don't matter any  
way/ Tomorrow I'll be leaving  
you, L.A."; and "Daddy won't  
you take me back to Muhlenburg  
County/ Down by the Green River  
where Paradise lay?/ Well, I'm  
sorry my son, but you're too late  
in asking/ Mr. Peabody's coal  
train has hauled it away." And  
two songs indicated a decision to  
move to the South for economic  
betterment: "I'm goin' back to  
Mussel Shoals/ Times are better  
there, I'm told."

**CONCLUSION** We do not wish to  
make too strong an argument bas-  
ed on the content of song lyrics.  
That they portray decisions to  
migrate in frontier terms does not  
show that this is necessarily hap-  
pening in post-industrial society.  
They may present a form of rati-  
onalization for prior migration de-  
cisions. But perhaps aspects of the  
popular culture should show trac-  
es of social decision making and

developmental trends. In an era  
of increasing rationalization the  
chimera of an unexplored frontier  
"somewhere in the South" serves  
as a mechanism to individualize  
and absorb what might otherwise  
grow into collective protest action.

. A look at Turner's original ar-  
gument might help more to explain  
the continued restlessness of the  
population than the theories of  
cost-benefit decision making. At-  
tempts to build a model of humani-  
ty in rational economic terms may  
preclude the activist element,  
which allows one to interpret the  
"rational economic situation" in a  
vocabulary of motives which could  
contradict what the rational per-  
son would consider in his "own  
best interest." We suggest, with  
Marcuse (1978) that aesthetic crea-  
tions of man may be a good index  
to the human condition in society.  
Remember the little prince's dia-  
log with the switchman.

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(Concluded on page 76)

pinge on the mind of the social researcher, and argue that these should be confronted.

. The idea that powerful insight can be achieved through applying the sociology of knowledge orientation in scientific research can be generalized to all forms of sociological endeavor. If the penetration of this perspective into many areas of the discipline means that sociologists are recognizing and addressing the real and potential impact of socio-cultural influences on knowledge of every kind, we can expect a new phase in social science development.

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