

Soul, Country, and the USA: Race and Identity in American Music Culture.

By Stephanie Shonekan. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. 200 pp. ISBN: 978-1-137-37809-5

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Stephanie Shonekan sets herself an ambitious task of evaluating the world view of two major tributaries in American music in this short and accessible text that will find an audience with undergraduate students of American popular music. Shonekan positions herself at the centre of the analysis. As a self-confessed 'outsider' introduced to the United States via popular cultural productions such as *The Beverley Hillbillies* and *Good Times*, she grew up imagining two United States of America; one black, one white, almost as separate as the metaphoric fingers of Booker T. Washington's legendary Atlanta Compromise. This outsider's perspective informs her approach and her understanding of the United States.

Each chapter of her book traces a particular aspect of country and soul music: roots, money and media, racial identity, gender, semiotics, politics and religion. Shonekan is strongest when examining music and racial identity. Citing Brad Paisley and LL Cool J's 2013 song 'Accidental Racist', an almost comedically gauche attempt at racial reconciliation in which the country singer and rapper call out to Americans to stop judging each other, Shonekan observes the ways in which black and white artists express their identities through music and image. She notes that the song's lyrics trivialised the racial divide that continues to define the United States. Lines such as 'If you don't judge my gold chains, I'll forget the iron chains', however well-intentioned, trivialise slavery's impact on black America and simply serve to remind listeners that slavery and its legacy still dominate the racial conversation. Shonekan's mode of analysis is, as this example suggests, primarily lyrical, which might leave readers wondering about her thoughts on the music itself. Paisley's attempt to use a hip hop beat behind his country melodies is as awkward as the lyrics, a feature that deserves further probing.

A chapter investigating gender and relationships encapsulates the book's qualities. In 24 pages Shonekan considers women's and men's view of women, love and relationships alongside women singers' responses to men and cinematic representations of female musical icons. Such breadth is commendable. Yet it means that Shonekan is not able to delve deeply into these issues, or into particularly notable songs. Moreover, at no point is there any consideration of representations (or lack thereof) of homosexual love, desire and being in popular song. Similarly, when demonstrating how soul and country developed over the post-World War II years, Shonekan is forced into shortcuts and generalisations: the repurposing of gospel music by the new soul singers of the 1950s and 1960s, for example, is evaluated briskly in under one page. The young Elvis Presley's amalgamation of the influences he absorbed in Memphis, meanwhile, receives one paragraph. The racial integration of Stax is glossed over in favour of a rather straightforward contrast between it as an exemplar of 'black' music and Bakersfield representing its 'white' counterpart. Readers might wonder how the country-soul gumbo developed by the musicians at Muscle Shoals, Alabama in the 1960s and 1970s fits into this spectrum.

Shonekan also evaluates a number of emblematic musical icons. Garth Brooks is, quite understandably, singled out as a country icon. His black counterpart is Michael Jackson, a figure who Shonekan tantalisingly defines as 'an interesting study in racial ambiguity' (p. 90) before moving on. Prince, similarly, receives

consideration as an example of a crossover star who faced problems when trying to appeal to a 'white' 'rock' audience. Shonekan here points out that black artists like Prince tend to weave in and out of 'black' music whereas country 'seems to have a virtual wall' (p. 90) around itself. An analysis of Taylor Swift might be instructive here. As a teenage country singer Swift achieved crossover success which led to her incorporating numerous musical styles on later albums. Keen listeners can identify house, dubstep, neo-soul and even hip hop in her more recent output, suggesting that country is not as limiting as is often assumed.

Perhaps I am being too harsh. As a primer or an introductory text, *Soul, Country, and the USA* has much to commend it. The book is a breezy read, not too heavy on the theory while treating musicology, semiotics and other cultural approaches seriously. Each chapter will doubtless spur readers to conduct further research and to listen carefully to the music of their choice.

Joe Street

Northumbria University
joe.street@northumbria.ac.uk

Radicalism and Music: An Introduction to the Music Cultures of al-Qa'ida, Racist Skinheads, Christian-affiliated Radicals, and Eco-animal Rights Militants.

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Jonathan Pieslak's 2015 monograph *Radicalism and Music: An Introduction to the Music Cultures of al-Qa'ida, Racist Skinheads, Christian-affiliated Radicals, and Eco-animal Rights Militants* follows his 2009 book *Sound Targets: American Soldiers and Music in the Iraq War*. In *Radicalism and Music*, Pieslak builds on *Sound Targets'* exploration of the links between music and violence. Like a growing number of musicologists and other scholars, Pieslak maintains that music can influence human brutality just as it can foster social cohesion and heroic selflessness. To support this argument, Pieslak examines the music of four different movements on the violent fringe of contemporary politics. His findings suggest that many different human social groups use music for political ends, and that the connections between music and political violence are extraordinarily complex. In his words, 'The coercive uses of music are not isolated to radical cultures; they are at play in our own backyards, in political propaganda, sports rivalry and much of commercial music. By understanding the Janus-faced nature of music, I hope that we, as lovers of music, will be empowered in our listening' (p. 13). *Radicalism and Music* certainly does help empower listeners by discussing how music has helped and harmed individuals and societies in many different cases; it is therefore a valuable contribution to the scholarly literature.

Radicalism and Music delivers important findings for scholars of music, violence and extremism. Pieslak demonstrates that music can help attract new recruits to movements and ideologies across the political spectrum – but that recruits who join political movements simply because they identify with the movements' music are much less likely to remain involved long term than recruits who join out of pre-existing ideological commitment: 'For many, it appears as if the music of the subculture, on which many nonideological factors like social bonds and camaraderie are