Forty Hour Week (For A Livin'): 
Work and the American South in Alabama’s Music Videos

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For Katie. Thank you for always believing in me and supporting me.
1. Introduction..............................................................................................................1

2. If It Ain’t Dixie, It Won’t Do: Defining the American South..............................4

3. Work and Life in the American South: From the Antebellum South to the Twentieth Century.........................................................................................................................8


5. Analysis of the Selected Music Videos
   a. High Cotton (1989)............................................................................................16
   b. Dixieland Delight (1983).....................................................................................25
   c. Forty Hour Week (For A Livin’) (1985).................................................................33
   d. Song of the South (1988).....................................................................................43

6. Conclusion...............................................................................................................52

7. Bibliography............................................................................................................60
1) Introduction

American country band Alabama is the most successful band in the history of country music, with over 40 number one hits and 46 million albums sold (cf. Mansfield 2015, online). The band was formed in 1969 as “Wild Country” by cousins Randy Owen (guitar, vocals), Teddy Gentry (bass, vocals) and Jeff Cook (lead guitar, keyboards, fiddle, vocals) in Fort Payne, Alabama, and later changed their name to Alabama. The band signed their first major record deal with RCA Records in 1980 and reached gold or platinum certifications with all their following studio albums (cf. Cackett 1994: 9). With all of their singles at the top of the country charts throughout one decade, the 1980s mark Alabama’s most successful and productive period. Two singles, “Mountain Music” and “The Closer You Get”, earned the band Grammy awards (cf. Akenson 2013, online). Alabama was also one of the first successful acts performing as a band with a consistent line-up. At the time, it had been more common in the country scene to appear as a solo performer accompanied by a band (cf. Cackett 1994: 9; Akenson 2013, online).

Alabama’s lyrics consistently deal with the American South and the state of Alabama. Besides general glorification of the South with its values and traditions, working-class people and their jobs in farming, cotton, textile and steel mills are common themes in Alabama’s songs (cf. Akenson 2013, online). “Southern Star”, for example, focuses on the difficulties of being a cotton mill worker, while “Song of the South” and “High Cotton” deal with cotton farming (cf. Akenson 2013, online). In their 1985 single “Forty Hour Week (For a Livin’)”, the band also “specifically celebrates the economic contributions made by Detroit automakers and Pittsburgh steel-mill workers in the same manner that it celebrates the Kansas wheatfield farmer.” (Jenkins 2006: 49). In any way, the American South and work culture are omnipresent themes in Alabama’s music and constitute the core of their lyrical work.
Accompanying their hit singles, Alabama has also produced a large number of music videos - between 1981 and 1990 alone, Alabama released a total of 18 videos. Alabama’s music videos were among the first ones within the country genre to receive major airplay on channels such as VH-1 in the mid-1980s, resulting in exposure to a wide audience all across the United States (cf. Fenster 2005: 112). Therefore, their songs and messages about the South were shared with the entire nation, most likely influencing northerners’ perception of the South.

Since channels such as MTV have mostly moved away from playing music videos, they are now almost solely viewed on YouTube, which has become the third most visited website worldwide (Cawley 2015, online; Khan 2016: 236). YouTube has also made Alabama’s music videos available to the masses again and they enjoy popularity on the streaming platform. The official video of “Song of the South” has collected almost 21 million views (cf. AlabamaVevo 2009a, online), “High Cotton” 5.6 million (cf. AlabamaVevo 2009b, online), “Forty Hour Week (For A Livin’)” 3.4 million (cf. AlabamaVevo 2013, online) and “Dixieland Delight” has been watched about one million times (cf. AlabamaVevo 2014, online).

This paper will analyze how and in what ways a selection of the country band Alabama’s most viewed music videos on YouTube represent the American South. The focus will specifically lie on work culture and how the Southern working class’ everyday life and its values are communicated in these videos. In order to do so, cinematic properties concerning mise en scène, cinematography, editing and sound will be analyzed closely and interpreted in terms of their effects on the viewer. In addition, the lyrical contents of each song and how they relate to the videos will be taken into consideration in order to answer the following questions: Where do lyrics and video support or contradict one another? Do the relations between lyrics and video establish additional meanings?
In terms of cinematic properties, I argue that specifically the implementation of narrative techniques and continuity editing strategies in Alabama’s music videos help construct and convey the music videos’ representations of the American South. These specific strategies will be examined in the analysis. *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context* (2004) by Carol Vernallis - with a focus on the chapter “Editing”, where he distinguishes Hollywood film editing involving continuity editing from common music video editing - will also be considered in this analysis.

Moreover, this paper will investigate how the music videos’ representations of the South connect to social, economic and political contexts of Southern history and the time of the videos’ releases. The central questions being: According to historiographical accounts, what was life like in the American South in the 1980s and before? What are the most important historical events that led to the development of a distinctly Southern culture and society? How do the music videos communicate Southern history? How many historical facts can be found in the videos? What effects do the videos’ specific representations of the South have on the viewer?

In order to satisfyingly answer these questions, this paper will start by attempting to define the “American South”, where it is located and what its culture is comprised of. Furthermore, one section will be dedicated to the history of the American South - with a special focus on economic development and work culture. Another section will look at the genre of country music in general, how and where it developed, what the genre stands for among listeners and how certain associations between the genre and cultural properties can be explained. The significance of the country music video in particular will also be addressed.
Through the analysis of country band Alabama’s music videos “High Cotton”, “Dixieland Delight”, “Forty Hour Week (For A Livin’)” and “Song of the South” in terms of their representation of Southern work culture, traditions and values, this thesis will show that the music videos strongly promote a nostalgic image of the American South’s white blue-collar working class society, their humble lifestyles, strong work ethic, and traditional values - such as the importance of agriculture and family - by combining positively connotated aspects of Southern history and society while utilizing clear narrative qualities often considered unusual for music videos.

2) If It Ain’t Dixie, It Won’t Do: Defining the American South

*It is a region, after all, associated with cotton fields and tobacco sheds; with piney woods, cypress swamps, and wiregrass; and, as anyone who has spent a summer in Alabama can attest, with heat and humidity. (Hersey 2017: 99)*

Defining the exact location of the American South has become a considerably difficult undertaking. Nevertheless, it is important to establish a rough outline of what may be considered the American South up to this day. Some aspects, which are commonly used to reach a consensus as to what the ‘true South’ may be, include: the former Confederate States as the foundation of the South, economic properties, religion as well as cultural traits that are considered “southern” (cf. Passcoe, Leatham, Ambrose 2005: xiv).

As the nation generally became more critical about the practice of slavery in the early 19th century, the South was profiting from it greatly as the labor-intensive cotton, sugarcane and tobacco industries were growing in the region (cf. U.S. Embassy 2008a, online). Finally, with the election of President Abraham Lincoln in November 1860, the practice of slavery was seriously threatened. As a result, 11 southern states broke from the union to form their own government, the Confederate States of America (Figure 1). The Confederacy was comprised of
Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia (cf. “Confederate States of America” 2018, online). During that time, the Confederate States also created their own symbols of power, such as the Confederate flag (cf. “Confederate States of America” 2018, online). However, in 1865, the Confederates surrendered and the end of the Civil War also marked the end of slavery in the United States (cf. U.S. Embassy 2008a, online).

In the years following the Civil War, the contrast between the North and the South remained stark as the southern region stayed vigorously agrarian, economically dependent, racially segregated and largely poor (cf. U.S. Embassy 2008b, online). The Jim Crow laws, which were effective between 1877 and the start of the civil rights movement in the 1950s, enforced the racial segregation of black and white southerners (cf. Urofsky 2018, online).

Another symbol of division between the North and South has become the Mason-Dixon Line (Figure 2). In the 18th century, Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon were ordered to mark the boundaries between the states Maryland and Pennsylvania due to a dispute involving two families (cf. Mackenzie n.d., online). In the following century, in 1820, the Missouri Compromise labeled the Mason-Dixon Line the “national divide between the ‘free’ and ‘slave’ states east of the Ohio River, and the line suddenly acquired new significance” (Mackenzie n.d., online). Up until today, the Mason-Dixon Line has served as a symbol of the political and social division between the North and the South (cf. “Mason and Dixon Line” 2017a, online).
The American South is also often referred to as “Dixie”. Although it is not entirely clear where the term originated, a number of plausible theories do exist. One theory suggests that the term stems from a 1859 song of the same name, written by Daniel Decatur Emmett. The song, often considered the Confederate anthem, was a popular marching song of the Confederate Army (cf. “Dixie” 1998, online). Another theory suggests that the term “dix” (French for “ten”) originally appeared on ten-dollar bills issued by the Citizen’s Bank of New Orleans before 1960. As a result, first Louisiana and then the entire South acquired the label “Dixie Land”, the land of the Dixies (cf. “Dixie” 1998, online).

Like many cultures, the South has changed over time in terms of cultural characteristics as well as space. John Shelton Reed (2005: 144) argues that the state Mississippi used to be the core of Dixie because of its legacy of plantation agriculture and slavery. The old plantation South, often referred to as the “Cotton Kingdom”, changed into the “Solid South”, known for its white supremacist thinking. During the first half of the twentieth century then, it was labeled “the Nation’s No. 1 economic problem” under Franklin Roosevelt (cf. Reed 2005: 144). Later in the twentieth century, urbanization, industrialization and the end of Jim Crow turned the South into a thriving, industrial region attracting migration and investments. In 1994, during a survey at the University of North Carolina, Georgia, with its capital Atlanta, was elected the state that
now best captures the idea of the South (cf. Reed 2005: 144). The South has changed from the old, agriculturally-rooted Dixie into the new metropolitan Southeast (cf. Reed 2005: 145).

In fact, a study by Shrinidhi Ambinakudige (2009: 240-241) suggests that the vernacular regions (people’s sense of place) “South” and “Dixie” seem to be gradually shrinking, especially in metropolitan areas. The Dixie identity in particular, seems to be disappearing faster than the Southern identity. Reed, Kohls & Hanchette (1990: 222) argue that the term “Dixie” specifically evokes the notion of the Old South based on plantation agriculture, while “Southern” refers to a new, industrial and commercial South. One reason why the Dixie identity is fading fast and business names are now unlikely to include the term, may be that “Dixie” refers too much to the Old South (slavery, plantation labor) and thus could hurt the feelings of the black population (cf. Reed, Kohls, Hanchette 1990: 222).

Nevertheless, Reed (1980: 32) argues that localism, which is the preference of one’s own community over others, is a particularly persistent aspect of Southern culture. Concerning specific properties of Southern culture compared to the rest of the United States, Reed also states that

Survey research can be used to measure some of these differences, and in many respects it is true about what they say about Dixie. Southerners really do tend to be more religious, more conservative, more polite, more “touchy”. They are more likely to hunt and fish, stop their cars for funeral processions, and eat black-eyed peas on New Year’s Day. (2005: 149)

However, he also argues that “‘southern’ characteristics that were, in fact, the characteristics of poor, rural, poorly educated folks are plainly on the wane”. (Reed 2005: 150) Reed concludes that, although it has changed, the South will remain a distinctive region because the people inhabiting it identify with it and will continue doing so. Calling themselves “southerners” and acting as such connects them to their community and heritage (Reed 2005: 151). As Rubin puts
it, “To be a Southerner today is still to be heir to a complex set of attitudes and affinities, assumptions and instincts, which are the product of history acting upon geography, even though much of the history is now forgotten and the geography modified.” (1980: 17)

This chapter shows that it has become increasingly difficult to pinpoint the exact location of the American South, as it is an everchanging, dynamic cultural phenomenon. Its beginnings as the land of slavery and agriculture have shaped the South equally as much as its industrialization and urbanization during the second half of the twentieth century. Clearly, the Confederacy and the Mason-Dixon Line had the greatest historical impact on creating the South’s geographical location and up to this day, the 11 former Confederate States are more or less acknowledged as the American South. However, today, the concept of the “South” is merely kept alive by the people who identify as southerners because the region’s uniqueness or otherness in comparison to the rest of the United States is not as strong as it used to be.

3) Work and Life in the American South: From the Antebellum South to the Twentieth Century

During the years before the Civil War, the cotton industry became the most important economic sector in the South (cf. “Antebellum Period” n.d., online). In addition, sugarcane and tobacco plantations were becoming increasingly popular (cf. U.S. Embassy 2008a, online). The geographic suitability of the region as well as slavery were responsible for the South’s dominant system of labor-intensive agriculture (cf. Hornbeck & Naidu 2014: 964). Plantations were exceedingly profitable mostly because slaves provided a seemingly never-ending, undemanding and cheap labor source (cf. “Antebellum Period” n.d., online). Thus, the wealth that did exist in the Old South was primarily a result of slave economy and with the formation of the Confederacy the South expected the importance of cotton to lead them to victory in the Civil War (cf. Arrington n.d., online).
However, between the Civil War and World War II, the South fell behind the North and remained considerably backward in comparison. The South remained largely agricultural while the North developed new economic sectors. Also, while the North started to largely mechanize agriculture, the South’s mechanization of the cotton industry was delayed until mid-twentieth century (cf. Hornbeck & Naidu 2014: 965). The South was also lacking skills and capital while the industry “tended to produce a narrow range of cheap, standardized, low-skill commodities, which added relatively little value to the region's raw material” (Wright 1987: 165-166). This was also partly because planters and employers did not endorse education, especially for black people. It was thought that schooling and a high school diploma would most likely encourage southerners to leave the region and not work in farms, mines, or sawmills (cf. Wright 1987: 169; Wright 2005: 80).

The collapse of slavery also paved the way for oppressive and inefficient businesses like sharecropping, while the cotton market stagnated, leaving the southern countryside with low living standards and distressed workers (cf. Carlton 2005: 108). Also, southern factories were in dreadful conditions and by 1880, the South only accounted for five percent of American manufacturing (cf. Carlton 2005: 108). The factories that did appear in the South during that time mostly processed raw materials such as cotton, timber and coal that were locally grown and mined in the South (cf. Jewell 2017: 1). Unskilled and poor workers, in particular, still
increasingly tried to find work in industrial manufacturing such as textile mills to support family income, despite near-starvation wages and bad working conditions (cf. Jewell 2017: 26).

The stagnating cotton market resulted in overproduction of textile goods in the South, cutting down prices and wages. Workers, however, still worked overtime on a regular basis because manufacturers thought that cutting back hours would prevent workers from being able to survive on their already extremely low wages. Some wages were not higher than twenty cents per hour – around 55 percent of the national average (cf. Jewell 2017: 25). Potential strikes organized by dissatisfied workers were simply suppressed by threats of dismissal (cf. Jewell 2017: 27).

Racial segregation also influenced the work life of southerners. While white workers were allowed to work on the factory floors, black workers were usually given lower paying and more physically labor-intensive positions (cf. Jewell 2017: 27). African Americans in the early twentieth century had the lowest earning potential, received hardly any health care and were threatened by racial violence on a daily basis (cf. Blackwelder 2005: 41). African American women sought jobs in factories or private homes with lower wages than white women because they could not afford to stay at home, even if they had given birth (cf. Blackwelder 2005: 44 – 45).

But not only women of color felt the hardships of living in the South during the early twentieth century. Most women, black and white, generally married while they were still young girls and hardly ever graduated high school. They would also carry to term one child after another as long as they could, while often still working in textile mills and around the household. In addition, child mortality rates were high due to complications with untreated tooth decay, malnutrition, pellagra, gastroenteritis, tuberculosis and other childhood diseases (cf. Blackwelder 2005: 41).
The South also remained widely isolated from the rest of the United States because of the lack of immigrants entering the South in the early twentieth century. When European immigration to the United States peaked in 1910, the Southern population was comprised of less than two percent foreign born inhabitants (cf. Wright 2005: 79).

From 1933 to 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt launched reforms in industry, agriculture, finance and labor in order to resuscitate the American economy and end the Great Depression. The “New Deal” was largely supported by Americans although it entailed more government involvement in economic matters (cf. “New Deal” 2019, online). As part of the New Deal, the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) was passed in order to specifically increase farmers’ income and better their economic situation. Although the New Deal did help increase prices and production, it could not bring the depression to an end (cf. U.S. Embassy 2008c, online).

It wasn’t until mid-twentieth century that the South underwent a dramatic change. Starting with emergence of World War II, the standard of living continuously improved in the South because defense industries as well as military and naval bases were brought to the South (cf. Rubin 1980: 14).

By mid-century, most southerners had left behind their rural farms and tenant lands to find jobs in commercial organizations, factories or private homes in the larger cities (cf. Blackwelder 2005: 40). Rising yearly wages also attracted a large number of women, resulting in 60 percent all women working in manufacturing between 1940 and 1950 in the state of Mississippi alone (cf. Cobb 2005: 5). World War II and legal acts such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 created new opportunities for both white women and women of color, resulting in continuous employment of women in apparel and textile firms (cf. Cobb 2005: 14).

The farmers that did stay in the agriculture business also shifted from old-fashioned, labor-intensive practices to utilizing tractors, picking machines and chemicals (cf. Daniel 2005: 92).
Electricity also finally reached the rural countryside, providing power for light and equipment. As a result, sharecropping basically disappeared and excessive labor force – workers of color in particular - moved to the growing cities to find jobs (cf. Rubin 1980: 15).

In the late twentieth century, many of the South’s typical mills and factories had closed to be replaced by warehouses, office parks and high-tech businesses (cf. Blackwelder 2005: 40). The South was now booming and changed its label from “Dixie” or “Sunny South” to “Sun Belt” (cf. Rubin 1980: 15). Wright states that “since World War II, the South has persistently outpaced the rest of the nation in growth of incomes, industry, jobs, commerce, construction, and education.” (2005: 77) While the American South still represents a region marked by conservatism, notable religious values and traditional foods, Blackwelder notes that late twentieth century South “mirrors the rest of the nation in being a postindustrial, high technology democracy where some girls grow up to become bankers, computer scientists, or politicians as well as mothers and citizens.” (2005: 54)

Clearly, labor has always held special importance in the American South. A region that used to be a quite wealthy agricultural community made possible by slave labor turned into an economic disaster after the Civil War, only to be reborn as the New South with its “Sun Belt” after World War II. While the working class southerner worked inhumane hours in factories during the depression and still struggled to make ends meet, the New Southerner “may spend 40 hours a week at a job indistinguishable from those of other Americans[…]” (Rubin 1980:17). What’s left is a region that is more similar to the rest of the United States than it is different. Its turbulent history, however, is still relevant when trying to understand the region’s culture and values that still play a role in many New Southerners’ lives.
4) Country Music and the South: From the Emergence of the Genre to the Rise of Music Videos

“Traditionally music of the white, Protestant, working-class Southerner, Country remained a relevant genre throughout the twentieth century because its songs documented the lives of its constituents – it addressed their pain, their dreams, struggles, beliefs, and moral dilemmas” (Raines & Walker 2008: 44).

There have not been many cultural artifacts that are so strongly connected to the American South and Dixie like country music. Country music evolved from the so-called Hillbilly music, which was influenced by a wide variety of folk music, dances, ballads and instrumental pieces. These different music styles were brought to North America mainly by Anglo-Celtic immigrants as well as Afro-Americans (cf. Malone & Laird 2018: 1). Since country music has become a global phenomenon, it can be considered one of the most important tools to keep the “Southern spirit” alive and known.

The roots of country music go back to a time before the “South” actually existed. Already in colonial times, British folk songs were used by rural southerners and modified in terms of structure, subject matter and melody in order to ‘Americanize’ the music (cf. Malone & Laird 2018: 4). What has become one of the most popular instruments in country music, namely the fiddle, was also already brought to North America in 1692. Although fiddle music became well-liked among most Americans, it “was most favored at the rural house party” (Malone & Laird 2018: 20). Even Alabama celebrate the importance of the fiddle in their 1984 hit “If You're Gonna Play In Texas”: “He said, ‘We love what you're doing/ Boys don't get us wrong/ There's just something missing in your song’/ If you're gonna play in Texas/ You gotta have a fiddle in the band/ That lead guitar is hot/ But not for a Louisiana man.” (“If You Are Gonna Play In Texas”, n.d., online)
Interestingly, although country music is typically regarded a “white” genre, African-Americans heavily influenced country music. Contact between black and white folks has always been inevitable in the South - first through slavery and then on fields, in mines, factories, work camps and at church. Black musical styles such as spirituals, blues and jazz were instantly adopted by white southerners and thus helped shape country music (cf. Malone & Laird 2018: 5-6). Since the church and religion were, especially in rural areas, central figures in Southern society, spirituals had special significance in the development of country music. A great number of people only encountered and eventually learned to play music in religious settings (cf. Malone & Laird 2018: 12).

Since the rural South was a society committed to preserving its traditions as well as values and music of rural communities was mostly shared among local audiences (cf. Malone & Laird 2018: 3), it is not surprising that the region eventually developed its own unique style of music. With the emergence of the radio in the 1920s in particular, country music as such became more refined and standardized because of its sudden availability to a broader audience in the South (cf. Malone & Laird 2018: 38-39).

However, the term “country music” was only coined in the years after World War II (cf. Malone & Laird 2018: 3). During the second World War, southern soldiers brought country music to other parts of the nation and the world, expanding its popularity significantly. In addition, due to the economic boom in the wake of World War II, record sales and dancing establishments soared in the South, which further fueled the popularity of country music (cf. Raines & Walker 2008: 45 – 46).

Although country music had already been far away from being ‘rural’ by the second half of the twentieth century, the genre still often promotes a nostalgic idea of the past agricultural South – “a time when hard work, independence, and honesty played a major role in the ways people made their living,” as Jenkins (2006: 46) puts it. Besides the general feeling of nostalgia among
the country community, artists may also choose these lyrical topics in order to preserve a degree of authenticity and authority by reflecting the rural lifestyle (cf. Jenkins 2006: 46).

In the early 1980s, the country music industry also started to catch up on what had already been a serious business and important commercial tool in popular and rock music: music videos. Nashville, the home of the country music industry during that time, saw that it did not attract the large, young audiences that pop music did and thus reacted by entering the music video industry (cf. Fenster 2005: 109). However, at the beginning, country music video productions were only granted extremely low budgets compared to the average pop and rock videos and as a result, production quality was usually low (cf. Fenster 2005: 111). In addition, early country music videos were only aired by small country music channels and local TV-shows (cf. Fenster 2005: 112).

The situation only significantly changed in the mid-1980s, when national, non-country channels such as MTV and VH-1 began including country music videos in their programs. As a result, the country music industry had to produce more expensive, higher quality videos in order to be able to compete with pop and rock music videos. Eventually, mainstream country music videos registered the desired success with late 1980s music videos of, for example, Alabama and significantly broadened the genre’s audience and popularity (cf. Fenster 2005: 112).

Country music videos are distinct in style and content compared to pop and rock music videos. Fenster describes, “Unlike the more disjointed, fragmented narratives of pop/rock videos, which owe more to experimental films and advertising, most country video narratives are more directly descended from the classical Hollywood style.” (2005: 115). Country music videos have adopted conventions of silent film, television and commercial film simply because the genre’s lyrics often tell personal narratives (cf. Fenster 2005: 115). However, Fenster (2005: 115) also states that the primary purpose of the country music video remains the promotion of artist and song.
Early country music videos in particular often utilized the performance-concept combination. Such music videos typically consist of a filmed performance of the song by the artist, which is intercut with different scenes that are supposed to reinforce the message of the song. This technique was especially popular in the early stages of country music videos because production was cheap and the performing artists directly addressing the audience helped establish an emotional connection between video and viewer (cf. Fenster 2005: 116).

Content-wise, 1980s country music videos typically address the South’s traditional values, life in small towns, home, family and the artist’s country-roots (cf. Fenster 2005: 118). As Vernallis suggests that the interaction between music, lyrics and image can establish “complex social meanings” (2004: XIII), I argue that Alabama’s music videos very strongly strive to create and illustrate specific social images of the American South, which will become evident in the following analysis.

5) Analysis of the selected music videos


The first shot of 1989’s “High Cotton” employs low-key lighting and depicts a car coming down a road. The camera is positioned in a relatively high-angle. Vernallis argues that high angle-shots in music video as well as in film “give the viewer a sense of power and mobility.” (2004: 32). These notions are important as they signalize the viewer that they will have a certain degree of control over and relevance in the world that they are going to observe. Furthermore, the introduction of the notion of mobility holds particular importance because the viewer will gradually move through the diegetic world in the course of the music video.

This first shot is followed by a low-angle shot looking up to the sun and another straight-angle shot depicting horses galloping on a field. During these last two shots, the camera moves as if it were situated in the car shown in the first shot of the music video. As a result, the viewer is
immediately drawn into the world of the music video and perceives it in the same way as a person sitting in the car would. These tracking shots from seemingly inside the vehicle also instantly create a sense of continuity. In contrast to many music videos that avoid clear narrative qualities (cf. Vernallis 2004: 28), the viewer realizes early that they will be observing the diegetic world from inside the vehicle. At 0:15, it is revealed that Alabama’s singer operates the vehicle, with the rest of the band also sitting in the car.

While the first shot is mostly dark blue in color, the following shots are dominated by warm yellow, orange and green tones. This change in the color spectrum from the first shot to the next signifies the transition from morning to daylight. In addition, green, yellow and orange colors make the landscape appear friendly, warm and romantic. Fenster (2005: 114 – 115) states that especially warm orange tones have become the signature look of a large number of contemporary country music videos. “High Cotton” explicitly follows this trend.

The video then moves on as a montage of different shots, many of them tracking shots that also evoke the notion as if the viewer were sitting in the car with the band, observing the immediate environment. At 0:19, a black man walking through a field behind a long fence carrying a white child is depicted. Also, two small farm houses can be seen in the background. The man and the child wave at the camera. This shot is significant in a number of different ways. First, the fact that the man waves directly at the camera establishes a relationship between viewer and the environment because they are directly addressed by a person in the video. Also, since the viewer technically sees the world of the video through the band’s eyes, the waving characters also position the band firmly inside the music video’s world. Second, this shot strongly hints at one of the most important themes of the video: farming and Southern work culture. The field is fenced in and farmhouses can be observed in the background – the location is most likely a farm or a ranch. Third, the topic of race relations in the South is picked up in this shot. The viewer is shown a black man taking care of a white child. Since it is impossible to determine
whether the black farmer works for a white family or if there is a family connection between the two, this shot could either represent Jim Crow work standards (blacks working for whites) or detract from the Souths long history of racial segregation and racism by demonstrating harmony between the two races.

The camera then passes a barn that seems to be positioned on a small hill. It is striking that the shot is filmed from a lower-angle, making the barn appear even taller. The object also almost fills the entire frame. Both aspects give special significance to the barn, making it a symbol of the American South represented in the music video, namely, the agricultural South.

This trend remains unbroken in the following shots. At 0:29, the viewer is shown a medium-close up of an elderly black couple walking by. Both of them smile and the woman also waves at the camera. It is visible that the woman is missing some teeth. While the missing teeth do suggest poverty with a lack of healthcare, which used to be the norm for black families in the South, the couple conveys happiness. The smile and the waving make the poverty represented by the couple appear less severe and lead the viewer’s attention away from it. One can also observe that the man wears a blue work overall, which represents the blue-collar society that was the old, agricultural South. The fact that the man still wears this type of clothing in his age and even though he is not actively working in this shot, emphasizes how work shapes the entire life of southerners.

The emphasis on the importance of work in the life of southerners is also continued in the following shots. At 0:33, a static long shot shows a tractor driving over a field, from one corner of the frame to the other. This transition from one side to another emphasizes how agriculture follows southerners from the beginning to the end of their lives. This notion is also reinforced by the transition from the long shot to a medium close-up of the driver and the child sitting on his lap. The wardrobe of man and child match one another almost exactly. Both are wearing a baseball cap and a white shirt. The medium close-up, their matching outfits and the fact that the
child is sitting on the man’s lap emphasize the close relationship between the two – presumably father and son. Most importantly, the father is evidently teaching his son how to operate the tractor, thus passing on his skills and values to the next generation. A similar effect is achieved by the medium-close up at 0:40, depicting a woman holding a baby in her arms. The composition of the frame is particularly important in this shot. While the woman and her baby are positioned slightly off center in the right half of the frame, other equally important components are visible in the foreground as well as the background – the shot utilizes deep space. The right side of the frame is filled by a large tractor wheel that is positioned slightly in the foreground. The left side, on the other hand, shows a farmhouse and a fenced-in field in the background. The woman and her baby are therefore positioned in between these strong symbols of agriculture. As result, the mother’s as well as the baby’s lives are surrounded and shaped by agriculture. It is also important to note that both the mother and the baby wear all white clothes, adding a sense of purity and cleanliness to their agriculturally dominated lives.

This shot is intercut by another one depicting Alabama’s singer in a close-up of his face while driving the band’s vehicle. His eyes are not focused directly on the viewer but on the offscreen space as if he were observing the mother holding her baby. This is also a moment when the song’s lyrics come to the foreground as they support the image in an effective way. The words “saw the light in daddy’s eyes” (0:41) suddenly turn the singer into the father figure that was missing in the previous shot showing the woman and her baby. The following close-up shot, which once again depicts the woman holding her baby, is accompanied by the words “and felt the love in momma’s hands” (0:45). This pairing of lyrics and image now confirms the suggestion of the parental relationship between Alabama’s singer and the woman. As a result, the connection between the band and the diegetic world of the music video is once again strongly reinforced. Furthermore, the importance of family in Southern society is brought into play.
“High Cotton” continues with rigorous celebration of Southern agriculture, blue-collar culture, religion and southerners’ love for the region and its community.

At 0:50, a static extreme long shot depicts a sprawling field, bright blue skies and a group of young children running through the field in the center of the frame. This extreme long shot emphasizes the magnitude of the South’s agricultural fields as well as its beauty. The children being placed in the center of the frame shows that their young lives are already mainly surrounded and shaped by the South’s landscapes and agriculture. This ties in with the previous shots depicting the father teaching his son how to drive a tractor and the mother holding her baby next to a tractor. The running children also imply excitement and happiness, thus bringing out the goodness of that lifestyle. The notion is also confirmed at 1:56, when the same scene is shown as a medium long shot, clearly revealing the children’s excitement and happiness. It is also important to note that this new shot scale clearly reveals that the group of children consists of three black and two white kids. This portrayal of black and white children playing together happily, clearly distorts the reality of racial segregation in the American South. Instead, close, friendly relationships are combined with the image of a picturesque agricultural South. The fact that the depicted individuals are children also adds a sense of innocence to the characters and the shots, which in turn further weakens possible affiliations between the shots and the South’s racist past.

Also at 1:19, an upward camera tilt reveals a young boy playing the fiddle in a medium close-up before showing him in a long shot (Figure 4). The close-up tilt scans the young boy’s body, strongly drawing the viewer’s attention to the boy’s wardrobe: a blue work overall. This shot neatly ties in with the depiction of the elderly black man wearing the blue work overall at 0:19. Also, a shot at 1:05 depicts a middle-aged farmer wearing a blue work overall, driving a tractor through a corn field. The shots indicate that the blue-collar culture is not tied to a specific age group in the American South, but is represented by young, old, black and white southerners
alike. The boy, however, does not only represent blue-collar culture, but also the American South in general. While the boy plays the fiddle, which is an instrument that represents country music and the rural American South alike, the boy’s outfit as a whole sends another strong message. The blue overall, paired with a bright red shirt and red baseball hat represent the primary colors of the Confederate Flag (Figure 5). The reference to the Confederate Flag displays and confirms the importance of the Old South in the music video but stands in sharp contrast to the depiction of black and white kids playing together, since the Confederate States usually represent the opposite of tolerance and positive interracial relationships, namely slavery and racism.

![Figure 4](image)

![Figure 5](image)

Figure 4  Figure 5 The rectangular battle flag of the Army of Tennessee, Confederate States of America.

Southerners’ love and longing for their region is expressed at 0:15 through a medium close-up depicting a child on a school bus waving goodbye. The following close-up of a teary-eyed woman reveals that the child addresses his mother who is also hurt by having to say goodbye. While these two shots themselves would only express a child and its mother’s sadness when the child has to go to school, the lyrics add another layer of meaning. The words “leaving home was the hardest thing we ever faced” (0:15) allow the images to represent the pain of every southerner who has ever had to leave their region. Considering that education was often poor and unavailable in the agricultural South, it is also interesting that a child going to school is
pictured. Once again, the video brings in aspects that in reality were not necessarily properties of the older, agriculture-dominated South.

Religion also finds its place in the music video, which through to today has been a defining property of Southern culture. At 1:31, a downward camera tilt reveals a white church in a long shot. In front of the church, a wedding party has gathered to take a photograph. A close-up of the newlyweds reveals their happy faces. The religious tone of this sequence is underlined by the lyrics that come to the fore due to the match with the images: “When Sunday mornings roll around, we dressed up in hand-me-downs/ Just in time to gather with the church.” (1:30 – 1:38)

The video ends with a sequence of shots focusing on the band driving their car through the southern landscape. 2:09 employs a similar composition of framing as the shot of the tractor at 0:33 – the camera is stationary, depicting the car in a long shot moving from one side of the frame to the other. The center of the frame constitutes a building with a large inscription that reads: “Covington Feed & Seed Co.”. Above the building looms the sun (Figure 6). Once again, an agricultural business is in the center of viewer attention, emphasized by its central position and the sun shining upon it. Furthermore, the shot is filmed from a low angle, awarding the building with its inscription even greater importance – similar to the barn at 0:24. The name of the business is also positioned above the car driven by the band. In this shot, the band can be considered a representative of Southern society, which is dominated by the agricultural industry.
From 2:10 onwards, continuity is seamless although, for example, the 180-degree rule (crossing the line) is sometimes disregarded. A high number of intercuts between the band driving and singing in the car and their surroundings combine the two levels. Also, the eyeline-match at 2:41-2:42 between Alabama’s singer in the car and the group of children running through what now seems to be a wheat field promotes continuity. As Vernallis states, “Continuity editing seeks to preserve the flow of time and the coherence of spaces.” (2004: 28). Through this continuity, the viewer is once again reminded that the music video depicts ‘the real’ American South as observed by the artists themselves. The children also wave and cheer at the band, showing that they admire them, which, in turn, gives the band credibility and authenticity. The viewer, therefore, is compelled to believe what is shown in the video.

The last shot of the video depicts the band’s car from behind driving away from the camera, as opposed to the first shot where it is depicted from the front. Also, the closing shot displays a bright orange horizon while leaving the car strongly underexposed. This color composition suggests dusk compared to the dark-blue tone of the opening shot, which suggests morning. As a result, the video draws a bow and concludes the narrative. It becomes clear that the video showcases one day in the American South – from dawn till dusk.

“High Cotton” follows the traditions of early country music videos by exhibiting clear narrative qualities. The music video’s time frame is clearly marked through the first shot suggesting dawn, and the last shot suggesting dusk. Hence, the viewer experiences exactly one day in the American South. Furthermore, the music video establishes a continuum by including the band driving a car through the landscapes. The viewer follows their path and observes the diegetic world through their eyes. In contrast to Vernallis’ claim that “most often in music videos, performance footage of the band has the effect of blunting narrative drive.” (2004: 5), the singing and performing band in the car leads the spectator through the music video. Observing the diegetic world through the eyes of the artist, who himself is part of it, gives credibility to
the images. Also, contrary to Vernallis’ (2004: 37) claim that in music videos, time usually unfolds arbitrarily without points of reference, “High Cotton” does give the viewer certain temporal markers to hold onto.

Vernallis’ statement that “music videos often reflect cultural stereotypes. In fact, they sometimes exaggerate them” (2004: 81) is genuinely applicable to this music video. “High Cotton” promotes an overwhelmingly agricultural South in a solely positive manner. The green, yellow and orange tones highly romanticize the environment. Agricultural work is depicted to be defining all levels of society, from young to old. Also, the act of passing the agricultural lifestyle on to the younger generations stands in the center of attention.

“High Cotton” can be considered nostalgic in two different ways. First, the agricultural South that is fiercely promoted in the video had been long gone at the time of the music video’s production. The 1980s saw an American South that was not much different to the rest of the nation - mostly industrial. Second, the video combines properties significant of different time periods in order to construct one positive picture of the South. The words in the chorus “old times they are not forgotten” are therefore somewhat misleading concerning the content of the music video. While the extremely agriculturally dominated South refers to a time before World War II, the often depicted tractors were only introduced to the South’s agriculture on a large scale by mid-century. Furthermore, education was often unavailable or of bad quality in the rural South. The inclusion of a child on a school bus, however, suggests that education has always been a natural part of growing up in the South. Also, racial segregation was commonplace until mid-century. It is therefore unlikely that the older, plantation-based South saw many white and African Americans playing together. The reference to the colors of the Confederate Flag also relate to a South that did not promote friendly interracial relationships. The music video’s omission of the darker spots of Southern history define its highly nostalgic character.
b. Dixieland Delight (1983)

The music video accompanying the 1983 single “Dixieland Delight” opens with a shot that closely resembles the opening of “High Cotton”: a frontal shot of a car coming down a road, headed towards the camera. The first shot of “Dixieland Delight”, however, employs a handheld camera, which creates a more unstable feel. The camera movement adds momentum to the music track as well as the video’s feel. Also, an orange-yellow color tone is already prominent in the first shot of the music video, once again adding a somewhat warm atmosphere to the music video’s appearance.

Like it is often the case with traditional Hollywood film scenes (cf. Vernallis 2004: 36), the camera then moves in from the first extreme long shot depicting the car from up front to a medium close-up focusing on the singer, who once again operates the vehicle and lip-syncs the lyrics of the song. This transition establishes a clear spatial setting – an establishing shot depicts the surroundings and the outside of the vehicle while the close-up portrays what happens inside the vehicle. The close-up first depicts the singer from his side, eyes focused on the road off-camera (0:14) until he suddenly turns his head and directly faces the camera (0:22). Vernallis describes such a moment as follows:

> Suddenly the performer’s head turns toward me, the eyes gaze into mine, the singing voice demands my attention, and I am struck. […] At this moment, the performer crosses the limits of the screen and addresses me as a person, and I can no longer view this face and body as an object.” (2004: 48 – 49)

“Dixieland Delight” therefore immediately establishes a close relationship with the viewer, because they are directly addressed by the artist. As a result, what comes next will be experienced on a more personal and emotional level. This effect is reinforced by the singer actually winking at the viewer (Figure 7). This extra expression deviates from what Vernallis
claims is typical of music video close-ups: “The closeup of the singer’s face is often shot and edited in such a way as to leave us with a single gesture.” (2004: 48). This is not the case here: the viewer receives a few different gestures and the shot is quite lengthy (0:14 – 0:33). This close-up of almost twenty seconds becomes instead rather reminiscent of classical movies or silent movies. As a result, a certain degree of realism and authenticity is added to the character.

Once the viewer is drawn into the video by the frontality shot of the singer, the topic of work is immediately introduced. At 0:34, a long-shot depicts Alabama’s bassist in a saw mill throwing his jacket over his shoulder. Mills were especially typical of the South before urbanization and industrialization in the late twentieth century. The composition of the frame ensures that the viewer’s attention is directed at the setting: the blade of the large wood saw covers fifty percent of the frame, while the bassist himself covers roughly twenty percent. The large saw is also spatially placed in front of the character. Furthermore, during the first two seconds of the shot, a rail vehicle carrying a log passes by, briefly covering almost the entire frame. As a result, it is impossible for the viewer to only focus on the band member but disregard the setting which is typical of the older South. Also, the lyrics “worked hard all week” accompanying this shot help steer the viewer’s attention to the noble work ethic of the American South.

In the following shot (0:38), the bassist is depicted leaving the saw mill, slapping his right pants pocket with his hand. At the same time, the lyrics “got a little jingle” are underscored by an

Figure 7
actual jingle in the music track. The bassist’s gesture, the lyrics and the music track all work together in this shot to put emphasis on the bassist having earned some money (change = jingle) at his work. The fact that it is only ‘change’ that has been earned by the bassist can be read as a clear allusion to the modesty of southerners – their work efforts are never about earning a large sum of money, instead work is represented as an honor.

This ongoing scene ends with a long shot (0:40) that shows the bassist being picked up by the singer with his pickup truck, followed by a pan shot that tracks their car as they drive away. One the one hand, the pan shot secures spatial continuity as it reveals what would otherwise remain offscreen space. On the other hand, the pan shot confirms the bassist’s workplace to be a rural saw mill typical of “Dixie” by scanning the premises. The pan shot also helps maintain momentum and speed that matches the upbeat music.

The next sequence of shots follows the previous one almost exactly in terms of action, composition as well as editing. A dolly shot at 0:54 follows the drummer, who evidently works at a store, climbing down a ladder and picking up his jacket. The dolly shot functions like the previous pan: the camera movement supports the expectation that the drummer is going to leave his current spot to go someplace else and helps maintain momentum. The shot is followed by another medium close-up showing the drummer walking out the front door and eventually entering the singer’s car, who has previously picked up the bassist as well. The similarity of this sequence of shots to the previous makes it easy for the viewer to follow the action and predict that the drummer was going to leave his work to be picked up by the singer too – narrative continuity is established. The band members are thus friends who all live the Southern lifestyle.

Interestingly, the store picked as the drummer’s workplace creates a modern contrast to the old-fashioned saw mill. In addition to that, the drummers wardrobe and hair are also in sharp contrast to the bassist’s style. While the bassist wears a flannel shirt, a short haircut and a full-
beard, typical of lumberjacks (0:38), the drummer’s baseball hat, sunglasses, sports t-shirt and long blond hair (0:56) are clearly indicative of modern, urban folk. The same counts for the scene starting at 1:19, showing the drummer picking up a girl who works at what seems to be a drive-in diner. The woman’s tight, short white dress also stands in contrast to a South that is deemed very conservative and old-fashioned.

This shot also marks the point where the viewer is left with a break in continuity for the first time. As clearly visible at 1:35, the drummer is now driving his own pickup truck, the other two band members having disappeared. As it becomes evident later on in the music video, the band members are now all driving their own vehicles, picking up women. Although the viewer is not given any visual explanation as to how this happens, the actions are similar and do not disturb the flow of the music video. Also, separating the band members into their own vehicles allows the music video to include more pick-up scenes that can showcase further aspects of life in the American South.

The video then returns to showcasing the rural South. At 1:50, a long shot depicts Alabama’s guitarist getting off a tractor next to his house while a pickup truck passes. The guitarist waves at the car and runs over to his house where his presumed wife is hanging up laundry. A tracking shot follows him and zooms in as the two of them hug. This moment is also rendered in slow motion. This shot is significant in three different ways: First, the long shot in combination with a slight pan that follows the passing car manages to capture a large area of the surroundings. The viewer receives a well-established image of the guitarist’s rural property, their house and tractor, indicating agricultural work. Second, the guitarist waving at the passing car and the slow-motion medium close-up that focuses on him hugging and spinning his wife exhibits the South’s strong sense of community and family. Third, this shot represents traditional gender roles as it depicts the man with a tractor and the woman hanging up laundry. The tractor represents exhausting field work while hanging up laundry represents the house work the
woman is responsible for. At 2:03, a woman dressed in a white dress can be seen feeding chicken – the setting is once again rural and the activity signifies house work rather field or mill labor. The shot employs a shallow focus with only the woman depicted in sharp focus. During this shot, the lyrics come to fore as they, similar to the shallow focus, draw the viewers attention to the woman and makes one wonder about her thoughts and feelings. Vernallis states that “By naming specific characters and objects, the lyrics can draw our attention to the back or the front of the frame, or toward offscreen space.” (2004: 94). In this case, the lyrics “home grown country girl, gonna give me a whirl” clearly draw the viewer’s attention to the woman, who represents a “country girl” taking care of the house and animals while also making her husband happy by giving him a “whirl” (this also happens onscreen at 2:05). “Music videos also reflect gender stereotypes. The most common setting of a music video for women is within the domestic sphere […]” (Vernallis 2004: 82) While this statement does not match all representations of women in “Dixieland Delight”, it certainly holds true for the two shots discussed in this paragraph. A clear cut between the man’s role of working in the fields and mills, and the woman’s role of taking care of the household is established.

When the singer picks up his date at 2:11, the camera zooms-out, moving away from the woman who runs towards the camera to enter the singer’s car. The reverse zoom-shot slowly reveals the woman’s large house until she disappears behind the pickup truck that covers only the right corner of the bottom half of the frame. In the center looms a large antebellum-style home (Figure 8). Antebellum homes are typically symmetrical, boxy, have large front porches or balconies and central entrances (cf. Craven 2017, online). Antebellum architecture was particularly common among rich plantation homes in the American South during slavery. As a result, these homes have become symbols of the Plantation South and slavery (cf. Crave 2017, online). The central position of framing and the camera resting on the image of the house for several seconds place special emphasis on the building and its power of representation. The
Plantation South before the Civil War is therefore represented in this shot without referring to farm labor or slavery in a direct manner. The shot is also accompanied by the lyrics “lucky as a seven, living in heaven” (2:13 – 2:17), which directly suggests the Southern plantation to be a heavenly place to live. The same image of the American South is referred to at 2:44, when a close-up of a car’s rear end shows an image of the Confederate Flag replacing the regular license plate (Figure 9). As already discussed in the previous chapter, the Confederate Flag, while representing the American South in general, still is mostly connected to the Antebellum South. The fact that the license plate was replaced by the Confederate Flag shows how much the driver and the community identify with their region and its historical values.

2:25 – 2:40 presents the viewer another lengthy, lateral close-up shot of the guitarist’s face, showing him lip-syncing the lyrics of the song. This shot immediately stands out because, as Vernallis argues, “Camera movement in music videos also differs from that of film. Most music videos make such extensive use of the dolly that a static shot seems anomalous.” (2004: 34). This long, static close-up shot appears to be so different from standard music video camera work that it engages the viewer in wondering about the person’s inner state of mind. As a result, a significantly close relationship between viewer and band member is once again established and the “southerner” stands in the center of viewer attention.
Also, next to the guitarist, his woman is depicted waving at the townspeople who seem to have gathered on the streets. The framing once again places the artist firmly inside the diegetic world among his date and townspeople. This clearly contradicts the following statement by Vernallis:

A surprisingly large number of videos cast the singer in an overseeing role […] That it is impossible for the singer to know what is going on in the context of the video as a whole never becomes an issue, nor does the fact that the background figures seem attentive or sensitized to the singer’s voice (challenging credibility because in most cases the distance between the performer and supporting cast puts everyone out of aural range). (Vernallis 2004: 61)

“Dixieland Delight” intentionally does not create distance between the artists and background figures – the two entities constantly overlap, making the representation of the Southern community seem truthful as the band itself is once again part of it.

The video comes to an end with an entire town following the band to a remote space. People’s cars are arranged in a circle, with a large bonfire in the middle. The band now has their instruments with them and they lip-sync and simulate playing the song on their instruments. The townspeople dance to the music (3:00). The final scene also contradicts Vernallis’ claim that “the band’s performance space and that of the story rarely interpenetrate” (2004: 57). The band’s performance space is among the community and part of the music video’s storyline: the band picks up their dates and they drive off to have a party with the entire town. This narrative is also temporally closed off by the last scene since because it happens during night-time. The viewer can therefore establish a timeframe around the music video: the story starts with the band getting off work, probably late afternoon, and ends during the night of the same day.

It becomes clear that, similar to “High Cotton”, “Dixieland Delight” exhibits a number of characteristics reminiscent of regular film making that establish continuity and narrativity. An
establishing shot, lengthy close-ups as well as pan and tracking shots help maintain spatial and temporal continuity. On a large scale, however, the video is closed off temporally more than it is spatially. While it becomes clear to the viewer that they observe a rough timespan from late afternoon to sundown, settings switch from rural areas to towns without clear transitions.

The viewer is led through the American South once again by the band and their cars. The band is firmly positioned in the diegetic world and is part of the community depicted in the music video, which contributes to the credibility of the music video’s representations. The narrative also functions as a means of transmitting a believable portrait of the South’s culture. Lyrics also come to the fore in certain instances and draw the viewer’s attention to individual features of the video.

Concerning the picture of the American South that is painted in “Dixieland Delight”, it can be considered nostalgic in different ways: First, the video includes numerous references to the older, rural South based in agriculture. Settings include a saw mill, farms with tractors and a house resembling antebellum-architecture. The Confederate Flag is also depicted in a close-up shot. These symbols of the rural and agricultural South are mixed with shots depicting love, community and a humble but positive attitude towards work. As a result, the rural and agricultural aspects of the South appear positive, desirable and worthwhile. Also, traditional gender roles are represented in the same environment characterized by love and positivity. Hardships such as poverty, dreadful labor conditions or the connections of the Confederate Flag to slavery and racism are omitted in favor of the positive representation of the ‘old fashioned’ South. Second, the video does not only include properties which refer to the ‘old times’ but also brings in numerous aspects that are characteristic of a more modern South in order to create a broader image of Southern culture. Alabama’s drummer’s outfit and style deviates greatly from the lumberjack-looks of the other band members. Long, blond hair, sunglasses and a sports t-shirt are representative of a modern and urbanized culture. The same counts for the drummer’s
date, who works outside the household at a drive-in diner, wearing a short dress as her work outfit - the viewer is therefore also exposed to a less conservative image of a woman.

The combination of these actually contradicting cultural images make the South represented in the music video appear less restrictive and ‘old-fashioned’ in an undesirable way but signalize that traditions are valued and preserved while not being oblivious to modern times and culture. The result is a nostalgic South that merges both old and new cultural and historical properties.

c. Forty Hour Week (For A Livin’) (1985)

The video “Forty Hour Week (For A Livin’)” (1985) opens with a series of close-up shots of a yet unknown person. The first shot depicts a hand reaching for an alarm clock in order to turn it off, followed by the person putting on their shoes, showing only feet and hands. The following shots depict the two hands breaking some eggs into a frying pan and grabbing car keys from a nightstand. These first three shots (0:00 – 0:15) function like a small narrative. The viewer follows the morning routine of an unknown person in a chronological order: getting up, getting dressed, preparing breakfast, collecting items necessary for the day. The close-ups strongly draw the viewer’s attention to the actions of that person, not leaving any room to contemplate about who is depicted or what the person’s background may be. As a result, the narrative of a person’s morning routine is in the center of attention.

Only the following close-up shot reveals the face of the person, the singer of Alabama himself, for the first time by showing him pouring hot coffee into a cup and then tilting the camera upwards. The next two shots are one close-up showing the singer’s hands putting down a food bowl for the dog and another medium close-up depicting the singer stepping out of his front door and checking the time on his pocket watch. These shots continue the narrative of the first four shots: the morning routine of an ordinary man. Despite the close-ups’ emphasis on the person’s actions, continuity is also established by the dissolving transitions between the shots.
The dissolves evoke the sense of one action leading to another in a chronological order, until the person steps out of his house – ready for whatever his plans may be.

The viewer also receives ample temporal information in those first few seconds of the music video through the images alone. First, Alabama’s singer is depicted turning off his alarm clock and getting up – hence it is most certainly morning. Second, the extreme close-up of the singer’s pocket watch at 0:27, which reads 6:55, suggests that the character starts work very soon. Third, in connection to the previous shot, the factory premises depicted at 0:30 suggest morning as well. The premises are largely empty with only unexposed silhouettes of two workers in frame. Also, the sky is light blue and the factory grounds are still shaded, hence, the sun has not completely risen yet.

Although the first shots of the music video do not reveal much of the set’s décor, partly due to the close-ups and partly due to the relatively low-key lightning, which emphasizes the early hours, the lyrics also give the viewer a clue as to what the person represents. During those first thirty seconds, the lyrics stand out because the musical backdrop is very simple and reduced - only a picking guitar and a light synthesizer can be heard. The lyrics read, “there are people in this country who work hard every day/ not the fame and fortune do they strive” (0:09 – 0:19). The words automatically relate to the images - it becomes clear that the person in focus represents a hard worker who is getting ready for work. Also, the lyrics suggest that the person, as already observed in the previous analyses, is from the ‘humble’ working class since they “do not strive for fame and fortune”.

As Vernallis states, “Music videos can provide the same pleasure [reading into incomplete images]. We know very little about the figures we see, but we still attempt to make sense of them, based on how they look and what they are doing, as well as setting, the lyrics and music.” (2004: 38). Within those first thirty seconds, the viewer manages to establish a well rounded image of a hardworking, humble, working-class American, who cares for his dog. The fact that
the singer himself is depicted helps give the song’s message a certain degree of authenticity because the singer himself seems to represent what he sings about.

The rest of the video maintains a high lyrics-image agreement. When the lyrics deal with “Detroit autoworkers”, medium close-up shots of workers in car factories are shown (0:33-0:44) and when “Pittsburg steel mill workers” are mentioned, snippets of workers in steel mills are shown (0:45-1:00). These montages do not have the same narrative quality as the first thirty seconds of the video, but rather function as a tool to paint an overall picture of America as a working-class society.

Particularly striking are the short dancing scenes that are inserted at 0:35, 0:55 and 0:59. On the one hand, the extremely short duration of these shots (barely one second) makes them appear to be purely rhythmic components that blend in with the upbeat nature of the music. This notion is reinforced by the “on the beat editing” (cf. Vernallis 2004: 27) of the other shots during the first chorus section. The edits underscore the song’s beat and persuade the viewer to ‘feel’ the music. On the other hand, however, these shots have a strong impact on the representation of factory work in America. The dancers’ wardrobes resemble those of the regular factory workers depicted in the montage shots. Also, the dancer positioned in the front of the frame at 1:00 directly faces the camera, emphasized by a slight zoom-shot, and displays a large smile. As a result, these dancers represent the working community as a whole in an excessively positive manner – factory work appears to be fun, enjoyable and fulfilling.

The notion of work as enjoyable is not only represented by the dancing-snippets, but also picked up one more time towards the end of the music video. At 2:38, a close-up of a carpenter’s face, who is already introduced in the first half of the music video, is shown (Figure 10). The carpenter directly faces the camera, smiles and eventually also winks at the camera. The left side of his face is lit up by sunlight, giving the shot a warm and friendly color tone. This direct viewer address also breaks the forth wall and brings the topic of the music video even closer to
the viewer. The shot functions similarly to one discussed in the analysis of “Dixieland Delight”, however, in this case, it is not a band member who addresses the audience this way but a ‘background figure’. The smiling and winking carpenter signalizes the viewer by directly addressing them that they do not completely have to rely on the band’s representation of American work culture but get a first-hand insight directly from the community. Hence, the viewer is basically forced to believe that work makes people happy in the United States.

In “Forty Hour Week (For A Livin’),” all band members once again function as a group and as their own entities inside the diegetic world in multiple settings throughout the music video. The close-up frontality shot at 0:42 depicts the singer lip-syncing the lyrics “just to send it all down the line” that appear in the chorus section. He is wearing a helmet and is dressed in work clothes, holding a welding device. By placing the singer inside the diegetic world using the appropriate wardrobe and properties while still having him address the camera directly, the lyrics are illustrated in such a way that they obtain maximum impact on the viewer. The artist, who himself is part of the working class, emphasizes that their work efforts rather benefit the nation as a whole than the workers individually.

At 1:07, the band is depicted entering a café or diner. This shot is intercut by another depicting a blond waitress turning around and brushing her hair back with her hand. The waitress exposes red lips and a light smile. A shallow focus is employed in order to direct the viewer’s attention completely to the face and mindset of the waitress: she represents beauty and enjoys her job. The following eyeline-match between the waitress and the singer while he is taking a seat with
the other band members at the bar clearly establishes a relationship between the waitress and the singer. The shot can also be classified as a medium close-up applying a shallow focus in order to bring out the singer’s emotional state. The editing alone, therefore, tells a small narrative of affection between the singer and the waitress. This scene’s lip-synced lyrics “for the one behind the counter, bringing up the sales” (1:06 – 1:11) come to the fore and sound like a compliment from the singer to the waitress, also underlining their relationship. As a result, this short scene contains key elements of narrative film – continuity editing and even ‘dialogue’ (lyrics). Concerning the role that is taken on by the waitress in the context of this sequence, the representation cannot be considered entirely conservative and old-fashioned because it depicts a woman in her workplace. However, it does add a strong emotional undertone to the representation of the woman. She is therefore perceived as a sensitive and emotional being rather than a strong and independent workforce, which matches Vernallis’ impression that “When women perform in videos, their bodies frequently remain passive, existing in a state of being rather than action; […]” (2004: 82). The women’s role in this sequence is largely to be beautiful and adorable rather than anything else.

There are two other instances, besides generally mostly depicting men in their workplaces, where the music video clearly showcases a men-dominated labor force in contrast to women in domestic settings. First, at 1:19, a zoom-shot depicts a window of a house in the center of the frame. Behind the window, a woman is visible holding a baby and wiping down the window with a rag. The lyrics during this shot read, “for everyone who works behind the scenes”. These words are, on the one hand, literally reinforced by the woman being situated “behind” the window. On the other hand, the lyrics underline women’s passive roles in the men-dominated work culture represented in the music video. Furthermore, the central framing of the window emphasizes how the woman is surrounded and encased in the walls of her home. As already observed similarly in “High Cotton” and “Dixieland Delight”, the baby that is held by the
woman exhibits women’s dominant roles as mothers and family figures. The fact that this shot is a zoom-shot that does not end in a close-up of the woman, but rather misses its goal to end up at the top of the window and dissolves, also creates an expressive effect. The camera passing by the woman represents how the outside world passes by the domestic setting day by day. There is no connection between inside and outside. The outside world is the men’s world, while the domestic setting is the world of women.

Another similar image is created at 2:00, when the band’s drummer, now in the role of a “West Virginia coal miner”, leaves his home in his work clothes. His wife hands him his toolbox, kisses him and closes the door behind him. On the one hand, the woman is once again depicted in a situation which is characterized by emotions (love in this case). On the other hand, the woman evidently stays at home and does not leave with whom is most likely her husband– she is once again firmly situated in the domestic setting as opposed to the outside world. This separation is also emphasized by the difference in level between the man and the woman. Because the man steps out of the house, he appears significantly lower in frame than the woman, who stops at the door. As a result, their worlds appear even more detached from one another. Also, the woman handing the man his toolbox reinforces the notion that she is the one “behind the scenes” who makes sure that the man has everything he needs for his ‘real’ job.

The guitarist also appears alone as a “Kansas wheat mill farmers” in a shot at 1:48. The shot starts off with a low-angle crane shot depicting the giant grain silos of a wheat mill. The crane then moves downwards to reveal the guitarist stepping out of his large truck. The crane shot moving downwards while scanning the factory and the initial low angle make the mill appear particularly large and highlight the importance of agriculture. Although not explicitly related to the South (“Kansas wheat mill”), this image is certainly reminiscent of the agricultural South and projects its importance onto the rest of the United States. The same shot continues with the crane shot turning into a tracking shot that follows the guitarist around his truck to meet a person
with whom he shakes hands. The constant camera movement does not only underline the song’s momentum but also the speed of the character’s work day. It shows that Americans are always in motion while conscientiously carrying out their duties.

The community of workers, which constitutes the most prominent theme in “Forty Hour Week (For A Livin’)”, is also picked up in two striking shots at 1:23, 1:31. A group of workers, evident by the helmets and the context of the lyrics “you can see them every morning, in the factories and the fields”, walk around a corner. The entire group and a pick-up truck are depicted in a long shot with extremely low key lighting. The following shot then zooms in to a medium long shot that now leaves the figures extremely underexposed - in fact, the figures as well as the car, apart from the headlights, now appear completely black (Figure 11). As a result, the silhouettes signify the unity among workers - there is no separation whatsoever within the workforce. Everyone looks the same, is equally important and contributes their fair share. This idea is also reinforced by the fact that they seem to have fun together (they jump around and mess with one another) as well as the words “working together” (1:35) that are sung towards the end of the shot.

The community among workers also remains in the center of attention during the final forty seconds of the music video. At 2:39, a crane shot depicts a bus stop with a bench from above. Around the bench, a group of people gathers. The crane shot creates distance between the
viewer and the diegetic world - the viewer appears omniscient, observing from above. This distance puts the viewer in a solitary, non-diegetic position that stands in stark contrast to the distinct sense of community represented by the people gathering in the video. As a result, the bond between the community of workers portrayed in the music video appears strong and desirable.

The following dolly shot, starting at 2:43, achieves a similar effect. The camera moves from right to left with a steady speed and angle (straight). The characters in frame appear in a medium close-up that allows detailed depictions of each person but also maintains a focal length long enough to be able to include several people in each frame. This composition of framing is necessary in order to showcase the bond within the American working class community but at the same time exhibit each person’s individuality. Maintaining a fairly steady angle throughout the entire shot also puts every individual on the same level, even though they deviate in height and age – all age groups and classes of society are illustrated to be working together as one. This also includes the band members, who appear in the shot as part of the group. They lyrics in this shot also address the entire nation and not a specific region or profession, “hello America, let me thank you for your time” (2:45 – 3:00). The group’s posture and how their eyes are directed at the sky is also reminiscent of people singing the national anthem, praising their nation. This shot can therefore be classified as strongly patriotic, portraying the unity among Americans and their determination to serve their nation.

The crane shot at 3:05 depicting a man sweeping an empty sidewalk who then stops to also look up to the sky suggests the end of the music video in two different ways. First, as already mentioned, the sidewalk and the surrounding area in frame appear empty, which suggests a late hour. Also, the low-key lighting through absence of sunlight, as already evident in the previous shots, indicates nighttime. Second, the crane shot moving away from the ground functions like reestablishing shots at the end of motion-pictures. The omniscient and non-diegetic viewer
slowly moves away from the diegetic world in order to conclude with the experience. Once again, the music video seems to depict one day in the lives of American workers by employing temporal cues.

However, the music video does not stop with the shot discussed in the previous paragraph. The initial shot from the beginning of the music video depicting Alabama’s singer outside his front door, checking his pocket watch, is once again picked up and continued. A close-up of the pocket watch, now reading 6:56 as opposed to 6:55, once again appears and is followed by a close-up of the singer’s face also lifting his head to look up to the sky. This take establishes a connection between the singer and the workers appearing in the previous shots, who also look up. An emotional as well as spatial connection is created among the characters appearing in the music video. In addition, it now appears as if the images shown in the music video were all graphic renditions of the singer’s thoughts. Thus, the music video illustrates American work culture through the eyes of the artist.

To sum up, “Forty Hour Week (For A Livin’)” exhibits a number of similarities with the previously analyzed music videos as well as certain differences.

While the music video puts great emphasis on rhythmic editing in order to complement the song’s beat and timbre, the beginning of the video in particular showcases continuity editing in order to tell a small narrative and create a specific image of the person depicted. The simple, ordinary and humble American worker stands in the center of attention. The music video also once again suggests to be covering one day, this time experienced through the mental images of the singer. Generally, the music video focuses on and emphasizes the strong community of American workers that work for the nation’s sake rather than the individual’s wealth.

A difference concerning “Forty Hour Week (For A Livin’)” compared to “High Cotton” and “Dixieland Delight” is that Alabama clearly reaches out with the music video as well as the
lyrics and projects Southern work values that are so rigorously promoted in the first two music videos analyzed in this paper onto the entire nation - these include modesty, noble work ethic, the importance of agriculture, mills and factories as well as conservative images of women’s roles in society. While the music video does show a woman working in a diner, female characters are always depicted either in an emotionalized context (love, affection, flirting) or in a domestic setting in connection to family. In contrast to these depictions are the male characters, who are depicted to be the dominating breadwinners.

A particularly strong message communicated in the music video is that work is fun and enjoyable. The characters all seem to enjoy their jobs and have fun carrying out their duties. These emotions are communicated more subtly by smiling workers directly addressing the viewer in order to touch them on a personal level, but also in a rather excessive way by dancing factory workers. Possible negative effects of factory labor on the working community are omitted entirely.

Although “Forty Hour Week (For A Livin’)” does not explicitly refer to the ‘old times’, the coal miners, wheat and steel mill workers are rather reminiscent of an economy in the earlier twentieth century South. The music video also pays a nostalgic homage to the “Detroit auto workers” while showing snippets of diverse assembly-line workers, handling auto parts. It is important to note that many Detroit auto manufacturing companies had already moved away to the South, Mexico and Canada in the 1950s (cf. Sugrue 2004, online). Sugrue notes,

> At the same time, the auto industry experimented with new labor-saving technology – called “automation” – that replaced many assembly-line jobs with new machinery. The results were devastating. Many of the large, early twentieth-century factory buildings in the city emptied out. (2014, online)
This also had the effect that minorities (mostly non-whites) who could not afford moving away or commuting long distances were left behind without jobs in the city center. Large Detroit neighborhoods that were once thriving through their local factories slowly turned into wastelands characterized by closed-down factory buildings. Even leading companies such as Chrysler, General Motors and Ford nearly collapsed through record deficits (cf. Sugrue 2004, online). It is therefore important to note that the situation of exactly those assembly-line workers depicted in the music video was actually in a bad state in the mid-1980s, when the video was released. Also, as previously mentioned, the community of workers was actually more divided than united in Detroit during that time.

Therefore, “Forty Hour Week (For A Livin’)” creates a nostalgic idea of a united community of workers and a flourishing economy that passes the borders of the American South and now includes the entire nation. The nostalgic character of the music video also derives from the celebration of a flourishing, American-made industry that was already a thing of the past at the time of the music video’s release. The overly positive depiction of the workplaces as well as the workers’ attitudes also contribute significantly to the nostalgic character of the music video.

d. Song of the South (1988)

The music video accompanying the 1988 single “Song of the South” does not start with the music track itself, but with an introduction that functions more like a news report. A black and white pan shot scanning a dried-out field with a narrow road in the center opens the video. This shot is followed by three more static shots depicting empty and deserted fields. The images immediately communicate an old and historical atmosphere. Also, a voiceover can be heard: “Again, the American farmer looks out upon a Sahara in the making, rivers and lakes dry, corn, hay, wheat and alfalfa turn to dust. Over one-hundred-thousand families are already destitute, so parched are the fields, and in most cases, there is no hope whatever.” (0:01 – 0:16) The
viewer is then shown a medium close-up of “farmer Alex Gilles” (0:17) who directly addresses the audience, “We are Americans, and Americans had a lotta hardships, but we’re gonna fight this through.” (0:19 – 0:26). The farmer’s words gain importance through the character’s central position of framing. “Song of the South” therefore takes its time to establish a narrative about an environmental disaster that heavily affected American agriculture sometime in the black-and-white-TV times. Although the viewer cannot know how the music video will continue, it signalizes early on that whatever will come next will deal with ‘real’ historical events. Within the first twenty-six seconds, the music video establishes a high level of credibility. The complete absence of a music track during the ‘news report’-section ensures that the viewer is completely focused on the topic and attention is not directed anywhere else. The depiction of a farmer readily introduces the Southern working class as the central and most important entity of the Old South’s community.

At 0:26, the music track then actually starts and is accompanied by another montage of shots depicting deserted and dried-out fields, a farmer kneeling down while letting the dry soil of what probably used to be a fertile field trickle through his fingers, more farmers shoveling dust onto a tractor and a close-up shot of a farmer’s face that showcases despair. The montage further illustrates the magnitude of the destruction that was caused and the negative effects it had on farmers.

When the first lyrics can finally be heard, the viewer obtains more information about the spatial setting of the video. While the title of the song “Song, Song of the South” (0:40) is sung, a static close-up up shot of a hand roughly circling the state Tennessee on a map is shown. It becomes clear that the lyrics as well as the images are supposed to relate to the Southern United States. This assumption is also confirmed by the shot at 0:53. Alabama’s singer crouches in a deserted cotton field, which has become the symbol of the agricultural South, tearing apart a piece of cotton while lip-syncing the lyrics “cotton on the roadside, cotton in the ditch / we all picked
the cotton but we never got rich […]”. The singer now takes over the role of the news reporter and further relates the story of the song and music video. During the shot, the camera steadily moves upwards, away from the singer, which is implemented by a crane. This crane shot has two effects: First, it slowly increases the distance between the viewer and the singer situated in the world of the music video. The viewer is put into an overseeing and omniscient role, while further grounding the singer inside the Old South represented in the music video. The large, dried cotton fields surrounding the singer make him appear only as a small part of the sprawling southern region that defines his personality (Figure 12). Second, the crane shot reveals a campaign poster of Herbert Hoover. The temporal setting of the music video is now fully established: it deals with the Great Depression and the “Dust Bowl” during the Hoover campaign and presidency in the 1930s (cf. U.S. Embassy 2008c, online). The deep focus and the position of the poster in the foreground of the frame, with the singer and the deserted cotton fields in the background, directly implies that president Hoover had something to do with the disastrous situation.

![Figure 12](image)

While the Great Depression, as discussed in the third chapter, did affect the South’s agricultural economy deeply, the “Dust Bowl” (an uncompromising drought in combination with dust storms) mostly affected the Great Plains states (cf. U.S. Embassy 2008c, online). The Great
Plains are comprised of the 10 states Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma, New Mexico and Texas (cf. “Great Plains” 2018, online). This list includes only one state that would typically be considered part of the South, namely, Texas. Tennessee, as implied as a location of the music video at 0:40, as well the rest of the South were not considerably affected by the Dust Bowl. Interestingly, however, “Song of the South” claims this natural disaster to have destroyed most Southern cotton fields.

The music video continues portraying the South during the Great Depression, mostly through successions of images and sequences that relate to the region and the time period. One significant cultural artifact included in the video’s montages is the 1939 movie “Gone with the Wind”. The lyrics relate the movie’s title verbatim in the chorus section, which in the context of the song and music video, may refer to the drought having swept away the fertile fields of the South. However, the music video combines the words “gone with the wind” with a snippet depicting the movie’s main actor, Clark Gable. This creates a direct reference to the movie, which has become a nostalgic but iconic portrayal of the Old South before, during and after the Civil War. Ebert writes, “‘Gone with the Wind’ presents a sentimental view of the Civil War, in which the ‘Old South’ takes the place of Camelot and the war was fought not so much to defeat the Confederacy and free the slaves as to give Miss Scarlett O'Hara her comeuppance.” (1998, online). Ebert also writes about the protagonist

She was a woman who wanted to control her own sexual adventures, and that is the key element in her appeal. She also sought to control her economic destiny in the years after the South collapsed, first by planting cotton and later by running a successful lumber business. She was the symbol the nation needed as it headed into World War II; [...] (1998, online)

It becomes clear that “Gone with the Wind” promotes an idealized image of the Old South that mostly disregards the hardships of, for example, slave labor. The movie, however, relates the
image of a hardworking, autonomous southern woman and therefore brings that positive element into the video. The reference to “Gone with the Wind” constitutes the first ‘uplifting’ element in the music video.

The shot at 1:30 also expresses encouragement to a certain degree. A large sign with the heading “Jobless Men Keep Going” fills the majority of the frame. The camera is stationary while a group of men walks past the sign from the right side to the left side of the frame (Figure 13). On the one hand, this sign can be read as a simple statement by the chamber of commerce, telling the population that there is no point in asking for employment because no jobs are available. The simple black and white look of the poster also ties in with the sense of hopelessness present among the southern community during the Great Depression. On the other hand, however, the words can also be read as an appeal to confidence and endurance. The inscription is positioned right above the workers who walk through the frame, making it appear as if they were directly addressed by the words. The shot therefore implies that the jobless must not give up but “keep going” until the depression is finally overcome. The shot is also edited in slow motion, which reinforces the workers’ difficulties in moving forward.

Figure 13

There are also no lyrics, which could compete with the language on the sign, sung during this shot. The absence of lyrics ensures that viewer attention is focused purely on the inscription on
the poster. Consequently, the words are instantly noticed and add an extra layer of meaning to the shot and the literal meaning of the lyrics.

A more hopeful and positive notion is also introduced at 1:41. A snippet of a TV-speech by Franklin D. Roosevelt is accompanied by the lyrics “but Mr. Roosevelt is gonna save us all”. The inclusion of another shot taken from a real speech that aired on TV further expands the music video’s degree of authenticity. The lyrics relate to Roosevelt’s “New Deal” and how its legislations were to resolve the difficult situation of the South’s agriculture during the 1930s (to a certain degree, the New Deal did bring economic relief). Lyrics and image work together so closely that it once again becomes impossible for the viewer to disregard the subject matter of the lyrics. The shot of Roosevelt is followed by another that depicts an elderly couple sitting around an ancient radio device, listening carefully. In that moment, the music track – temporarily without lyrics – is complemented by a diegetic sound that appears to be coming from the radio device. It’s Roosevelt’s voice, saying, “the only thing we have to fear is….” (1:44 – 1:47). Including diegetic sound in the form of Franklin Roosevelt’s inauguration speech “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself”, delivered in March 1933 (cf. The Guardian 2007, online), further deepens the music video’s strong cultural narrative. As a result, the music track actually becomes secondary during those two shots.

“Song of the South” then changes directions completely. The lyrics “When momma got sick and daddy got down / The county got the farm and they moved to town / Pappa got a job with the TVA / He bought a washing machine and then a Chevrolet.” (1:48 – 2:00) are combined with shots that not only explicitly resemble the words, but underline the now more positive direction of the lyrics. For example, the shot at 1:50 depicts two fully loaded automobiles moving away from the camera. The shot is followed by another showing a man working on a construction site. The succeeding images concisely illustrate that a family moved to town and the father found work there. Also, the long shot at 2:00 conveys a positive atmosphere: A quiet
Southern town including a windmill is pictured. The sun shines so bright into the camera that the houses are left underexposed. While the houses themselves only cover about one third of the frame, the windmill stretches into the top half. The windmill stands tall and is therefore turned into a symbol of Southern greatness. In addition, the spinning wheel signifies the endurance of the South’s agriculture and the region’s strong will to move on and overcome difficult times.

This notion of Southern greatness is continued by another montage starting at 2:20. The montage includes snippets of a farmer arranging large buckets piled with apples, another construction worker hammering high up on a scaffold as well as a crane shot of a massive agricultural plow pulled by about twenty horses. The totality of these images suggests a booming agricultural economy. The South is now represented as an economically strong region that found its way out of misery, with the help of Roosevelt’s New Deal.

The music video’s transition from a strong focus on the hardships of the 1930s to the celebration of a reawakening of Southern agriculture is also visualized by a transition from black and white images to full color at 2:04. A crane shot moves away from a large crowd walking through a small Southern town. The group is led by the band in the front, who also sing the chorus with the townspeople. Once again, the band participates in the community depicted in the music video. The shot’s setting also includes a typical Southern church in the center of the frame, all the way at the back of the crowd (Figure 14). The fact that the group is surrounded by a church and other buildings visually encapsulates the crowd and emphasizes a small-town community that sticks together for their region. The South suddenly appears as a tangible and comprehensible unit that demands the viewer’s appreciation. Since the shot starts with the camera positioned very close to the people, it is also possible to observe that the crowd includes both grown-ups as well as children. This diversity represented in this shot shows that it does
not matter what age, all southerners are on the same page when it comes to appreciating their region.

The final one and a half minutes of “Song of the South” solely depict the band singing and playing their instruments to the song in a concert venue. The video now becomes strongly reminiscent of the concept-performance combination videos typical of early country music videos. This video, however, can still not be completely classified as such because, first, the performance part is not intercut with sequences that illustrate the music video’s message – instead the two levels of action are largely separated from one another. Second, the singer and the band both appear as part of the diegetic world on the “concept”-level of the music video as well as on the performance level.

The same counts for the background figures, who not only appear on the concept-level, but also inhibit the performance space of the band and eventually take on a leading role. At the beginning of the performance sequence, the band plays alone on stage, spatially separated from the audience. At 2:52, however, audience members enter the stage and participate in the performance by clapping and singing along to the music. The band also explicitly acknowledges the people on stage and interacts with them through eye contact and other forms of body language such as smiling as well as leaning and turning towards them. As a result of this
interaction between band and audience, the two levels merge into one. The fusion of the band and the secondary characters is taken even further when the music track slowly fades out around 3:30. While the music track slowly disappears, the audience’s singing and clapping remains at the same volume – the band hands over their authority over the music to the Southern community. “Song of the South” once again blurs the lines between the artists’ performance space and an independent concept-part in the music video, which leads to the video and the band reaching an exceptionally high level of authenticity in relation to the viewer.

In sum, “Song of the South” continues the previously analyzed music videos’ path concerning the emphasis on the importance of agriculture in the American South. In order to relate a narrative about the hardships that Southern farmers were facing during the 1930s, the beginning of the music video significantly deviates from the norm. A sequence strongly resembling a news report (including voiceover and an interview) introduces the viewer to the story and the prevalent topic of the video. The inclusion of images in combination with lyrics that refer to real historical subjects (for example Roosevelt and the New Deal) and diegetic sounds that push the music track to the background further expand the factual nature of the music video. Therefore, “Song of the South” is focused on relating the ‘truth’ about a portion of Southern history even more than the previously analyzed videos.

However, apart from attempting a factual representation of the South during the Hoover/Roosevelt era, “Song of the South” gains a strong nostalgic character by projecting the Dust Bowl’s direct repercussions on the entire American South. The use of this historical natural disaster that affected the Great Plains as a Southern phenomenon turns the draught into a tool to showcase the endurance and strength of Southern farmers. Introducing this natural disaster as the main reason for devastation of the Southern economy during the first half of the twentieth century also allows the music video to direct responsibility away from Southern society. Climate events can be considered beyond human control whereas the collapse of
slavery after the Civil War, sharecropping and below-minimum wages were all man-made phenomena that negatively affected Southern agriculture and economy during this period. These aspects, however, are widely omitted for the sake of showcasing Southern pride and the region’s glorious return from an economic mess that is depicted to have been caused solely by mother nature.

It is also important to mention that “Song of the South” refrains from depicting people of color altogether. As a result, the music video does not provide the viewer any cues that could be related to the now widely condemned Jim Crow laws, which were still in effect in the 1930s and a dominant aspect of the Southern social system. Furthermore, the exclusion of black characters in the music video also distracts from the fact that the black population lived on even lower wages than whites while being forced to work in even more labor intensive jobs. Including reminders of both of these aspects would threaten the feeling of nostalgia that the music video tries to trigger among viewers.

The white Southern community, in contrast, is depicted to be the core of the South’s identity, with the band being part of it. Although the band’s appearance throughout the music video, (especially before the performance footage at the end) is more limited than in all three previously analyzed music videos, its role as a communicator of Southern history and culture is established early on. As a consequence, the band is not only acknowledged to be advertising the song itself, but also the culture represented in the music video.

6. Conclusion

All four of Alabama’s 1980s music videos analyzed in this paper (“High Cotton”, “Dixieland Delight”, “Forty Hour Week (For A Livin’)” and “Song of the South”) share the property that they exhibit cinematic techniques that establish narrativity and continuity. Compared to a large body of music videos that seek spatial and temporal discontinuity in order to keep the viewer
interested in the product that is to be sold, namely the song, Alabama’s music videos present numerous shots and sequences reminiscent of classic Hollywood film making and television formats. These narrative and continuity-editing techniques include lengthy close-ups, eyeline-matches, establishing shots and a whole sequence that resembles ordinary television news reports. The narrative qualities that can be found in the videos analyzed have one central function: they help make the image of the American South that is constructed in the videos come alive, relatable and believable. While ‘abstract’ music videos or experimental films often immerse the viewer in worlds and states that are merely dream-like, hypnotic or euphoric, the narrative qualities reminiscent of Hollywood movies and television formats applied in Alabama’s music videos contribute to the music videos’ realistic appeal. Therefore, the music videos analyzed are not just commercials for the songs that they accompany, but they also advertise a specific image of the American South and attempt to relate this image in a way that appears truthful, honest and real.

In order to achieve this goal, the band itself also takes on a significant role. All band members appear as part of the diegetic world in all four music videos. Their roles reach from actually working and living among fellow southerners to acting as observers and leaders in the diegetic world. In “High Cotton”, for example, the viewer gets to observe and experience the South though the eyes of the band members while they ride a car through the southern landscapes. In “Forty Hour Week (For A Livin’)” and “Dixieland Delight”, the band members are depicted as ordinary working class southerners, carrying out their everyday duties. Since artists already enjoy a certain degree of authority when appearing in the music videos to their own songs, positioning them firmly inside the diegetic world gives credibility to the visual content. The illustration of a Southern culture that is inhabited and therefore endorsed by the band itself is more likely to be accepted as real among viewers. Thus, the notion of a ‘first-hand account’ is created.
The music videos all promote a strongly nostalgic image of the American South in a variety of ways. First, the most prominent idea, which is picked up by all four music videos, is a humble and hard-working, predominantly white, blue-collar society that is still deeply rooted in agriculture. This society largely works for the greater good of the nation and never for the individual’s own benefit. Also, the agricultural lifestyle is depicted to be defining all ages of Southern society equally, with the older generations passing on their knowledge and values to the younger ones. While the settings of “High Cotton” and “Song of the South” never turn away from the sprawling farmlands of the South, “Dixieland Delight” portrays a rural sawmill, private farms and symbols of the Old South such as the Confederate Flag and an antebellum-style home. The Plantation South based on agriculture is therefore never out of reach. The skillful combinations and juxtapositions of images of farmland, family and the well-disposed southerners wearing their blue work overalls paint a picture of a harmonic and self-sufficient society that is worth longing for. This idea of a well-functioning, agricultural, blue-collar South can also be considered genuinely nostalgic because by the 1980s, the American South was already far away from being a rural and purely agricultural society. The old agricultural factories and fields gave way to the modern businesses of the Sun Belt. Nowadays, the differences are even smaller and the South does not appear to be any more agricultural than the rest of the United States. Also, claiming that the Dust Bowl significantly affected the South around the state of Tennessee in order to showcase Southern farmers’ strength and commitment in overcoming their misery is another extreme example of how nostalgia is created in “Song of the South”.

Second, in order to create an image of the South that can be appealing to a large variety of contemporary viewers, the music videos not only promote a South that is fundamentally agricultural and rural, but also one that does not have to do without the amenities of industrialization and urbanization. Tractors, drive-in restaurants and servers in short dresses are
just as much part of the South in Alabama’s music videos as the old cotton fields, barns, antebellum-style homes and the blue work overall. These combinations of older and newer aspects of Southern culture are also responsible for the highly nostalgic character of the American South represented in the music videos. The idealized concept of the old-fashioned South is enhanced with the developments and achievements of modernization in order to create an appealing portrayal of the South during its agriculturally dominated period.

Third, all music videos, with the exception of “Song of the South”, omit problematic and negative aspects of Southern history completely. The agricultural South is depicted as a romantic place run by a community that is loyal, loving and conscientious. The fact that the “Cotton Kingdom” was built on the brutal exploitation of slaves is blurred by the romanticized images shown in the music videos. Also, the miserable decline of the South’s agriculture in the years after the Civil War, resulting in skyrocketing unemployment rates, poverty and disease is not even touched upon in the music videos. Only “Song of the South” deals with a difficult time for Southern agriculture but blames these problems, which are eventually overcome in the narrative of the music video, on a natural disaster that actually did not affect most of the region.

Racial matters are treated in a similar manner. Most depictions of people of color show these in friendly relationships with whites, distracting from the fact that racial segregation was the norm in the Old South. For example, the viewer is shown images of black and white children playing together in a field or a black worker holding a white baby in “High Cotton”. “Song of the South”, by contrast, completely stays away from depicting black folk and avoids any possible reference to the issue that people of color’s situation was even worse than that of whites during the Great Depression. These aspects discussed result in the viewer being presented a South that is free from the major problems it has encountered throughout its history.

The South’s humble but hard working community is also projected onto the entire United States in “Forty Hour Week (For A Livin’)”. The viewer is now presented the image of a nationwide,
American, blue-collar community that lives by the examples set by the Southern United States. The dancing, smiling and singing workers depicted turn the music video into a mere commercial of an American industry that had already not existed that way at the time of the video’s release (for example the flourishing Detroit automobile industry that had started its decline long before the 1980s). The viewer is still presented a nation’s thriving factory and agriculturally based industry in which the driving force is the strong work ethic of its blue-collar workers.

Alabama’s music videos also strongly promote conservative gender roles. While women do appear in their workplaces on limited occasions, their depictions are always emotionalized by the presence of a flirting male who demands their attention. The majority of women’s depictions, however, take place in the domestic setting, clearly suggesting women’s roles to be taking care of household, children and their husbands. These portrayals of women are also representative of an older South before modernization and industrialization after the Second World War. During the first half of the twentieth century, it was normal for Southern women to get married young, not receive much education and stay at home with their children. By mid-century, however, more than half of the South’s women were employed in manufacturing. These depictions of women as housekeepers could also be related to the religious conservatism that is still a strong ideal in the South.

Since YouTube is not just a platform that allows consumption of music videos, but also user interaction in the form of commenting, liking and disliking (cf. Khan 2016: 237), one can observe how today’s viewers react to Alabama’s music videos. Some comments on the video of “Forty Hour Week (For A Livin’)” read: “3rd generation farmer here. I usually put in 40-hrs by Wednesday: Hard work. Hard hours. Not grand money. Servant of God Almighty of His Land. And I love every second of it.” (Eric Dusci 2017, online), “60 hr/week ironworker & Ex Marine. I just wish America would be the way it used to be, where everone [sic!] worked hard
and didn’t use the system.“ (Mike Jones 2017, online) and „Back when people viewed working as a right not a chore.“ (Daniel Ashworth 2018, online). A comment on “High Cotton” reads:

This is what "America" should be like today. Working hard, and going to Church on Sundays. America would be such a better place today, if it was still like the older days. Today's generation, is lazy, we have too much, and it only makes us want more, and not appreciate what we do have. Long time ago, they had very little, but they were much happier. (Kevin Baugh 2015, online)

Also “Dixieland Delight” and “Song of the South” have sparked similar reactions: “Family, work, honesty, simple living, values, .. this is why so many people around the world like American country music. God bless America and everything it stands for.“ (Gustavo Gentilin 2018, online), “A simpler time when people were proud to be Americans! 15 dollar minimum wage my ass! People today don't know how life was and people were proud of the country working for its betterment but now it's all about themselves. We'll never know a time like that again.“ (thatvdubguy 2017, online) and

Whether anyone agrees or not, the Southern United States is the heart and soul of America. Period. There's absolutely nothing else like it. Small quiet towns, everyone minds their own business (more or less), everyone's mostly friendly, barbecues, fairs, great country music, and much more […] (Wglass90 2017, online)

Evidently, Alabama’s music videos, even today, trigger strong emotional reactions concerning what seem to be the Old South’s noble values, traditions and work culture as represented by the videos and the music. One can observe viewers expressing a strong sense of loss and grief about ‘the good old times’. These reactions are understandable since the videos relate the idea of a past that was free from major crises, a time where people were not greedy and worked for the community, a time where everyone lived within a loving family and even racism did not really
exist. Naturally, if viewers think of the numerous issues our modern society is dealing with, the American South depicted in the videos may appear like a sanctuary. People receive a picture of an idealized past that did not exist that way in reality, but the audio-visual representation of these nostalgic images within the music videos make them feel authentic for viewers.

Also, it is probable that the country music audience already consists of people who cherish their American homeland more than others and are therefore especially susceptible to patriotic and idealized ideas. These fans also admire the artists and therefore are likely to believe in what the band itself represents. The strong presence of the band on the diegetic level in all of the music videos analyzed serves as a powerful example. The nostalgic picture of the old American South and the longing for a return to this society is distributed and shared within the country music scene. However, even outside the country music scene, and even outside the United States, these videos may contribute to the spread of an idealized version of United States history that largely directs the world’s attention away from the Southern United States’ legacy of racism and slavery.

To conclude, it is also necessary to notice that the images conveyed in the chosen Alabama music videos may specifically draw the viewers’ attention to negative aspects of today’s society by showcasing how perfect the old, agricultural South was. As a result, this may create anger among viewers and fuel intolerance towards other cultures and nationalities because the old Southern society and culture depicted appears worth protecting and fighting for. New and foreign cultures that could change the United States and the South’s society may subsequently be met with refusal and dislike. This also ties in with the casual use of, for example, the Confederate Flag in the music videos. These depictions desensitize viewers to the actual negative connotations that are attached to these symbols. These then become symbols of pride, representative of a perfect society, of which dark spots become accepted and approved by today’s generations. The current presidency of Donald Trump confirms America’s current
indifference concerning racism and extreme conservatism. At the same time, a strong type of close-minded and biased nationalism has been gaining ground. Music videos that present parts of history in an overly positive and potentially patriotic manner may further fuel nationalistic ideologies.

The results of the analyses of Alabama’s music videos “High Cotton”, “Dixieland Delight”, “Forty Hour Week (For A Livin’)” and “Song of the South” suggest that they should be viewed as only a snippet of the American South’s past and should be met with scrutiny before accepting the music videos’ representation of the South as the complete truth.
7. Bibliography


