

As I See It

The Migrants: A Tragedy

By Pat Costa



When as a nation we find ourselves confronted with a problem that seems next to impossible to solve, it is hard enough to accept.

Yet when we are confronted with a tragedy that need not be, we are shakened and sickened beyond reasonable distress. Man's conscionable inhumanity to man is a sore that oozes over all of us who know of it and do nothing.

Such were the feelings watching a recent NBC White Paper on the migrant laborer of America, specifically of the state of Florida.

With announcer Chet Huntley as anchorman, the news department of the network set about exposing conditions and interviewing laborers and their families.

The crew ran into some trouble. Gov. Claude Kirk, for instance, refused to talk to them. In other instances, they were run off property by grove owners although the right to talk to a laborer at his home at the latter's desire would seem basic.

Crumbling, mean, sub-standard little shacks, some at the edge of a swamp with no indoor plumbing were the typical dwellings of the laborers, who

mostly were black although a few whites and some Mexican-Americans were interviewed.

One announcer interviewed a 15-year-old white boy who said he refused to go to school because the other children made fun of him. Following through the announcer elicited the information that the "embarrassment" came when it was lunchtime and he had no money and could only sit and watch the others eat. Taunts because of clothing also bothered the child.

It was easy enough for any viewer unsympathetic to the plight of the migrants to charge that announcers were simply putting words into the mouths of these unfortunates.

Yet hearing the stories of how the large growers kept them dependent by charging exorbitant rates for their shacks, utilizing company stores to keep them in hock and paying ridiculously low wages, a more compassionate member of the audience could simply come up with another argument.

If conditions were only 1/10 as bad as depicted, if only one man out of 20 is in perilous poor health and being robbed of his American birthright of a certain level of prosperity, then it is still a national crime.

Is Thar a Message in Them Thar Trills?

By JOSEPH DUEER

Louisville, Ky. — (NC)—If, as the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow said, "Music is the universal language of mankind," then there is a popular brand of it here today that's carrying a variety of messages — from religion to love — to a wide cross-section of people.

It's called country music. Or, to be more exact, "modern" country music — which some describe as a marriage of rock-and-roll music of the 1950s, folk music and traditional country music.

Country music has been around for a long time — and has long been popular in the South and rural parts of the country. But, today, modern country music is also reaching into the homes and ears of the urban folk.

Modern country music's broad appeal is cited from surveys by Neal "Moon" Mullins, program director and a disc jockey at WJLN, a Louisville country music station. Mullins — who said a "better name" for country music is "American music" — described the average patron as:

A middle-class family, with income between \$5,000 and \$15,000. Family of four owning two cars. Or in his words, "just the average guy."

There seem to be a number of reasons why this brand of music is so popular.

Jim Ed Brown, a country music singer, said it "tells people things they want to hear" and it tells them "in a simple way."

To this Mullins added that country music "puts questions

so simply that people identify with it so easily. Country music sings about life, every facet of it."

Religion, especially the fundamentalist's religions of the South and the rural parts of the country, has long had an impact on country music. But some of today's songs with religious themes apply to more than just the country folk.

Take a song entitled, "Jesus, Take A Hold," that is quite popular here now. Part of it goes:

This world has never been in the awful shape it's in, And pupils scorn the things our leaders do, It's time a prayer was spoken from the heart of every man. Jesus, take a hold and lead us through.

There are others, too, like "The Family," whose words have an old message:

The family that prays together always stays together. And that's the way it's always been with us.

Telling "people what they want to hear" — especially those who may be displeased with the younger generation — is evident in the lyrics of one song, "Okie From Muskogee."

We don't smoke marijuana in Muskogee; We don't take our trips on LSD; We don't burn our draft cards down on Main Street; We like living right and being free.

Yet some songs express sympathy and understanding for youth — demonstrating the wide appeal of modern country music. Take the song entitled "What is Truth?" recorded by Johnny Cash. One verse goes:

New York — (CPT) — If self-worship turns man away from God, a trend in popular song lyrics may be the most ungodly thing yet for pop music.

In a Lutheran monthly and in Life magazine, the sudden rise of "self-love" songs such as I've Gotta Be Me, and My Way has been looked at — or, rather, listened to — with the kind of attention normally given to hidden drug or sexual meanings.

The reason: the "self-love" lyrics may be more dangerous, in the long run, to man's spiritual and social life.

In The Pacific Southwest Lutheran, a minister at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary of Berkeley, Calif., the Rev. Donald L. Deffner, concluded after making a survey of recent pop lyrics:

"Look at the one word that comes through again and again in many of these tunes: 'I . . . my' . . . 'mine'! 'I gotta be ME!' 'I did it MY way!' In 'Sounds of Silence' the pronoun 'I' is used 15 times; in 'I Am a Rock' 29 times!"

"To be sure," he continued, "there is a valid place for the 'I' in our Christian lives. Our Blessed Lord said: 'Love thy neighbor as thyself.' . . . but in the other sense, the 'I' is not to be worshipped. And that is

man's problem today, as it always has been . . . Man today is not so much in search of himself as he is in love with himself."

In a Life magazine essay titled, "I'm Confessin' That I Love Me — Tell Me That You Love Me Too," entertainment editor Tom Prideaux observed that songs such as I've Gotta Be Me, My Way, I Take a Lot of Pride in What I Am and even the egotistical I Believe in You (originally sung at a mirror) reflect a modern penchant for self-worship and lack of concern for others.

It would be a mistake, Prideaux said, to dismiss the self-love songs as a passing phenomenon. "It is part of the spirit of the day, which leads many couples to dance separately instead of together, and it portends a time, not far off, when songs will not be addressed in the old-fashioned way to other people like sweethearts or fickle women, but will be sung by the singer only to his adorable self."

He noted that although the heroine in one recent Broadway show sang, "When I look in the mirror, I love it," "most self-love hymns are written for men to sing."

My Way, sung by Frank Sinatra and Steve Lawrence,

among other vocalists, is a kind of farewell address by a man facing "the final curtain" but supremely proud that throughout life he did things "my way."

"At the end," Prideaux commented about this song, "the dying narcissist asks what does a man have if he doesn't have himself; which is a perfectly valid question pointing to some sound philosophical truths. But it ignores the fact that if a man is a babbling egoist, even if he's got himself, he's got nothing at all."

Prideaux commented that singers associated with the self-love songs, such as Sinatra, Martin, Tony Bennett and Sammy Davis, Jr. make him think for a moment of "a bunch of middle-aged millionaires taking a rather embarrassing ego trip to a meliorate some personal identity crisis."

"This, of course, is unfair. What they are really doing, in a business-like way, is supplying the new demand for self-love songs, and preparing us for the day when the big romantic moment in a movie or stage show will be when the lights go down and a spotlight picks out the hero — alone. We see that at last he has found his true love, met his destiny, heard his own laughter across a crowded room, and hugs himself with his manly arms . . ."

'I's Have It in Pop Songs

Incidentally, the 'I's have it in pop songs.

A young man sittin' on the witness stand; The man with the book said, "Raise your hand." "Repeat after me, I solemnly swear." The man looked down at his long hair. And although the young man solemnly swore, Nobody seemed to hear anymore. And it didn't really matter if the truth was there. It was the cut of his clothes and the length of his hair; And the lonely voice of youth cries. What is truth?

The country music field is filled with "love songs"—songs about happy marriages, unhappy marriages, and people looking for companionship. Take the lyrics to the song, "When A Man Loves a Woman."

You are my inspiration, you're my way to happiness: Things that you do for me show the love that you possess. When a man loves a woman the way that I love you, In his eyes there's no one else to make his dreams come true: Woman. I love you.

Or, flip the coin to the other side — as the song, "Baby I Tried" does — and you see the dejection of an unhappy marriage.

I've been good, stayed home, while you went out. I've watched our kids while you had fun. And never once did I shout. I've been lonely for long now, I'm getting used to havin' no pride. Give me credit for one thing, Baby, I tried.

Still other songs call to mind a melancholy life or existence

like "Two Little Rooms," "Daddy Worked In An Old Coal Mine" or "I Never Picked Cotton." The conclusion to each verse of "I Never Picked Cotton" goes:

But I never picked cotton. But my mother did, and my brother did, and my sister did. And my daddy died young, Workin' in the coal mine.

Talking about country music's rise to popularity among America's urbanites, one writer called it a reaction against the "noise and insanities" of rock-and-roll and popular music and as an "effort to find a simpler and more digestible musical expression."

He added: "A highly complex and industrialized society, beset by anxieties and nuclear fears, yearned to attach itself to something substantial and concrete."

If this is the case, perhaps the last verse of the song, "Jesus, Take A Hold," illustrates this to some degree:

The mighty roar of gunfire is now a local sound. And our city streets are filled with angry men: Law is now a mockery throughout our troubled land. And destruction seems to be the current trend. This world has never been in the awful shape it's in. Our leaders seem in doubt what to do. It's time a prayer was spoken from the heart of every man. Jesus, take a hold and lead us through.

Ban Proposed On 'X', 'R' Movies

Raleigh, N.C. — (RNS) — Two Baptist churches here have circulated petitions opposing the showing of "X" and "R" rated movies in Raleigh theaters. Copies were sent to the mayor, to the governor of North Carolina and state legislators, and to all local theater owners.

Circulating the petitions are Temple Baptist and Six Forks Baptist churches.

The Rev. William T. Mills, pastor of Temple Baptist, said "X" and "R" rated films are detrimental to the nation. "We think the elimination of these films is in the best interest of the country and the American home," he said. "These movies are undermining the foundation on which our country is built."

He said he never has been to an "X" or "R" rated movie, but "I've talked to people who have."

'C' Movie Ban Upheld in Ohio

Cincinnati — (NC) — In a unanimous 3-0 ruling, Ohio's First District Court of Appeals upheld a ban against the showing of the movie "Vixen" on the ground it is obscene. The decision applies in the court's five-county jurisdiction.

The movie was rated in the condemned category by the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures.