



Lone Star Brewing: Beer, Progressive Country Music, and the 'Texas Mystique'¹

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In the April 1976 edition of the music magazine Hit Parade, Bruce Meyer writes about an interview he conducted with the Texas rock band ZZ Top. The group had just finished a performance before 20,000 people at Atlanta's Omni Stadium, and all three band members, wearing cowboy hats, western belt buckles, and jeans, went to a nearby hotel ballroom to mingle with fans and drink beer. "You've got to be a Texan to love Lone Star beer," says Meyer. He describes Lone Star beer as tasting bad but also remarks that, because the beverage had become an icon of Texas popular culture at that time, "no self-respecting Texan would think of tarnishing his image by admitting the stuff turns his stomach. So, he chokes it down and smiles, knowing that, after the fourth or fifth bottle, it won't matter." At the far end of the ballroom, stainless steel tubs (resembling horse troughs) contain bottles of Lone Star beer on ice. When ZZ Top enters the room, the musicians make their way back to the tubs. According to Meyer, guitarist Billy Gibbons grabs a beer, chugs half of it down with one swallow, and then looks around the room "with an elfish grin and a glint of triumph in his eye."²

Such public displays of Texas swagger were typical of ZZ Top. In 1969, Gibbons (from Houston) began working with manager Bill Ham to form the blues-rock trio. They recruited drummer Frank Beard (from Frankston, Texas) and bassist Joe Michael "Dusty" Hill (from Dallas)

and started playing in small clubs throughout the state.³ “Jesus, we played in places like Fort [Port] Lavaca, Alice, George West—we played everywhere there is in Texas,” recalls Gibbons. The band eventually signed a contract with London Records and, after touring and releasing four successful albums, went on to popularize their “gospel of Mythic Texas” well beyond the Lone Star State. “We live in the braggart’s bubble,” Gibbons explained to Meyer. “We’ve got the prettiest girls, the prettiest horses, the prettiest clothes. Our suits cost \$1,300 apiece. ‘My gun’s bigger than your gun’ is the Texas feeling.”⁴

Later that same year, ZZ Top embarked on its “World Texas Tour” throughout North America, Europe, Australia, and Japan. Historian Gary Hartman says that, “with a long-standing interest in theatrical production and with an obvious pride in their home state, the band took along on its tour a Texas-shaped stage and Lone Star props, such as cacti and live cattle.”⁵ The group became famous for promoting a unique image of what it meant to be a “larger-than-life” Texan. ZZ Top’s ostentatious display of such cultural icons from their home state certainly appealed to the trio’s fans, but the notion of a “Texas identity” had been around for years, and it continues to evolve on an ongoing basis.

In fact, the idea of a distinct Texas identity is closely tied to what some have called the “Texas mystique.” This is a widespread belief among residents that the Lone Star State has a special history and culture that sets it apart from any other state or region in North America. Of course, many places claim to be “exceptional” and often express this through slogans, civic celebrations, monuments to local heroes and historical events, or other symbols that represent a particular identity often associated with that location and its inhabitants. In most cases, such ideas of regional exceptionalism are based on a combination of both historical fact and myth.

The Texas mystique is certainly rooted in both fact and fiction. In some ways, the state has indeed followed a unique historical trajectory. Because it is situated at the geographical nexus of the Deep South, the American West, the Great Plains, and Latin America, Texas has been a crossroads for a remarkably diverse array of ethnic groups, each of which has left its own distinct cultural imprint. The state also was an independent country (The Republic of Texas) for nine years after winning independence from Mexico in 1836 and before eventually joining the United States in 1845. Texas is the second largest state both in size and population, and, although it includes two of the nation’s largest urban centers (Houston and Dallas), most of the state is comprised of vast rural areas dotted with small-to-medium-sized towns.⁶ Mainly because it has been an economic powerhouse for nearly two centuries, Texas has long attracted a diverse population made up of immigrants from around the world.

Of course, much of today’s Texas mystique also owes to the mythologizing of the state through movies, books, music, and other means. These often portray Texas as a rugged place where fiercely independent cowboys and other colorful characters carved a living out of the wilderness through a combination of hard work, ingenuity, and grit. This rather romanticized image of Texas is part truth and part fiction, but it still plays a major role in helping define a “Texas identity” both for Texans and for those living outside of the state.

This article examines how the Texas mystique became a vital part of a marketing campaign by a beer brewery which sought to capitalize on such things as regional identity, Texas pride, and an emerging youth culture in the state during the 1970s. Specifically, this study looks at the ways in which San Antonio’s Lone Star Brewery developed a marketing strategy designed to retain its long-standing customer base (comprised mainly of older, rural beer drinkers) while also appealing to a younger and more urban generation of Texans.

In order to do this, company officials tapped into the emerging progressive country music scene that was rapidly gaining popularity throughout Central Texas and beyond in the mid-1970s to early 1980s. Progressive country music itself blended older musical traditions (blues, honky tonk, western swing) with newer styles (rock and roll, R&B, folk), so it was well-suited to helping bridge the cultural sensibilities of older and younger Texans. By aligning itself with the progressive country music scene, Lone Star could remain rooted in older regional traditions while also marketing itself as the beer of choice for a vibrant and forward-looking younger generation of consumers.

No Place but Texas: 1970s Progressive Country and The Texas Mystique

There are numerous historical studies of the 1970s counterculture in Austin with a focus on progressive country music and a changing Texas identity. In his book, *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks: the Countercultural Sounds of Austin’s Progressive Country Music Scene*, Travis Stimeling examines the efforts of local musicians and entrepreneurs to define Austin as a “free-spi[ri]ted, anti-commercial, and musically adventurous metropolis” by working to “commodify the scene and its projected identity for an audience that sought a distinctly Texan alternative to the American identities put forth by the national mass media.”⁷ Expanding beyond the Austin scene into the broader social currents occurring throughout the Lone Star State at this time, Jason Mellard’s *Progressive Country: How The 1970s Transformed the Texan in Popular Culture* considers 1970s’ Texas to be when “civil rights and feminist movements challenged dominant notions of the representative

Texan, [and] icons of Anglo-Texan masculinity—the cowboy, the oilman, the wheeler-dealer—came in for a dizzying round of both celebration and critique.” Situating the 1970s in the broader context of Texas cultural history, Mellard’s study focuses on actors who “invoked the symbolic weight of Anglo-Texan masculinity for progressive ends.”⁸

Although both books provide important insight into the many cultural, political, and demographic influences that shaped Austin’s progressive country scene, there is a need for further exploration of how certain businesses and commercial interests also helped transform Austin’s musical culture during this period. This article examines the intersection of regional identity in Texas, consumer culture (specifically Lone Star beer and its customers), and progressive country music, all at a time in which the state was increasingly shifting from rural to urban, Democratic to Republican, and racially segregated to more fully integrated. By using radio and magazine ads, networking with popular musicians, and sponsoring live music events to link their product to the progressive country scene in the minds of young people, the Lone Star Brewing Company played a significant role in influencing both the local Austin counterculture and the broader image of Texas itself by promoting a more cosmopolitan version of the Texas mystique.

During the 1970s, Austin was the epicenter of a cultural shift sweeping the state, as musicians representing various styles played in the City’s many clubs, and both old and new visions of what it meant to be Texan blended in a rapidly urbanizing environment. Progressive country music, which was an eclectic mix of rock and roll, blues, honky-tonk, folk, western swing, and other genres, came to symbolize the synthesis of both new and old cultures, social attitudes, and political ideologies. In many ways, the progressive country era of the 1970s represents a uniquely Texan expression of the 1960s’ “hippie counterculture” seen in other parts of the country a decade or so earlier.

A number of artists, many of them native Texans, took the lead in blending older musical traditions with newer styles. Most were “baby boomers” who had grown up listening to their parents’ honky tonk and western swing music of the post-World War II era but wanted to meld that with the folk music and rock and roll of their own generation. These musicians included Guy Clark, Steve Fromholz, Michael Martin Murphey (who coined the term “cosmic cowboy” to describe this new generation of Texans who wore traditional western clothing but embraced more hippie counterculture social and political attitudes), Rusty Wier, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Freda and the Firedogs (fronted by vocalist Marcia Ball), Doug Sahm, Jerry Jeff Walker, Bob Livingston, Gary P. Nunn (and his Lost Gonzo Band), Townes Van Zandt, Kinky Friedman (with his band the Texas Jewboys), Greezy Wheels, Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen,



THE BEST OF COMPANY

SEE AND HEAR
WILLIE NELSON
AT THE ANTONIAN HIGH SCHOOL SHOW IN CONVENTION CENTER ARENA
SATURDAY, SEPT. 25 1976

Willie Nelson holding a Lone Star longneck. Courtesy of the Jerry Retzliff Collection, Wittliff Collections, Texas State University.

western swing revivalists Asleep at the Wheel, Red Steagall, and Willie Nelson, who would become the most iconic figure of the progressive country music scene.⁹

The 1970s merger of country music with 1960s hippie counterculture seems, at first glance, highly unusual. However, a common theme found in traditional country music is a desire for open spaces and a pre-modern, pastoral way of life—something shared by Austin’s original counterculture movement of the 1960s, most of whom had migrated from small towns to the growing metropolis of Austin and were attracted to the notion of a folk culture untarnished by modern city life. As Stimeling points out in *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks*, “These young people...in and around Austin...wore their hair long and smoked marijuana like ‘hippies’ but dressed in the faded blue jeans, work shirts, cowboy hats, and boots of the rural cowboy.”¹⁰

With half a dozen colleges and universities in the area, Austin attracted a large number of young adults who had grown up listening to both country music and rock and roll and tended to be more politically and socially progressive than their parents.¹¹ While in the 1960s, conflicts concerning the Vietnam War and civil rights caused tensions and even outright violence between hippies and “rednecks” across the United States, the blending of older and newer traditions reflected in Austin’s progressive country music scene appealed to both traditionalists and hippies and helped create a more welcoming environment in which they could co-exist.¹²

Jim Franklin, co-founder and resident artist of two of Austin’s best-known live music venues, the Vulcan Gas Company and the Armadillo World Headquarters, popularized the armadillo as a symbol of this new countercultural scene. In a 1976 interview with *the Daily Texan* on the six-year anniversary of the opening of the Armadillo, Franklin discusses how people saw the armadillo in his drawings as representative of a lifestyle or attitude rather than merely the mascot for a specific nightclub. This distinction was important to Franklin, because it emphasized what he saw as the armadillo’s individuality and reluctance “to be pinned down on anything.”¹³

In his invocation of a unique southwestern animal to represent Austin’s counterculture, Franklin was not alone in associating a mindset or attitude with Texas. Leading up to the 1970s, authors and intellectuals debated the meaning of the hyper-masculine Anglo-Texan in popular culture. In his 1961 book, *The Super-Americans*, New York writer John Bainbridge describes Texas as a “mirror in which Americans see themselves reflected, not life-sized but, as in a distorting mirror, bigger than life.” Bainbridge saw these distorted features as including “bravado, zest, optimism, ebullience, and swaggering self-confidence” that was embodied by not only the Texas cowboy, but oil barons and businessmen in the state.¹⁴ This “wheeler-dealer” attitude of the Texan that Bainbridge identifies as an “adventurous millionaire whose approach to business is strictly free-style” is perhaps best represented by such politicians as Lyndon Baines Johnson and John Tower who, in 1961, became the first Texas Republican elected to the U.S. Senate since Reconstruction.¹⁵

In 1968, historian T.R. Fehrenbach published his best-selling book, *Lone Star: A History of Texas and Texans*, in which he aimed to cut through the mythology of the state but actually only reinforced certain misperceptions.¹⁶ Fehrenbach’s telling of Texas history earned him acclaim but also criticism from some historians for his Anglo-centric narrative that focused on the epic and bloody conflicts involving Anglos, Indians, and Mexicans.¹⁷

Fehrenbach’s more traditional views on the Texas mystique are reflected in the January 1975 issue of *Texas Monthly* magazine, whose cover poses the question, “Is Texas too big for its britches?”

The magazine features several articles that contemplate Texas secession (including one by Fehrenbach lamenting the ‘americanization’ of Texas).¹⁸ Another article, entitled “A Place in the Sun: If at first you don’t secede, try, try again,” makes a case for Texas independence by harkening back to the 1836 Texas Revolution against Mexico. “Independence?...Not secession, mind you, just good old hard-earned sovereignty. Battled for at Goliad, won at San Jacinto, and...well...never relinquished after all. Not such a bad idea, independence.” The authors argue that, out of 158 countries in the world, Texas would be 33rd in size, 45th in population, 16th in number of daily newspapers, with enough oil to be a member country of OPEC [Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries].¹⁹

By the 1970s, a new generation of historians began to challenge this more traditional view by pointing out the darker side of the Anglo-Texas story, as represented by the widespread marginalization of Native Americans, Texas Mexicans (Tejanos), and black slaves brought into the state as forced labor.²⁰ In the book, *With His Pistol in His Hand*, Américo Paredes argues that “the difference, and a fundamental one, between folklore and the Texas legend is that the latter is not usually found in the oral traditions of those groups of Texas people that one might consider folk.” Paredes sought to debunk the Texas mystique as “pseudo folklore” propagated “in the written works of the literary and the educated and orally among a class of rootless adventurers who have used the legend for practical purpose.”²¹

For Paredes, this was most clearly embodied in the Texas Rangers, who often subjugated Tejanos through violence. Strongly critical of the Anglo-Texas mystique, Paredes sought to promote an awareness and appreciation for the contributions made to the state’s history and culture by non-whites. Through his work, Paredes inspired greater political activism among a new generation of students, scholars, artists, and Texas-Mexican musicians.²²

Larry McMurtry’s book, *In a Narrow Grave*, describes Texas as a place where, “rural and soil traditions are competing most desperately with urban traditions.” Despite voicing strong criticism of writers who glossed over the racism against Mexicans and Natives Americans, McMurtry still found something in Texas’s transition from rural to urban which moved him to write that, even though he disliked frontiers, “the sense that my own has vanished produces in me the strongest emotion I have felt in connection with Texas, or with any place.”²³

McMurtry’s writings were popular among college students in Austin during the 1970s, perhaps because many also were struggling to reconcile the rural Texas of their parents with the rapidly urbanizing environment in which they now found themselves.²⁴ This attempt to balance older and newer visions of a “Texas identity” could be seen by the mid-1960s at a north

Austin gas station-turned-bar called Threadgill's Tavern.²⁵ The owner, a traditional country yodeler named Kenneth Threadgill, encouraged young and old musicians alike to mingle and share their musical interests. Threadgill also mentored a number of aspiring musicians, including a young Janis Joplin, who briefly attended the University of Texas.²⁶

The tension McMurtry identified between rural and urban Texas could be readily seen in Jim Franklin's armadillo posters. However, instead of idealizing the mythic Anglo-Texan cowboy, these posters were often drawn in a surrealistic style reflecting the larger-than-life image of the Texas mystique subverted with new meaning in the 1970s' Austin music scene. According to Franklin, "Here was this surrealist state you know, with all this exaggeration

Disc jockey Joe Gracey at Austin radio station, KOKE-FM, coined the term "progressive country." He compared it to the contemporary Chicano and Black Power movements, explaining that, through progressive country music, young Anglo Texans were exploring their own roots and reconciling those with newer social forces contesting the older Texas mystique and the Anglo power structures that it served. For Gracey, the progressive country phenomenon was an organic, grassroots movement that reflected genuine concerns among young Anglo Texans struggling to transition from adolescence to adulthood in a state that itself was rapidly transforming from rural to urban. As Gracey said, "Just wait a damn minute. I'm from Texas, I love Texas, it's a great place to live. I love the way we eat, I love the

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as part of the official imagery. The biggest this and the biggest that...All this brags of Texas...You don't have to go to Paris and copy Salvador Dali; you just stay in Texas and look around."²⁷

Armadillos were often seen dead on the side of Texas highways, which gave Franklin a sense that they were victims of modern society in a way similar to longhaired hippies. Franklin explained his sympathy for the animals. "Armadillos have been completely ignored in this state...No one takes an armadillo seriously if they see it on the side of the road, although maybe young people are beginning to."²⁸

Much of Franklin's early poster art celebrates the lowly armadillo. His first, an advertisement for a 1968 concert at Austin's Woolridge Park, shows an armadillo "smoking a joint, no human relevance or smart-ass connotations intended. Simply an armadillo as an armadillo might look." Another poster drawn by Franklin in 1969 features a giant armadillo destroying a pickup truck on the side of a highway. The wrecked truck is crushed with a giant armadillo footprint in the bed, while the armadillo walks away having exacted its revenge upon this modern mode of transportation. Franklin's armadillos appear again in a 1970 poster advertising the group Shiva's Headband, which performed at the Armadillo World Headquarters' grand opening. Franklin's posters became popular enough in Austin that some University of Texas students tried to have the armadillo replace the longhorn as the school's mascot.²⁹

way we dress, I love our habits and our customs, and I love the way I talk. I love everything about this state—and why wouldn't I? It's a great place!"³⁰

The Armadillo World Headquarters became a haven for many of these youth who had left their rural or suburban lives to attend the University of Texas. Eddie Wilson opened the cavernous live music venue in 1970 in a South Austin neighborhood populated mainly by lower-income Anglos and Mexican Americans.³¹ Wilson eventually secured a liquor license and constructed a beer garden and restaurant.³² Attracting crowds of up to 1,500 each night, the Armadillo soon claimed to be the largest retail supplier of Lone Star beer in the state of Texas, second only to Houston's Astrodome.³³

Long Live Longnecks: Lone Star Brewing Company and the Shaping of Texas Culture

By the early 1970s, "cosmic cowboys" and images of armadillos could be seen all over Austin, and they were beginning to spread elsewhere across the state. Businesses throughout Texas sought to capitalize on the growing youth market connected to progressive country music. The Lone Star Brewing Company was one such enterprise, and it would play an important role in helping redefine the state's youth culture through its close association with progressive country music.

The original Lone Star Brewery opened in San Antonio in 1884 as a joint venture between San Antonio businessmen and famed St. Louis beer baron, Adolphus Busch, who hoped to tap into the Texas market. The founders considered San Antonio an ideal site for a large-scale brewery, because of its central location, its large German and Mexican populations, and nearby aquifers, which could supply large quantities of pure artesian water. Prior to the establishment of the Lone Star Brewery, the fifty-eight existing breweries in Texas produced a combined total of 16,806 barrels of beer annually. By contrast, production at the Lone Star Brewery (which had modern equipment and access to outside capital from Busch) produced 17,246 barrels in its second year. Because of its mass production capabilities, Lone Star drove several of its smaller competitors out of business, and

on their service routes. As early as the 1950s, the brewery also hired musicians to promote its product. Former Lone Star delivery driver and shop worker Jimmy Boeck recalls that some of the company's earliest radio ads featured legendary western swing bandleader Bob Wills performing such jingles as "Lone Star beer's the clear and mellow brew. Try it once and you'll agree, it's the beer for you."³⁹ Lone Star recruited Wills in order to compete with such rivals as Pearl Brewery, (started by former Lone Star Brewery manager, Otto Koehler), which employed popular Czech-Texas musician Adolf Hofner and His Pearl Wranglers.⁴⁰

By the early 1970s, the brewery had hired the Glenn Advertising Agency to advertise Lone Star beer as a "good homegrown brew for good, solid, homegrown, working people."⁴¹ During this time period, Lone Star began using the

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the number of breweries in the state dropped from fifty-eight to only eight between 1880 and 1889. In 1918, the Eighteenth Amendment, prohibiting the sale of alcoholic beverages, brought the closure of nearly all Texas breweries.³⁴

After Prohibition ended in 1933, the Champion Brewing Company, under the ownership of the Haeglin family, started construction of a new brewery near the old Lone Star facility.³⁵ The Haeglins operated the brewery until 1940, when a group of Texas businessmen, using the name the Lone Star Brewing Company, bought the plant and produced 39,000 barrels of beer in its first year.³⁶ In 1965, production at the facility surpassed one million barrels. By 1972, other companies, including Schlitz and Budweiser (which no longer owned the Lone Star brand) moved into the local market and began competing with Lone Star.³⁷ Facing increased competition from such national breweries, Lone Star had to update both its image and its marketing strategy to appeal to an increasingly young and urban population.³⁸

The president of the Lone Star Brewing Company, rancher and businessman Harry Jersig, had long marketed his beer through civic participation in the San Antonio community. This included sponsoring local events and organizations, as well as encouraging delivery truck drivers to cultivate good relations with bar owners

slogan "From the Big Country" in order to associate its beer with the image of Texas as a rustic, rural, "wide-open" place.⁴²

Radio spots played frequently in 1973 featuring Mexican-American actor Ricardo Montalbán:

I'd like to talk a minute about beer...men who live here in the Big Country have a special reason to drink one brand; I mean Lone Star. It's brewed here for the men who live here, and it tastes great besides. Watch the men who drink it, because it tells the world who they are. Lone Star with a fresh clear taste of the Big Country. Lone Star, the beer every beer would like to be like. Take it from me, Ricardo Montalbán.⁴³

Since this ad celebrated a more traditional image of the Texas mystique, it was not very effective with the growing youth market that listened to progressive country music. So, Lone Star Brewery launched new radio ads specifically aimed at younger Texans. For example, a 1972 ad featured a rockabilly jingle touting Lone Star as, "the biggest beer that Texas has ever known." The song attempts to connect Lone Star with the live music scene by using such lyrics as, "If you're looking for a beer that will quench your thirst, pourin' Lone Star will always do it first. Drink it by yourself, or drink it with your friends; drink it anywhere you want the fun to begin. A honky tonk or bar and a nightclub too, Lone Star beers, they're a-waiting for you."⁴⁴

A 1973 radio spot featured the old German polka "In Heaven There Is No Beer," except that it substituted lyrics advertising Lone Star beer: "Texas has just one beer (a crowd yells, 'Lone Star!'), that's why we drink it here. And when we're gone from here, all our friends will be drinking all the beer."⁴⁵ Another ad associates Lone Star beer with youthful beach parties along the Texas Gulf Coast. A male vocalist sings:

Walking down the sunny beaches, wearing cut-off sandy britches. Sure feels good to get away, running in the ocean spray. Surfers riding on the curls watching all the pretty girls...Me and my friends and a bunch of Lone Star beer by the cases. Drinking that cold Lone Star beer and all them smiling faces. Drinking that cold Lone Star beer. Oh, honey come over here. Drinking that cold Lone Star beer.⁴⁶

Although the company began airing more commercials targeting young audiences, it continued trying to appeal to its older, more rural consumers with ads voiced by Ricardo Montalban and others, including actor Warren Stevens, who invoked more of the traditional Texas mystique. In a 1974 ad, Stevens proclaims:

This is the Big Country. Time was when a man on a horse was the living symbol of this country; he still is. But today, the Big Country is more than even he can dream-its great beaches timeless, its ranchlands endless, its lakes countless, its great cities stretching endless towards the sun. And the pleasure these things offer are more than a man can enjoy in one lifetime. One of these is Lone Star, the great light beer brewed for the men who live here. They drink Lone Star because they like it, and it tells the world who they are. Lone Star, with the fresh, clear taste of the big country.⁴⁷

In another ad, Stevens speaks from the perspective of a cowboy on a cattle drive:

When a storm comes to the Big Country, the cattle smell it coming, and they get spooky. You got to keep them bunched up 'til it's over. It may take all night, but you can't settle back. You got to stay with them. Then it's over. You're flat worn out, but you're inside ready to settle down with a real beer. Lone Star, the great prime beer with a light taste for the greatest thirst of all-yours.⁴⁸

It was during the early 1970s, as Lone Star Brewery was trying to appeal to younger consumers without alienating its older, more traditional drinkers that a new district manager, Jerry Retzloff, took over marketing and distribution for Central Texas. He not only increased sales dramatically, but he also helped shape the culture of the entire progressive country music scene by attracting youthful audiences to the Lone Star brand and helping make the beer an enduring icon of the era.⁴⁹ Retzloff, a San Antonio native born the same year the Lone Star Brewery reopened in 1940, graduated from Central Catholic High School in 1957. In 1963, he got a job as a tax accountant at Lone Star and developed a friendly relationship with owner Harry Jersig, who already was a customer of Retzloff's father's fishing guide service.⁵⁰

According to Retzloff, "I started [in Accounting] but I ended up working [in] all departments at the brewery." Jersig started grooming Retzloff to become a salesman but, "[Jersig] told me I had to go through the plants and work and all that first so I would be a well-trained beer man." Becoming a beer man also required Retzloff to go back to college for a degree. From 1966 to 1971, Retzloff attended St. Mary's University, where he earned a degree in Marketing.⁵¹

Because Retzloff was often present in the plants taking care of inventory and other routine duties, he became friends with many of the union employees (part of the International Brewery Workers' Union affiliated with the AFL-CIO) in a way that upper management at Lone Star was unable to do.⁵² In 1968, during a work break, Retzloff noticed that most of the plant workers (who were provided free beer during their breaks) chose to drink from returnable glass bottles with long necks instead of from cans or the disposable "short neck" bottles.⁵³

Ottmer Harmes, a head machinist for the old bottle shop (which filled returned bottles), explained to Retzloff that most employees preferred drinking longnecks, instead of cans or short neck bottles, because the cans are injected with CO² to keep out impure air. According to Harmes, the returnable bottles are "filled with a filling tube all the way to the bottom and then the ultra-sonic shaker shakes it on the next step and then it's crowned." As a result, the long neck bottles end up with less carbonation, giving the beer a smoother taste.⁵⁴

Retzloff ran the Parts Department at the brewery for six years until 1971, when Jersig hired two former Schlitz employees, Charlie Stidham and Tom Roegge, to revamp the Marketing Department.⁵⁵ Under their direction, Lone Star appointed twelve new district managers throughout Texas. Retzloff was promoted to district manager of the San Antonio West District in 1972.⁵⁶ In 1973, Retzloff transferred to the Austin district, where Budweiser was aggressively marketing its beer to college students. Instead of working from his office, Retzloff joined

the Lone Star truck drivers on their Austin routes delivering beer to venues, where he quickly realized that, “The real fertile market was the youth market and the on premise market...The Armadillo World Headquarters was the second biggest keg account we had in Texas [and the largest in Austin].”⁵⁷

Retzloff visited nightclubs several times a week in order to cultivate relations within the progressive country music scene. His efforts paid off when he developed a friendship with Armadillo World Headquarters owner, Eddie Wilson. Lone Star gave Wilson a discount price for buying large quantities of beer, which sold briskly in the venue’s beer garden. Retzloff began exploring new ideas to promote Lone Star to Austin’s younger crowds through the progressive country music scene. Around the same time, Jersig hired Barry Sullivan, a new marketing director, who was also interested in promoting beer to young concert goers.

Retzloff pitched his idea to Sullivan at a Michael Murphey concert at the Armadillo World Headquarters. “When Murphey opened the second verse of his anthem, ‘Cosmic Cowboy part 1,’ by singing ‘Lone Star sipping and skinny-dipping’—every hippie in the room raised a Lone Star to the rafters and screamed.” This convinced Sullivan that Retzloff should try and convince Harry Jersig to focus on a more youthful image for Lone Star. Retzloff pledged that he would raise sales in his district by 30%, on the condition that he could do it his way. “I’ve got to get rid of the shirt and tie and get some cutoff shorts and grow a beard... because I can’t sell beer to the youth market that way...I’ve got to become part of the in-crowd.”⁵⁸

Becoming part of the Austin music scene’s “in-crowd” allowed Retzloff to connect personally with local performers and venues across the city instead of merely trying to reach them through ads. Luckily for Retzloff, the Armadillo World Headquarters’ advertising agency TYNA/TACI (Thought You’d Never Ask/The Austin Consultants, Incorporated) had already approached Barry Sullivan about collaborating on an ad campaign for Lone Star. While Sullivan and TYNA/TACI handled official business between their respective organizations, Retzloff frequented the Armadillo and nurtured a friendly relationship with its employees and patrons.

Retzloff told the Armadillo’s resident artist, Jim Franklin, the story of why employees at Lone Star preferred returnable bottles over cans. This inspired Franklin to combine images of armadillos with the uniquely shaped long neck beer bottles. Retzloff later described the first poster Franklin sold to Lone Star for \$1,000 as “the atom bomb [that] had just hit and blown everything off the landscape. The only two things still standing—the things that were absolutely invincible, were the armadillo and the Lone Star. And then [Franklin] came up with the slogan ‘Long live longnecks.’” Another poster by



Jim Franklin (entitled “Texas Gold”) showed an oil rig with a giant Lone Star longneck in the middle gushing forth a geyser of beer.⁵⁹

Some drinkers had already used the term “longneck” to describe the returnable bottles well before Franklin incorporated the word into his artwork.⁶⁰ However, Lone Star beer officially began using it in 1974, after Retzloff and other district managers met in Dallas as part of a promotion campaign. The Lone Star reps carried several cases of returnable bottles into a bar on Greenville Avenue, where, according to Retzloff, a group of young women saw the beer and said, “Oh, Lone Star! They got longnecks here? That’s what they got in Luckenbach. Yes, we want a longneck!” Retzloff told Sullivan that, in order to establish a regional identity for Lone Star beer, they should adopt the name “longnecks” for their bottles. Sullivan agreed but advocated focusing on the Austin youth market for the time being. Consequently, longneck advertisements were limited to the Capital City while, throughout the rest of the state, Lone Star continued to advertise itself as “the beer of the Big Country.” Retzloff justified this more targeted advertising by saying, “We didn’t want [older, rural] drinkers thinking we were a college beer. Old folks were so touchy back then.”⁶¹

Collaboration with the Armadillo World Headquarters continued after Harry Jersig retired in 1975.⁶² Lone Star dropped Glenn Advertising and its "From the Big Country" campaign, and began working exclusively with the Armadillo's advertising arm, TYNA/TACI, to produce radio spots. The first ad featured *Rolling Stone* music critic, Chet Flippo, along with the Lost Gonzo Band, who at the time were part of Jerry Jeff Walker's back-up band. In one ad, Flippo describes the progressive country music scene. "The scene is always changing, and the new change right now is putting steel guitars and country rhythms in a new setting. Sometimes it's called cross-country, sometimes it's called progressive country, and it sounds like this-[Lost Gonzo Band plays.] Two really good things—good music and Harry Jersig's Lone Star beer. It's really fun."⁶³

The song performed in the radio spot by the Lost Gonzo Band, "The Nights, They Never Get Lonely," was written by group member Gary P. Nunn. Several versions of the tune aired on radio throughout Texas in 1975. One harkened back to the pastoral imagery of earlier ads. "Dancin' in the moonlight under Lone Star skies in the Lone Star State with a Lone Star high and the nights, they never get lonely."⁶⁴ Test market studies found that young progressive country fans reacted very positively to the phrase "Lone Star high."⁶⁵ The verse then transitions to the chorus with the line "We watch the showers of April grow the flowers in May. We lay our cards on the table singing songs all day, and the nights, they never get lonely. Loving with your lover in the evening breeze, listen to the murmur of the Spanish oak trees, the sweet soul music brings you to your knees. And the nights, they never get lonely." As the song fades, an announcer adds the tag "Harry Jersig's Lone Star beer; it's really fine."⁶⁶

In another version of the ad, the song includes words in both English and Spanish, as Gary P. Nunn sings "Bean taco and harina (flour) tortilla, all night long. Bean taco and harina tortilla, Lone Star beer." As the music fades, an announcer repeats the tag "Harry Jersig's Lone Star beer; it's really fine."⁶⁷

While the Nunn ad ran on Austin radio stations, other musicians who had no official connection to the brewery began to refer to Lone Star beer in their songs. The 1976 tune "11 Months and 29 Days" includes a character arrested in Austin for "walkin' around in a daze." After being sent to the Huntsville prison for 11 months and 29 days, he sings the chorus, "Keep the Lone Star cold, the dance floor hot while I'm gone...Keep your hands off my woman, I ain't gonna be gone for that long."⁶⁸

Although the Lone Star Brewing Company had formal agreements with musicians across the state to promote its products, such popular Texas artists as ZZ Top, Asleep at the Wheel, and Willie Nelson were willing to endorse Lone Star beer without actually signing contracts or promotional deals. As Lone Star salesmen established friendships with Texas musicians



Charlie Pride and Jerry Retzlaff. Courtesy of the Jerry Retzlaff Collection, Wittliff Collections, Texas State University.

and collaborated on advertising the beer, they inadvertently contributed to a new version of the Texas mystique that appealed to a younger, more diverse, and cosmopolitan audience than ever before.

Another song from the period that features unsolicited references to Lone Star is Red Steagall's, "Lone Star Beer and Bob Wills Music." In a tribute to western swing icon, Bob Wills, Steagall exclaims, "Lone Star beer and Bob Wills music have kept my heart alive since you've been gone."⁶⁹ Often called the "King of Western Swing," Wills had a profound influence on Steagall and many other artists in the 1970s Texas music scene, including Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, and Asleep at the Wheel.⁷⁰ By pairing the image of Bob Wills with Lone Star beer, Steagall helped tie the local brew and the progressive country music scene to older regional music traditions and the ever-evolving Texas mystique.

As several other musicians began referring to Lone Star beer in their songs, more graphic artists (in addition to Jim Franklin) used their artwork to publicize the Austin music scene and reinforce Lone Star's iconic presence on the cultural landscape. For example, in 1975, poster artist Sam Yeates, who relocated to Austin from the University of North Texas in Denton, began drawing for the underground newspaper, the *Austin Sun*. While working at the *Sun*, Yeates met Jerry Retzlaff, who needed posters and print ads to help market Lone Star beer at various events. As Yeates recalls, "[Lone Star beer] needed an illustration I think for...Spring Break. One of the big...festival, concert things...but they needed it really quickly. And it was like this hand came out of the water holding a beer."⁷¹

Producing a quality poster on such short notice earned Yeates more opportunities to design ads, which often appeared in such publications as the *Sun* or the *Texas Monthly*. One of



his illustrations from 1978 features a group of horses running through shallow water at the bottom of a canyon. Rock formations above appear in the shape of electric guitars. At the top of the poster is the Lone Star logo with a variation of the tag being used in many radio spots at the time—“Free Spirits and Good Times with the Great Taste of Lone Star”—and below that—“No place but Texas.”⁷²

Yeates echoed many of the same themes of Texas regionalism that Lone Star beer emphasized in its ads. In one poster, Yeates depicts a rodeo clown sitting on a barrel formed in the shape of a giant can of Lone Star.⁷³ Leisure time spent outdoors was also a prominent feature in Yeates’s drawings. For example, one ad, called “the Loch Travis Monster,” features a woman in a bikini sunbathing on an inflatable mattress in the middle of Lake Travis near Austin. The woman’s hand, holding a six pack of Lone Star, has slipped below the surface of the lake. At the bottom of the picture, a giant armadillo is swimming upward toward the woman (similar to the poster for the 1975 movie *Jaws*, in which a shark is about to attack a swimmer). A 1978

ad by Yeates shows a woman in cut-off shorts staring out at the waves crashing on a Texas beach. Though only the lower half of her body is visible, in her left hand is a can of Lone Star beer. In yet another outdoor-themed ad, Yeates portrays three giant cans of Lone Star beer floating on inner-tubes down a river.⁷⁴

Yeates often included popular musicians in his Lone Star beer ads. For instance, Ray Benson, front-man for Western swing revivalists, Asleep at the Wheel, appears sitting on the edge of a stage drinking a Lone Star. A caption to his left says, “Ray Benson from Asleep at the Wheel takes a break” while a tag line at the bottom reads, “the Musician’s Brew.”⁷⁵ Another ad from a May 1975 edition of the *Sun* features prominent Austin musician, Craig Hillis, posing with a Lone Star longneck in his hand and the caption “Craig Hillis, performer, producer, studio musician, beer connoisseur.”⁷⁶

Jerry Retzliff’s Lone Star beer marketing campaign gained even greater momentum after he befriended Willie Nelson, the most iconic figure in Austin’s progressive country music scene.⁷⁷ Born and raised in Abbott, Texas, Nelson had established a successful songwriting career in Nashville during the 1960s, but he had grown increasingly frustrated with the limited opportunities there for artistic freedom and the ability to play before live audiences. Nelson moved back to Texas in 1971 and began performing throughout the state. As Nelson explained, “I was raised in Texas beer joints, so I went back to my old beer joints. I was home again. I knew all the club owners...I was back in my element.”⁷⁸

Nelson made his Armadillo World Headquarters debut on August 12, 1972.⁷⁹ Since he appealed to both hippies and rednecks who saw him as rebelling against the “Nashville establishment,” Nelson quickly became a potent symbol of the Texas mystique and the way in which many fans of progressive country music were intent on embracing a uniquely Texan cultural identity.

Although Willie Nelson and Jerry Retzliff never had a formal agreement to collaborate in promoting Lone Star beer, Nelson recognized that Lone Star’s growing popularity throughout the progressive community would be helpful in marketing his music to a new generation of Texans.⁸⁰ According to Retzliff, Nelson told him that young people “won’t drink your beer because Mom and Pop drink your beer, and they won’t listen to my music for the same reason.” Nelson and Retzliff cooperated on an informal basis (which Nelson insisted on, because he was concerned he would be seen as a “sell-out,” if they had a contractual agreement) in which “Lone Star wouldn’t pay [Nelson] anything, but [Retzliff] would buy ads to help promote concerts—make posters and do concerts for him.” In return, says Retzliff, Nelson would “drink Lone Star, which he already did, anyway.”⁸¹

Retzloff began personally delivering beer to Nelson and other performers at music venues, using his time backstage to network with artists and convince them to drink Lone Star. The May 1978 issue of the *Rocky Mountain Music Express* recounts a jam session Nelson hosted, in which he was joined by such musicians as Charlie Daniels, Jerry Jeff Walker, Spanky McFarlane, Gary Busey (who had just played Buddy Holly in *the Buddy Holly Story*), and Roger Miller. As the article mentions, "everyone was well-oiled on the 30 cases of Lone Star beer Jerry Retzloff had imported from San Antonio."⁸²

Only five years earlier, Retzloff had promised Harry Jersig that he could increase beer sales in the Austin area by 30%. Retzloff exceeded that, achieving a 46% increase. In addition to Jim Franklin's posters and the endorsement of Willie Nelson and other musicians, Lone Star launched a huge merchandising campaign that included bumper stickers, shirts, jackets, belt buckles, hats, and pins all featuring the Lone Star logo. Coincidentally, the October 1975 *Billboard* magazine listed Willie Nelson's "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain" as the Number



Barbara Mandrell and Charlie Daniels. Courtesy of the Jerry Retzloff Collection, Wittliff Collections, Texas State University.

One hit single and his album *Red-Headed Stranger* as the Number One LP.⁸³ Nelson had become a true country music icon. His growing popularity proved crucial in recruiting other artists and in reaching progressive music fans.

While radio ads from the 1970s advertised Lone Star beer, Retzloff found new ways to promote his product at live events that featured progressive country artists. On the first weekend of July 1973, Nelson threw a music festival he called his "4th of July Picnic" outside of Dripping Springs, Texas (about an hour west of Austin).⁸⁴ Although the festival was plagued by overcrowding, excessive traffic, and other problems, Nelson held another 4th of July Picnic in 1974 at the Texas World Speedway near College Station, Texas, this time with Lone Star beer as a sponsor. The company not only provided free beer backstage but also promoted the event through radio, print media, and posters. Retzloff supplied beer backstage for the performers, which included Nelson, Leon Russell, Floyd Tillman, Freda and the Firedogs, Jerry Jeff Walker and the Lost Gonzo Band, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Doug Kershaw, Doug Sahm, Greezy Wheels, B.W. Stevenson, Michael Murphey, Steve Fromholz, and others.⁸⁵

Under Retzloff's direction, the Lone Star brand was ubiquitous throughout the festival, including a large billboard advertisement located 1½ miles before the entrance.⁸⁶ After the festival, Retzloff noted that Lone Star sold "1,000 cases compared to Schlitz 200 and Pearl 100," along with another 2,000 cases of Lone Star sold in nearby Bryan and College Station that same weekend. Retzloff also earned a lot of goodwill among the performers at Nelson's picnic by giving them free beer. "The entertainers sincerely appreciated this and told me so on numerous occasions. Due to this, Lone Star was mentioned on stage continuously by them in front of the crowd and on the videotape being made there."⁸⁷

THE MUSICIAN'S BREW

LONE STAR

BULK RATE
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 2070
Austin, Texas

Ray Benson sitting on the edge of a stage sipping a can of Lone Star Beer with the caption "The Musician's Brew." Courtesy of the Jerry Retzloff Collection, Wittliff Collections, Texas State University.

Texas Trilogy: The Changing Personality of Texas Beer

During the 1970s, the Lone Star Brewery sought to reinvent its image in a way that would appeal to the changing social climate of Texas. By promoting its beer as the drink of choice for progressive country music fans, Lone Star helped reshape the Texas mystique by broadening the definition of what it meant to be Texan to include a younger, urban, and more politically and socially progressive audience. Retzliff and others believed that marketing products to this audience would work best if it was done in a somewhat subtle manner. In Retzliff's words, "It wouldn't work if Nelson looked like some bought-off whore."⁸⁸ Since Retzliff and Nelson had the autonomy to market themselves in any way they chose, they both changed their physical appearance from clean-cut, shaven, and conservatively dressed to sporting beards, jeans, and cowboy hats.⁸⁹

For Retzliff, this was part of a conscious effort to differentiate between Lone Star's target audience of younger cosmic cowboys and an older demographic represented by traditional country music fans, or "rednecks," who tended to drink Pearl, Shiner, or other brands.⁹⁰ However, Lone Star and Pearl (both with breweries in San Antonio) considered their main competitors to be such out-of-state beer companies as Budweiser or Schlitz.⁹¹

An October 1974 issue of *Pearl* (a monthly supplement to the University of Texas newspaper, the *Daily Texan*) included an article called "The Texas Beer Trilogy," which chronicled a trip that four staff writers took to the Lone Star, Pearl, and Shiner breweries to find some real "Texana" and its connection with beer.⁹² The article describes the different tastes and attitudes among beer drinkers:

For the earthier types, the Texas beers are indispensable. Lone Star is for the person that takes his earthiness too seriously. A Lone Star career drinker eventually graduates to Pearl. This is far down the road, though, and only the serious image-mongers drink Pearl for status reasons. Shiner is the pseudo-redneck favorite, although it also enjoys an equally if not more loyal following among oldsters who have drunk Shiner for years...Be careful not to pick a beer that clashes with your personality—the results could be disastrous. Weigh the merits of each carefully, and if you're successful, settle in for a long and happy life behind the bottle.⁹³

Comparing it with Shiner and Pearl, the article dubs Lone Star "the Disneyland of Texas breweries" because of its emphasis on merchandise and image. The article goes on to describe owner Harry Jersig as living up to the company slogan "for the

Big Country," in that Jersig "is an outdoorsman, a hunter, an aggressive businessman—a Texas stud." In the article, Lone Star's Vice-President of Public Relations, Floyd Schneider, explains "We are a public relations oriented company...Yeah, we're changin'. We're a young company, we can still do that. So we're going after the young people, that critical mass of people...We're not running away from cowboys though...We want to make a profit; we're profit oriented. But we're also people oriented." The article concludes by saying that, unlike Spoetzel Brewery (which makes Shiner beer) Lone Star beer is not brewed by people but by "an analog computer, which automatically brews, funnels, cans, and takes the fun out of producing the 1.5 million barrels a year. But it is more efficient-and profitable."⁹⁴

Until 1965, when it was surpassed by Lone Star, Pearl led in sales among the three regional beers. Pearl's Director of Civic Affairs, Bob Marsh, explained that "We don't want to knock Lone Star out. We don't want to knock little Shiner out. We want to knock out Schlitz, Budweiser, and Coors. If the Texas beers don't hurry up and get together, we're all going to go under. There used to be over 2,000 breweries in the U.S.; now it's down to about 124. Schlitz, Budweiser, and Miller came down here and opened up these....factories. Just a few men operating those massive machines."⁹⁵

Following the "Beer Trilogy" article is another piece by Lamont Wood entitled, "Pearl's Near-Great Beer Tasting Jamboree," which reports on a beer-sampling event Pearl organized in 1974 at Hector's Taco Flats restaurant in Austin to decide "for all eternity which Texas beer would be honored as 'numero uno.'" Serving as judges at the event were several local celebrities including Alvin Crow (of the band the Pleasant Valley Boys), Jeff Jones (1970 UT student body president), Sue Doty (owner of Austin's drug crisis intervention center, Middle Earth), Judy Hutchinson (former KTBC-TV meteorologist), Jim Franklin (artist for the Lone Star beer ad campaign), and Hector Alvarado (owner of Hector's Taco Flats). Wood says "the judges were to receive three unmarked glasses of beer which they were to rate under the headings of aroma, flavor, color, fizz potential, heaviness, giddiness, and kidney excitation. Each criteria would get a number of one through six, one meaning disgusting, six meaning better than sex."⁹⁶

While judges scored each of the three Texas beers, the audience had the opportunity to vote with cheers or boos. Wood notes that the crowd "seemed to prefer Lone Star in first place, Shiner in second, and Pearl last." By contrast, the judges (unaware of what they were drinking) placed "Pearl in first place, Shiner in second, and Lone Star last." Wood concludes that "the affair quickly broke up after this historic revelation, the judges and spectators going back into the littleness of themselves, each aware that for at least one moment in his life he had been part of

something infinitely larger than the mundane affairs of dreary living. Such is the making of history.”⁹⁷

Despite the ongoing public debate over which of these three regional beers was best, Lone Star continued targeting the youth market with musical events and music-themed advertising. In 1975, Lone Star began airing different versions of the Gary P. Nunn song, “The Nights, They Never Get Lonely,” incorporating lyrics and stylistic changes reflecting African-American and Mexican-American cultural influences. In this way, Lone Star was trying to broaden the definition of what it meant to be Texan to include other groups besides Anglo Americans. Although this may have been as much an attempt to expand Lone Star’s reach into African-American and Mexican-American markets as it was an effort to appeal to the eclectic musical tastes of progressive country fans, the end result was that Lone Star helped reinforce a more inclusive, urban vision of the Texas mystique. Furthermore, focusing on a younger, Anglo audience did not mean Lone Star’s marketing efforts cut squarely along racial lines. In San Antonio, Austin, and other major cities, delivery routes continued to take Lone Star drivers into neighborhoods where older Anglos, African Americans, and Mexican Americans lived.

One example of how Lone Star retooled Nunn’s song, “The Nights, They Never Get Lonely” is a version performed by African-American blues guitarist, Freddie the “Texas Cannonball” King, a frequent performer at the Armadillo World Headquarters.⁹⁸ King’s rendition of the tune features a third verse not found in the original version. “Bring your body over here next to mine, baby. Bring some Lone Star beer; let me tell you. The nights never get lonely.” King’s version also features a modified chorus that conjures images of an urban setting rather than a rural one. “Love with your lover, dancing in the breeze. Listen to the mamas on the old main street. Sweet soul music bring you to your knees...And the nights never get lonely.”⁹⁹

African-American pop group, the Pointer Sisters (who also performed at the Armadillo) had their own version of “The Nights Never Get Lonely,” as did the Texas-Mexican band, Sunny and the Sunliners, who sang in Spanish.¹⁰⁰ Freddie King also wrote an original blues song for an ad that ran that same year. In “Bring Your Body,” King alternates blues guitar licks with spoken word. “Hey, look here. What’s happening? I’m Freddie King, and that means I drink Lone Star beer. Right on. Play some guitar, make it pretty. Give me a beef taco and some chili. Mmm...all night long!”¹⁰¹

While Lone Star radio ads featuring African-American and Mexican-American musicians lacked a direct political connotation (a complaint many leveled at progressive country as a genre), they were a more inclusive cultural revision of the pastoral and traditional visions of the Texas mystique.¹⁰² Despite

Lone Star’s urban rebranding of the Texas mystique, other beer companies during the 1970s, notably the JAX Brewing Company and Schlitz Brewing Company, were already able to successfully market and earn the brand loyalty among minorities—JAX with African Americans and Schlitz with Mexican Americans.¹⁰³

As the assistant sales manager for Lone Star in Austin, Hector Guerra recalls of the Mexican-American market, “Back then the biggest competition was Schlitz. That’s why we had very little success with the Mexican market. Because their warehouse was in East Austin and all the Chicanos drank Schlitz. That was their beer.”¹⁰⁴ However, Lone Star drivers and salesmen in Austin (such as Julian Vasquez, Johnny Garza, and Robert Mackey) crossed I-35 to the African-American and Mexican-American east side of town to sell Lone Star directly to bars and venues. As Guerra remembers:

They would go to the Mexican-American markets in the state of Texas and they would come into town and we would go, strictly Austin, to Mexican bars. They’d sit there and buy them beer. Never forced anybody. They would never say, I’ll buy you a Lone Star by the bottle. They’d say, I’ll buy you a Pearl, or I’ll buy you a Schlitz, or I’ll buy—compliments of Lone Star... Sometimes they appreciated it, and sometimes they didn’t. That’s how you play the game.¹⁰⁵

Outside of the Austin market, Lone Star broadcast Spanish-language radio spots and had a distributorship on the west side of San Antonio headed by Pete Morales. He specifically targeted Mexican-American customers who were willing to try another brand of beer. Marketing of Lone Star also expanded into African-American markets. In addition to Freddie King and the Pointer Sisters, Guerra says that Lone Star worked with “several African-American artists. Gatemouth Brown would come into town.” Aside from Antone’s and the One Knite, Guerra identified the East 11th Street club, Charlie’s Playhouse, as “a very well-known black club over in East Austin.” However, Guerra noted that “there were more whites in the place than there were blacks because they loved the black music. They’d go over there from the University [of Texas].”¹⁰⁶

During the 1950s, Charlie’s Playhouse had been the site of much controversy. So many white college students had begun going there, that many of the club’s long-time African-American clientele could no longer get in. As *Village* editor, Tommy Wyatt, recalled later about the music scene on East 11th, “many of the students, particularly from Huston-Tillotson [University] and so forth, didn’t think that was quite right you know. That we couldn’t go into any club on the west side, but yet we couldn’t

go to our own clubs on the east side on Friday and Saturday night.”¹⁰⁷ As a result, African-American college students started picketing outside Charlie’s Playhouse. Consequently, although desegregation benefitted Austin’s African-American community in certain ways, it also created some tension among whites and blacks, as the physical and cultural boundaries between their traditional neighborhoods became increasingly blurred.¹⁰⁸

Pastoral Texas and the Wanderlust of the Modern Texan: Lone Star after Harry Jersig

In 1975, the Washington-state-based beer company, Olympia, bought the Lone Star Brewing Company, and Harry Jersig retired. However, Lone Star continued to use Jersig’s name in its advertising as a way to maintain the image of a Texas beer

The ads continued to use the “Harry Jersig’s Lone Star beer” tag at the end, although the line “it’s really fine” was changed to “No place but Texas.”¹¹¹

A series of Lone Star commercials produced by San Antonio radio personality Woody Roberts, which ran from 1975 to 1976, included humorous skits designed to appeal to progressive country fans by using pastoral characters and imagery.¹¹² These ads featured a fictional cowboy named Ramblin’ Rose, along with his band, the Sons of the Bunkhouse. In the first ad, Rose announces, “Howdy, howdy to all you folks out there gathered around your radios. This here’s the old Ramblin’ Rose lookin’ through my speakers at all you country kickers and pot lickens... Me and the Sons of the Bunkhouse out here learned us a new tune, now didn’t we boys?...We learned it for a new sponsor, Mr. Lone Star beer.” Rose then cues the band with a “Y’all ready? Me

Two prominent themes that appeared in Lone Star ads from 1976 to 1978 were pastoral connections to the mythic Texas past and the “homesick Texan” who longs to return home after traveling outside of the state.

with a strong personality behind it.¹⁰⁹ Although the change in ownership was the start of a new era for Lone Star, Olympia adopted a hands-off approach that gave Barry Sullivan and Jerry Retzloff full autonomy in advertising Lone Star. In 1976, Retzloff began working with a new advertising firm called Keye, Donna, Pearlstein to produce radio and television spots. Under this new arrangement, Lone Star advertising utilized new lyrical themes and involved a broader range of musicians and musical styles than ever before. Two prominent themes that appeared in Lone Star ads from 1976 to 1978 were pastoral connections to the mythic Texas past and the “homesick Texan” who longs to return home after traveling outside of the state. These themes reinforced a sense of nostalgia for Texas as both a literal place and a more idealized, romanticized concept.

The first of these new themes, which dominated ads from 1976 to 1977, emphasized a rustic, pastoral image of Texas. Instead of relying on different renditions of Gary P. Nunn’s “The Nights, They Never Get Lonely,” Retzloff used new songs from a variety of musicians, including Commander Cody, Asleep at the Wheel, Rusty Wier, Steve Fromholz, Freddy Fender, and Sammi Smith.¹¹⁰ Most of these artists were not under contract but instead volunteered to do commercials in exchange for publicity and for a fee equal to their previous year’s highest paying gig,

too.” However, instead of a new song, the group performs the outro to “The Nights, They Never Get Lonely.” Ramblin’ Rose ends the commercial with “Y’all keep them cards and letters comin’! You keep on sipping Harry Jersig’s Lone Star beer. It’s really fine.”¹¹³

Various ads in the series feature Ramblin’ Rose and the Sons of the Bunkhouse celebrating an album debut, Lone Star’s returnable long neck bottles, and various holidays. Most of the ads include the Gary P. Nunn song at the end, although some feature renditions by Freddie King or Freddy Fender. Of course, Ramblin’ Rose and the Sons of the Bunkhouse are fictional characters, but these ads effectively merged the Lone Star brand with a mythic image of Texas (past, present, and future) in order to promote Lone Star beer throughout the progressive country music scene.¹¹⁴

In 1976, Lone Star introduced a radio ad featuring Austin songwriter, Rusty Wier, singing a tune that used Franklin’s slogan, “Long Live Longnecks.” This song, recorded in a live venue format, celebrated many positive features of the Lone Star State. “Long live the armadillo and them cosmic cowboys. Long live the Texas women, don’t you know they’re the real McCoys. Long live the rodeo and the longhorn steer. Long live longnecks and Lone Star beer.” At the mention of “Lone Star beer,” cheers

from the audience grow louder as Wier continues, "Long live longnecks and Lone Star beer. On the long hot Texas summers and the chilly winters, too. So come on everybody, let's all give a cheer. Long live longnecks and Lone Star beer." Wier yodels the line "Long live longnecks and Lone Star beer" as the commercial fades with the roaring applause of the audience.¹¹⁵

Wier, an energetic performer who combined elements of country with rock and roll, had released three popular albums—*Stoned, Slow, Rugged* (1974), *Don't It Make You Wanna Dance* (1975), and *Black Hat Saloon* (1976).¹¹⁶ He also was friends with Jerry Retzloff and had performed at Lone Star sales meetings.¹¹⁷ Wier recorded another radio ad called "Sing it With CS (Country Song)," done in a southern rock style. The song links Lone Star beer with pastoral imagery to describe Texas as a place for music and good times. "Singin' me a song in guitar heaven. Sittin' 'neath the Texas sky, stars are shining on me. Yeah, it makes me feel free, and it gives me that Lone Star high." He emphasizes his pride in being a native Texan. "I'm Texas born and raised on cold Lone Star. I sing a happy song. Hey, hey, my friend. Everybody join in. C'mon and sing a long."¹¹⁸

Another 1976 Lone Star ad features country-folk singer, B.W. Stevenson, and a tune called "Old Grady," which continues the theme of sharing good times with friends. Stevenson was a former music student at the University of North Texas who performed regularly in Austin during the mid-1970s.¹¹⁹ With such hits as "Shambala" and "My Maria," Stevenson was already a successful musician by the time he began promoting Lone Star beer in 1976. Although it is unclear exactly who "Old Grady" is, Stevenson reiterates the notion that Lone Star beer is an essential part of socializing with friends:

Come sit down beside me compadre. Don't you give me that left ear stare. There's plenty for everybody. There's plenty for all to share. I don't know whether you meant it. Said you don't buy beer you just rent it. I'll show you good times without whiskey or wine and know you won't ever forget it. Find a couple of ladies for me and Old Grady and a pitcher of Lone Star beer.¹²⁰

These ads produced during 1976 included a format change, which at first might appear unimportant, but actually reflects a conscious shift in marketing strategy. This involved including the sound of a live audience in the commercials. Typically, this started with a band playing a song and then an announcer speaking as if the group is performing live in concert. It is not clear whether the audience noise on the Lone Star ads was always authentic, but the importance of appealing to a youth market by creating a sense of "partying with friends" was a

recurrent theme in Lone Star's advertising strategy during this time period.

This technique of including audience noise on recordings already had been used very effectively on Jerry Jeff Walker's 1973 album, *Viva Terlingua!* In some cases, Walker actually was recording in front of a real audience, but for some songs, the audience noise was edited onto a studio recording in order to give listeners the impression that it was performed live. This was done to lend the music an air of authenticity by creating the illusion that the songs were recorded in an informal setting, rather than in the sterile confines of a recording studio. The technique was designed specifically to appeal to progressive country music fans, most of whom not only disliked the music industry "establishment" (as represented by Nashville), but also considered the communal experience of a live music performance to be essential to the countercultural spirit of progressive country.¹²¹

A good example of incorporating the "party element" into its marketing strategy can be found in a Lone Star radio ad featuring disc jockey and musician, Jimmy Rabbitt (born Eddy Payne in Tyler, Texas), performing a song called "Sundown at Sarah's."¹²² The ad begins with an announcer saying "Well, everybody knows Jimmy Rabbit!" On cue, Rabbit sings the opening verse about meeting up with a group of friends at Sarah's (a popular West Austin bar called the Dry Creek Café run by bartender Sarah Ransom) for a night of fun.¹²³ "Come sundown in Austin, time to head out Sarah's way. The river's got a glow and the jukebox starts to play...With Lone Star on the table, just where it ought to be...Well, the Sun goes down at Sarah's, and way across the room, you can hear...me a howlin' at the moon." The song ends with "Yeah, we're all there at Sarah's just a howlin' at the moon," followed by the tag, "No place but Texas."¹²⁴

1976 also was the first year that Lone Star ads featured Commander Cody (George Frayne), of the popular band, Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen.¹²⁵ Originally from Ann Arbor, Michigan, Cody and his band played boogie woogie and western swing music and recorded the popular 1973 album, *Live From Deep in the Heart of Texas*, at the Armadillo World Headquarters.¹²⁶ In this ad, Cody appeals directly to working-class Texans. "Down in Texas in the noon day sun. Working all day and lookin' for fun. When I buy beer, you know the one. Talkin' about Lone Star. Tall cool Lone Star...Pop that top, sit back down. Call your buddies from all over town. Open 'em up, pass 'em around." Cody ends with, "Good-bye blues, hello Lone Star."¹²⁷

The first 1976 ad to feature a female country musician was "Sammi's Song" by singer Sammi Smith, who scored a Number One country hit in 1971 with Kris Kristofferson's "Help Me Make It Through the Night."¹²⁸ In certain ways, Smith

represented an alternate female perspective on the masculine tradition that dominated the progressive country scene.¹²⁹ Although perhaps not as politically-oriented as the larger national feminist movement, this “cowgirl” image mirrored the Texas cowboy tradition, in terms of independent swagger and a love of good times. In the Lone Star radio spot, Smith is introduced by the announcer as “the lovely Sammi Smith!”¹³⁰

It is worth noting that, while male progressive country singers in these ads are usually placed in pro-active, leading roles, Smith projects a more passive stance, inviting the listener to take the lead. “Where do you want to go? Will you take me along? ‘Cause I’ll pour you Lone Star, I’ll start your old car, and I’ll learn all your songs. ‘Cause you make me feel like dancing. Feel like clickin’ my heels.” She continues, “This is the place, but honey let’s face it. There’s something about you that appeals [band stops as Smith holds out the note with a seductive sigh] to my better nature. I appreciate the ride. And you’re handy to have around. I laugh at your jokes.” Unlike other ads, Smith gets the last line after the announcer’s tag when she asks “So, which way do you wanna go?”¹³¹

In 1977, California country-rock pioneers, the Flying Burrito Brothers (without founders Chris Hillman or the late Gram Parsons), appeared in two radio ads for Lone Star beer.¹³² The first was “Write a Song,” featuring the same working-class theme found in many progressive country songs of a male protagonist enjoying his leisure time. “The day’s work is through. I’ll soon be with my baby! It’s time to pour a brew or two or three or maybe! I’ll write a song, the feeling is strong when I hold her hair. The music is Lone Star! Lone Star beer!” An announcer adds the ending, “There’s good times and great beer brewing in Texas. Lone Star!”¹³³

1977 also was the year that musician, author, and humorist, Kinky Friedman first made ads for Lone Star beer.¹³⁴ A University of Texas graduate and former Peace Corps volunteer, Friedman (with his band the Texas Jewboys) was known for his sarcastic wit and “adult-themed” lyrics.¹³⁵ Because of the controversial nature of some of Friedman’s songs, Retzliff had to edit them prior to broadcast. Friedman used clever wordplay to poke fun at the more machismo elements of the Texas mystique, as well as what he considered to be the public’s growing trend toward mass consumerism. Although he might seem an unlikely choice to help market a commercial product, Friedman’s irreverent sense of humor appealed to the youthful progressive country music market.

Friedman’s first Lone Star ad was, in part, a spoof on outdoor concerts, such as Willie Nelson’s 4th of July Picnic. The announcer introduces Friedman by saying, “Live from Radio Cairo, your choice is our rejoice. Mr. Longneck himself, Kinky for Kinky Fried—Kinky.” Friedman begins with “Whenever I’m

rolling in and out of Rio Duckworth, Texas, or New York in my brand new Yom Kippur clipper, I always try to fill her up with about twenty gallons of ice cold Lone Star beer. We get about two or three hundred miles to the ten gallon hat.” Instead of the Lone Star tag used in other 1977 ads, Friedman ends with his own witty tag. “Remember, if you’re driving, don’t forget your car. If you’re looking for some beer, make it a Lone Star.”¹³⁶

Friedman made a second 1977 radio ad for Lone Star called “Sold American,” based on his song (and album) of the same name. In this ad, a fast-talking bidder auctions off Lone Star longnecks. The auctioneer announces the winner of the longnecks by calling out “Sold American to Kinky Friedman.” After winning the longnecks, Friedman says to the crowd, “Thank you, thank you. Thank you for being an American. And now, before we get back to our movie *The Cosmic Cowboy vs the Smog Monsters*, here’s a few more words for Lone Star beer.” The bidder tries to interrupt Friedman by continuing his fast-paced bidding, but Friedman continues. “Get a grip on a longneck. Get a hold of one today” as the bidder resumes the auction with “going once, going twice. Sold American!” Friedman adds, “Everyone’s been sold American.”¹³⁷

Friedman’s song, “Sold American,” is a critique of capitalism and consumerism, in which a country singer laments his declining career and expresses a sense that he has become little more than a disposable commodity himself. By articulating a more negative, commercialized image of the Texas mystique, Friedman presents a somewhat cynical, revisionist image of the Texan as a rootless adventurer with no permanent connection to his community:

Faded, jaded falling cowboy star, pawnshops itching for your old guitar. Where you’re going, God only knows. The sequins have fallen from your clothes. Once you heard the Opry crowd applaud. Now you’re hanging out at Fourth and Broad, on the rain wet sidewalk remembering the time, when coffee with a friend was still a dime.¹³⁸

In the ad called “El Paso,” Friedman follows the same theme in clear reference to his 1976 album, *Asshole from El Paso* (a parody of Merle Haggard’s conservative anthem, “Okie from Muskogee”). As an audience cheers, the announcer introduces Friedman. “Now straight from the heart of Texas, the man you all love so well...The one and only, Mr. Kinky Friedman!” Friedman then greets his audience with an exaggerated country accent. “Well alright now! I don’t care if you’re from El Paso. I don’t care if you’re from Dallas or from Austin or from Houston! In fact, I don’t care where you’re from, but if you elect me governor, I’ll reduce the speed limit to 54.95.” Similar

to "Sold American," Friedman parodies the Texas mystique and commercialism, while promoting both longnecks and Lone Star's aluminum cans. "Grab yourself one of them Lone Star longnecks. In fact you might even want to grab yourself one of them 'alu-mini-um' cans. They're just as good; they got the old Lone Star flavor just like a longneck."¹³⁹

Lone Star based a 1977 radio spot on the Friedman song "Waitret, Please Waitret" (about a cowboy propositioning a waitress in a café). In this ad, Friedman orders food and Lone Star beer from a waitress (pronounced "waitret"). An announcer introduces Friedman and his Texas Jewboys as "The number one band and the number one show from the 'Electric Matzoh Ball' in downtown Palestine, Texas." Friedman then calls for his "waitret" and orders "some fish ice cream and a chicken fried snake. Also, how about some tortilla chips and huevos rancheros...And give me one of them longnecks. I want to put a lip lock on a longneck. Buy Lone Star."¹⁴⁰

The second major theme found in Lone Star commercials during 1976 and 1977 is that of the traveling Texan who can only cure his homesickness by returning to his native state and

One of the most prominent musicians to record a radio ad for Lone Star beer in 1976 was Mexican-American country and pop star, Freddy Fender (born Baldemar Huerta in San Benito, Texas). His 1975 hit "Before the Next Teardrop Falls," topped the charts, garnering the Country Music Association's "Single of the Year" award.¹⁴² The album, *Before the Next Teardrop Falls*, went on to earn platinum status. Fender's professional connection to the Armadillo World Headquarters (where he performed twice) and Lone Star beer came through his producer Huey P. Meaux from Houston's SugarHill Recording Studios. However, Fender also had been childhood friends with Lone Star's Austin director of advertising, Hector Guerra.¹⁴³

Fender's ties to Lone Star (a beer he already preferred to drink) led to his recording of two commercials in 1976. The first featured a blues song called "Cryin' in My Beer," which was unique among Lone Star radio ads, in that it was sung from the perspective of a Tejano (Texan of Mexican descent) from the Rio Grande Valley missing his South Texas home. Fender sings "Left my home down in the Valley, headed north in my pickup truck. Must have tracked in out of town, out of friends and out

One of the most prominent musicians to record a radio ad for Lone Star beer in 1976 was Mexican-American country and pop star, Freddy Fender (born Baldemar Huerta in San Benito, Texas).

his favorite beer. Singer-songwriter Steve Fromholz made a 1976 Lone Star radio spot that draws on this theme of wanderlust and longing to be back home in Texas. In his song, "Ain't It Nice," Lone Star beer is one of the main things Fromholz looks forward to after touring throughout the United States:

I've a need to go wrong, but I love to come back home. I fly out to play a date, but then I miss the Lone Star State. You're my favorite lover, too. I can't get enough of you. When I'm gone, I'm on my own. It is nice to be back home. It is nice to be right here with a good old Lone Star beer...I have had the Wanderlust. We can't sit together in dust. When I wander off to find, I leave here behind. Lone Star lady, be my own. It is nice to be back home¹⁴¹

Fromholz's song invokes the traditional image of the restless, unbound Texan who, in the modern era, is conflicted by an independent thirst for adventure but also a longing for home.

of luck. Since I don't have any here, I'm crying in my Lone Star beer and tears keep falling down. You're not around; I'm lonely here." The ad reaches an emotional peak when Fender begins to sing in Spanish "When I am alone, of you I will remember my life," before the song fades and the announcer ends with the Lone Star tag.¹⁴⁴

Fender often sang in both English and Spanish. This occurred during the recording of "Before the Next Teardrop Falls," when Fender accidentally dropped a lyric sheet and began improvising by singing the missing verses in Spanish. Nashville producer Shelby Singleton, who originally gave the song to Huey P. Meaux, later said, "I have always felt that the Spanish that Huey and Fender put in the song was the main reason it became a big hit."¹⁴⁵ Fender went on to use this bilingual singing style in many of his songs and radio ads. A second Fender commercial from 1976 called "I Love My Rancho Grande," reflected a working-class ethic of hard work and good times.¹⁴⁶ He sings "I love my rancho grande. We love our happy fiestas. We work hard in the day time and sing away our night time, while drinking Lone Star beer." He

then switches to Spanish and finishes with the line “We’re going to have a party and enjoy life. Take a very cold Lone Star.”¹⁴⁷

In 1976 and 1977, western swing revivalists, Asleep at the Wheel, recorded two radio ads for Lone Star beer. Perhaps as well as any other band, Asleep at the Wheel represented the blending of older musical traditions (western swing, blues, jazz, and honky tonk) with newer styles, including R&B and boogie woogie. The group originated in West Virginia, but it built a large following in Central Texas through its frequent performances at the Armadillo World Headquarters and Soap Creek Saloon.¹⁴⁸ A 1973 review of the band’s debut album, *Comin’ Right at Ya*, compares Asleep at the Wheel’s musical ability to Bob Wills and the western swing pioneers of the 1940s, by exclaiming that “these youngsters really CAN play western swing.”¹⁴⁹

Asleep at the Wheel’s front man, Ray Benson, befriended Jerry Retzliff, leading to the group’s first radio ad for Lone Star, a male/female duet called, “Lone Star Beer Sign.” The song begins with a swing fiddle playing, someone hollering out the trademark Bob Wills-styled “Ah-Ha!” and the male and female vocalists singing, “If there’s a Lone Star beer sign, then you can bet that it’s a sure sign that you’re getting you the best beer in the West...If you’re drinking Lone Star beer, you’ve got the best.” The song borrows a line from the band’s hit, “Miles and Miles of Texas” by ending with “open up a bottle; this is what I’ll see—miles and miles of Texas, staring back at me.”¹⁵⁰

Asleep at the Wheel recorded two new original songs in their 1977 radio ads—“Lone Star Sky” and “Boogie Woogie.” “Lone Star Sky” features the same theme found in many other Lone Star commercials about a homesick musician eager to return to Texas and Lone Star beer. Ray Benson sings, “When I get back to Texas and want to have some fun. I know the place to go at night. I’ll hit some dance hall here in town and drink some Lone Star beer down. Lone Star beer is the best that I can buy.” Benson repeats the phrase “Lone Star beer is the best that I can buy” as the song ends with the tag, “Good Times and Great Beer.”¹⁵¹

The song “Boogie Woogie” features a piano-driven boogie woogie beat and a female vocalist singing about traveling to Texas and drinking Lone Star beer. “Came down from Virginia, lookin’ for a real good time. I had me a case of that Lone Star, and it nearly blew my mind.” In the chorus, a group of female singers joins in with “Lone Star,” while a male voice adds “She’s been drinkin’.” In the second verse, the female lead sings about her preference for Lone Star beer at parties. “Well, I went to a party where everything was free...they offered me wine and whiskey but that ain’t good enough for me.” The song eventually fades out with the “Good Times and Great Beer” tag.¹⁵²

In addition to Asleep at the Wheel, there were other bands from outside of the state that made Lone Star ads celebrating the Texas mystique. A 1977 commercial by the California-

based Flying Burrito Brothers features a song from their 1976 album *Airborne* and echoes the often-used theme of a recently urbanized Texan longing to return to a somewhat mythical rural past. “Big Bayou where did you go, to the river running slow? Into the Gulf of Mexico, big Bayou carry me home!” The singer then opines that, after moving to the city, he “spent all of [his] hard-earned money, havin’ fun drinkin’ Lone Star beer.” Similar to other Lone Star ads, the cheers of the audience grow louder after the band mentions Lone Star beer. The song fades as the announcer concludes with “Good Times and Great Beer.”¹⁵³

In 1977, African-American multi-instrumentalist Clarence “Gatemouth” Brown, who performed at the Armadillo and at Antone’s in Austin, recorded his first radio ad for Lone Star. Hailing from Orange, Texas, near the Louisiana border, Brown was a versatile guitarist and fiddler who combined blues, country, and Cajun music to build a successful career during the post-World War II era. Younger audiences were attracted to Brown, because he was an established link to the older musical traditions found in Texas.¹⁵⁴

Brown also had a personal connection to Jerry Retzliff and his father through performing at San Antonio’s Eastwood Country Club during the 1950s.¹⁵⁵ Brown wrote three songs for Lone Star beer that were recorded and used in separate commercials.¹⁵⁶ The first was a country song called “Good Drinkin’ Friend,” in which Brown recalls his cross-country travels (echoing the pastoral “Wanderlust” theme from previous ads). As the announcer introduces Brown to a cheering audience, he sings in a gruff voice, “I’ve traveled around this country, many times before. Arizona desert to the Gulf of Mexico. I’ve heard about your whiskey, I’ve heard about your gin. Talk about good drinkin’ friend, try our Lone Star beer.” Brown ends the song to the roaring applause of the audience as he repeats the phrase “Talk about good drinkin’ friend, try our Lone Star beer.” The song fades out with the tag “Good Times and Great Beer.”¹⁵⁷

Gatemouth Brown’s second ad, “Gate’s My Name,” is unique in that it is a blues song with a full horn section that contrasts markedly with the progressive country style typical of other Lone Star recordings. The announcer yells to the audience, “Let’s welcome, Gatemouth Brown!” Brown begins to sing, “Gate’s my name; fame’s the game. Wanna stay on top? They got to work to sing.” He continues, “You can drink your coffee. Whoa, people, you can drink your tea. [blues guitar lick] Nothing in the world but Lone Star beer for me.” The crowd roars its approval before the commercial fades and the announcer tags the ad with “Good Times and Great Beer.”¹⁵⁸

Another 1977 ad Brown produced for Lone Star features a swing song called “Fame’s the Game” that is similar in tone (featuring the same horn section and electric guitar) and subject matter to “Gate’s My Name.” However, the song’s walking bass

line gives it more of a swing rhythm than a blues feel. Brown sings, "Back up buddy, don't be a waste. Drink good stuff inside and find your taste. You claim there's whiskey, save that gin. [The band stops.] What's the drink for all good men?" The horn section plays as Brown continues "Went to cities, most towns. Son, I bet Lone Star's the best beer around." As the audience applauds, he begins a guitar solo before the ad fades out with the familiar "Good Times and Great Beer" tag.¹⁵⁹

Lone Star Beer and the Decline of Progressive Country Music

While the Lone Star Brewing Company and Jerry Retzliff significantly increased the number and diversity of musicians in their beer ads during 1976 and 1977, the company continued to base its advertising campaign on the earlier themes of a youthful, progressive vision balanced with a nostalgic longing for a more traditional past. All of this tied in to the popular notion of a Texas mystique, which blended older and newer cultural elements into something "uniquely Texan." This approach to advertising had worked well for several years, but as the state's musical landscape began changing in the late 1970s, Retzliff and Lone Star were forced to adapt in order to appeal to an ever-evolving market.

Several things occurred during the late 1970s that created new challenges for Retzliff and his team. Perhaps most importantly, progressive country music began to wane in popularity, as outlaw country, punk rock, disco, and other genres emerged. Jan Reid's 1976 *Texas Monthly* article, "Who Killed Redneck Rock?" discusses the ways in which the "cosmic cowboy" ethos of the early and mid-1970s gave way to the new "outlaw country" culture of harder drugs, violence, and misogyny. Reid points to Willie Nelson's 1976 Fourth of July Picnic near Gonzales, Texas, as representative of this shift. According to Reid, "Nelson's... Fourth of July Picnic at Gonzales inspired eighteen overdoses, fifteen stabbings, and seven rapes."¹⁶⁰

While Reid considers the cosmic cowboy of the early 1970s as a cultural high mark for Texas music, he criticizes such outlaw country singers as David Allen Coe who, in Reid's opinion, fostered something quite different from cosmic cowboy idealism. Reid cites Coe as openly rejecting progressive country as stale and out-of-date. As Coe says, "I'm sick and tired of somebody saying, 'I'm a cowboy from Texas, gimme a longneck. I can't drink nothing but longnecks.' I'm sick of hearing that. It's like the hippie cult before that and the surfin' cult before that."¹⁶¹

Others saw the budding cocaine market of the late 1970s as a sign of the Austin music scene's decline. According to Roger Collins (owner of the popular downtown club, the One Knite), "the scene changed drastically" as "recreational users of drugs

became addicts. It affected everything in the music industry. It took all the money out...and every club owner [in Austin] pretty much became involved in heavy cocaine use." On July 4, 1976, the Internal Revenue Service shut down the One Knite after the owners were no longer able to pay their bills. The club's loss in revenue was partly due to a growing number of motorcyclists who frequented the bar, often using hard drugs, and frightening away other customers.¹⁶²

Retzliff began to shift away from visiting individual venues across Austin on a weekly basis to instead promoting Lone Star at a number of events throughout the state, including a 1977 chili cook off in Victoria, where Retzliff's daughter, Jill, earned the title "Queen of Chili."¹⁶³ The previous year, Lone Star distributor Arthur Dillon had sponsored an event in Victoria called "the Great Guinea Glide," in which a helicopter dropped guinea fowls from the sky onto a target below (an X drawn in the middle of a field). However, instead of gliding safely to the earth, many of the birds were disoriented from the updraft of the helicopter causing them to drop to the ground and perish. Horrified locals called for the arrest of the event's organizers. Although Dillon was not arrested, subsequent chili festivals in Victoria did not feature a Guinea Glide.¹⁶⁴

Lone Star also sponsored other events, including the 1976 "Freddy Fender Day" in the popular Chicano musician's home town of San Benito, Texas.¹⁶⁵ This featured a parade through town and a ceremony held in the high school football stadium.¹⁶⁶ An article in the *Chicano Times* explained the reason for Fender's popularity among Mexicans Americans. "Some Chicanos might criticize the fact that Huerta did not use his real name. The emergence of the name Freddy Fender is but one chapter in the life of a man who, like so many other talented Chicanos, have been cheated and exploited by the people in the music business."¹⁶⁷

By 1978, Lone Star radio commercials began changing once again. The previous format of being made to sound as if they were recorded at a live venue gave way to ads that featured studio recordings without any background audience noise.¹⁶⁸ These new ads also emphasized different regions of Texas and were designed to complement Lone Star television commercials airing at the time. However, much like earlier radio spots, these ads still emphasized a nostalgic sense of pastoralism and the geographic, historical, and cultural uniqueness of the state, all ending with a region-specific version of the "No place but Texas" tag. These changes may have been an effort to focus less on Austin as the epicenter of "Texas coolness," since progressive country was waning and being challenged by punk, disco, and outlaw country. In any case, the new commercials focused broadly on the entire state and celebrated its distinct regions.

The first of these ads was called “Beach Party,” in which a vocalist sings along to a “tropical” electric keyboard rhythm. “I’m watchin’ the Gulf wind blow. I’m watchin’ the waves roll down. Sun and the sand, getting’ a tan and I’m back on the beach again.” The singer continues, “Sippin’ a cold Lone Star. Watchin’ the hot dogs grill. Surfin’ and singing, Frisbee flingin’ and I’m back on the beach again.” The commercial ends with the tag, “Padre Island and Lone Star beer—No place but Texas.”¹⁶⁹

The second radio spot of 1978 is a more bluesy song called “Big Bend,” about a road trip through the Big Bend National Park in West Texas. “Ridin’ down that highway, one place on my mind. The Big Bend of Texas where the Rio Grande is wide. About this time tomorrow, we’ll be by the fireside in the Big Bend of Texas, where the Rio Grande is wide.” Emphasizing a pastoral theme, the singer continues, “Sleep beneath the heavens. Ain’t no city sounds here. Just some friendly conversation and some good old Lone Star beer. So come on along, bring a friend; don’t you dare

“Floating down the Guadalupe and the great taste of Lone Star beer. No place but Texas.”¹⁷²

One ad from 1978 combines the themes of regionalism and pastoralism with the same feelings of homesickness used in earlier Lone Star commercials. In this case, the singer longs to be back in the “Piney Woods” of East Texas. “I’m takin’ it back to East Texas, where the skies are always blue. Takin’ it back to East Texas. California, I’ve had enough of you.” Upon returning home to East Texas, the singer declares “I’ll buy friends a cold Lone Star, ‘cause we’ll have a round or two. ‘Cause I’m takin’ it back to East Texas to the Piney Woods. Ah, the Piney Woods...I’m makin’ some tracks and it’s a sure enough fact. I’m coming on home to you.” The ad ends with “The Piney Woods and the great taste of Lone Star beer. No place but Texas.”¹⁷³

In another nod to regionalism and the state’s unique culture, some ads linked Lone Star beer to Tex-Mex food. One such ad from 1978 features a rock and roll band whose singer proclaims

Combining Lone Star beer, Tex-Mex food, western swing, and conjunto serves to broaden the definition of “being Texan” to encompass both Anglo and Mexican culture.

get left behind to the Big Bend of Texas, where the Rio Grande is wide.” The commercial ends with “Big Bend National Park and the great taste of Lone Star beer. No place but Texas.”¹⁷⁰

Another ad features a slow ballad that harkens back to a bygone romance involving the San Antonio River Walk and Lone Star beer. “You’ve been fine; the years have been kind since we walked our separate ways. But I remember your smile and our quite talks down on the San Antonio River Walk. The sunny days, the smile on your face, canal boats covered with flowers. Our favorite bar and the cold Lone Star gave the nights a magical power.” The singer continues, “it’s been great, maybe it’s not too late to bring those memories back again. So take my hand and we’ll take a walk, down to the San Antonio River Walk. We’ll share a cold Lone Star and a quiet talk down on the San Antonio River Walk.” The ad ends with “The San Antonio River Walk and the great taste of Lone Star beer. No place but Texas.”¹⁷¹

Still another Lone Star radio spot celebrates the popular pastime of “tubing” down the Guadalupe River in Central Texas. “Well, cross your fingers. You better hold on tight, ‘cause this water is turnin’ like boilin’ soup.” Despite the danger, the singer finds navigating the rapids rewarding because of “this calm, clear water and a cold Lone Star.” The song fades as the narrator says

“You know I’ve traveled this land from east to west, I’ve seen the worst and I’ve seen the best. But if there’s two things in life that I hold dear, it’s that Tex-Mex food and Lone Star beer...Give me an enchilada and a taco, a beef burrito and a side of nacho. Flour tortillas and a whole lot of butter and hot sauce that’ll make me stutter. Just the thought makes my taste buds flutter.” The singer concludes with “Now I’ve eaten food from L.A. to Maine. Tried more beers than you could name; but if I’m asked what I hold dear, I tell ‘em Tex-Mex food and Lone Star beer.” The ad ends with “Tex-Mex Food and the great taste of Lone Star beer. No place but Texas.”¹⁷⁴

One Lone Star commercial from 1978 advertises the State Fair of Texas. “Why don’t you come on along, lose your troubles and cares, at the State Fair of Texas, the king of state fairs. There’s nothing quite like it. Nothing really compares to a cold Lone Star and our own State Fair.” The singer continues, “So come on along, lose your troubles and cares. Grab a Lone Star beer, baby, I’ll meet you there. Yeah, grab a Lone Star beer and, baby, I’ll meet you there.” The announcer ends with the familiar tag, “The State Fair and the great taste of Lone Star beer. No place but Texas.”¹⁷⁵

Another 1978 radio spot focuses on sailing, fishing, and partying on the Texas Gulf Coast in Port Aransas. “Watchin’ the

Sun break, off of my boat's wake. Port Aransas is slippin' away. It's a deep sea round here. And I've gotten my hopes up. That I'll be hookin' a big one today." The singer fast-forwards to later that night when he cooks his catch and parties with friends. "So boil up the shrimp...I'll warm up the band and we'll be dancin' and singin' all night. I'll be drinkin' Lone Star from that winter's cup. If I can only get me a bite." The commercial ends with "The Port Aransas Deep Sea Round Up and the great taste of Lone Star beer. No place but Texas."¹⁷⁶

Red Steagall recorded several ads for Lone Star in 1978. The first, called "Texas Talk," emphasizes both pastoral scenes and the broader regional appeal of the brewery's marketing campaign in the late 1970s.¹⁷⁷ Steagall sings, "If chili and cook off is your thing, Terlingua is your place. It's Junction or Uvalde, if your horses like to race. If you like fairs, then Dallas is the place you ought to go. Fiesta is the time to be in good old San Antone." He continues "There are several things about Texas that make a body feel at home. Like the feeling of belonging, the sight of bluebonnets and live oaks waving in the wind. The smell of honeysuckle and roses waving in the fresh air. And the great taste of Lone Star beer." The song then transitions into a chorus emphasizing the state's uniqueness. "There ain't no place but Texas, course we all know this is true. Where country is our music and Lone Star is our brew." The ad ends with "The music of Red Steagall and the great taste of Lone Star beer. No place but Texas."¹⁷⁸

Steagall's next ad repeats the theme of Texas as a unique place and compares the state with different countries around the world. "Spain has got her bull rings, England's got her Queen. Canada's got the Mounties, and Ireland's got the green. Australia's got the kangaroos and Egypt's got the Sphinx. Hawaii's got the hula girls and the Swiss have got the cheese... But there ain't no place like Texas, course we all know this is true. Where country is our music and Lone Star is our brew." The song ends with the "No Place but Texas" tag.¹⁷⁹

A different Red Steagall ad from 1978 highlights dancing as an important part of the state's cultural heritage. "When you think of Texas, you think of dance halls. And when you think of dance halls, you think of unique dances like the 'Cotton-Eyed Joe,' or the 'Schottish,' or the 'Two-Step.'" He also reprises the Jim Franklin term "Lone Star longnecks" as another unique feature of life in Texas. "When you think of dancing...you automatically think of longnecks. And of course when you think of longnecks, you just naturally think of the great taste of Lone Star beer."¹⁸⁰

At times, Lone Star commercials mixed newer trends with more traditional aspects of Texas culture. For example, a 1979 ad, entitled "Disco Bubba," is about a "good old boy" named Bubba who likes dancing to disco music. Considering the widespread dislike of disco often expressed by fans of rock and country music at the time, making a beer commercial in Texas with a

disco theme was a bold (and possibly risky) move.¹⁸¹ However, there is no evidence of a backlash against Lone Star by country music fans as a result of the ad.¹⁸²

The "Disco Bubba" ad is set in a nightclub. "The Disco floor was becoming a bore. It was the same old Saturday thing. Until into the bar with a cold Lone Star came a dude I'd never seen... He said, 'My name is Bubba and I'm here from Lubbock where they call me a dancing fool'. He started doing the Shop and a Cotton-Eyed Hustle that broke every disco rule." As Bubba continues dancing, he says "Just move your hips [Background singers shout 'Disco Bubba!']. Put a smile on your lips ['Oh, Bubba!']" He ends with "Wherever you are, grab a cold Lone Star, I'll do the Cotton-Eyed Hustle with you." The themes of pastoral Texas and the homesick Texan are notably absent from the song, although it does end with the tried-and-true tag, "Good times and the great taste of Lone Star beer. No place but Texas."¹⁸³

A 1979 ad by the San Marcos group, Cooder Browne, blends regional themes with an emphasis on the state's Anglo-Hispanic bi-culturalism. The song "Cooder Jalapeño" features a western swing-style fiddle lead backed by an accordion playing a polka beat typical of Texas-Mexican conjunto music found throughout South Texas. "I travelled way down south and by the Rio Grande. Down where the jalapeños are eaten just like candy. We heard conjunto music and watched the señoritas...Drinking cold Lone Star and eatin' hot fajitas. Lone Star beer. Lone Star beer. From the land of Texas to the places far and near." Combining Lone Star beer, Tex-Mex food, western swing, and conjunto serves to broaden the definition of "being Texan" to encompass both Anglo and Mexican culture, even if this song does present a rather romanticized image of South Texas.¹⁸⁴

1979 was also the first year that country comedy duo, the Geezinslaw Brothers (Sammy Allred and Dewayne "Son" Smith), made ads for Lone Star. Allred, a DJ at Austin's popular country radio station KVET, had been playing with Smith as a duo since the 1950s. Through their many live shows around Austin, the Geezinslaws befriended Jerry Retzliff and his wife, Sally.¹⁸⁵ The first Geezinslaw ad, called "Wife," is about a man whose wife is trying to convince her husband to stay home instead of spending so much time in local nightclubs. She completely transforms the house by stocking up on Lone Star beer and Texas music, hoping that it will appeal to her husband. "So, she puts her longnecks in the ice box. There's armadillo races in the hall. We've got a chili cook off in the kitchen, and lots of ice cold Lone Star for us all... Good music, good times for the Geezinslaw Brothers and Lone Star beer. No place but Texas."¹⁸⁶

Another Geezinslaw Brothers ad from 1979, called "New York," is about the brothers dealing with a slick businessman from New York. The song contrasts stereotypical characteristics of both Texas and New York (the former representing bravado,

swagger, and naiveté, while the latter exudes corruption and malaise).¹⁸⁷ “Me and my brother come to New York City, we was kind of quiet and shy. Seen this building on 34th Street, reached way up in the sky...this smooth talking fellow in two tone shoes came over and asked us, ‘Would y’all like to buy it?’” The New Yorker sweetens the deal by adding, “I can get you guys a part in Willie Nelson’s new movie, and I know a place where you can get some cold Lone Star longnecks.”¹⁸⁸

The Geezinslaws respond with “You wouldn’t put the shuck on me, would you stranger? Now, you’re talking about no place but Texas!” The rest of the band then joins in singing “Don’t take for granted that I’m dumb and stupid just because I got a Southern accent. Lots of people say y’all and talk with a drawl, including the President [Jimmy Carter].”¹⁸⁹ The reference to Willie Nelson was somewhat of an inside joke, since the Geezinslaw Brothers already knew Nelson and performed with him occasionally. The “place where you can get some cold Lone Star longnecks” is probably a reference to the Lone Star Café (1976-1989), a highly popular Texas-themed restaurant and bar in Manhattan that featured performances by a variety of prominent Texas musicians.¹⁹⁰

The 1980s ushered in an important period of change for the Texas music scene and for Lone Star beer. For one thing, the Armadillo World Headquarters closed on December 31, 1980.¹⁹¹ Although there remained several other live music venues throughout Austin, the Armadillo had served as the symbolic epicenter of the eclectic music scene associated with progressive country, as well as a major purveyor of Lone Star beer. The 1980 blockbuster movie *Urban Cowboy*, starring John Travolta, shifted much of the state and national attention to the Houston nightclub, Gilley’s, and the post-progressive country music scene gaining popularity there. Gilley’s, where much of *Urban Cowboy* was filmed, soon became one of the biggest outlets for Lone Star beer and merchandise.¹⁹²

Gilley’s opened in 1970 in the Houston suburb of Pasadena. With a capacity of 6,000, it attracted huge crowds of country music fans, many of whom worked in the nearby petrochemical plants. Gilley’s already sold large amounts of Lone Star beer, but sales increased dramatically after the *Urban Cowboy* movie vaulted the nightclub to national fame. Retzliff and his business associates had the foresight to provide Lone Star to the movie’s cast and crew during filming, so the beer appears onscreen throughout the movie. This helped Lone Star Brewing Company substantially increase its sales of beer and merchandise in the Houston and San Antonio markets and beyond.¹⁹³

In 1981, Lone Star began producing a new series of ads that reflected broader changes in the music scene, as well as the company’s acquisition by the G. Heileman Brewing Company.¹⁹⁴ Under Heileman’s ownership, Lone Star decreased

its advertising and promotions (at a time when Lone Star could have capitalized on the national exposure gained through *Urban Cowboy*) and instead lowered its price to compete with national brands. Unfortunately for Retzliff and others, this reduction in price helped create a misperception that the quality of Lone Star beer had declined. Despite scaling back its marketing efforts, the company continued to use radio ads that featured a variety of Texas musicians, including Gary P. Nunn, the Geezinslaw Brothers, and, a relative newcomer named Isaac P. Sweat.

By 1980, Gary P. Nunn’s Lost Gonzo Band had broken up, so Nunn started a solo career.¹⁹⁵ His song, “What I Like About Texas,” which he wrote for Lone Star beer, quickly became one of his most popular, spawning three commercials featuring different versions of the song. Nunn sings the first verse with an emphasis on pastoral Texas imagery. “You ask me what I like about Texas. It’s bluebonnets and Indian paintbrushes. It’s swimming in the icy waters of Barton Springs. It’s body surfin’ the Frio. It’s Friday night in Del Rio. It’s crossin’ over the border for some cultural exchange...It’s another burrito. It’s a cold Lone Star in my hand. It’s a quarter for the jukebox, boys, play the sons of the mother lovin’ bunkhouse band.”¹⁹⁶ In a different version of the ad, Nunn sings “You ask me what I like about Texas. I tell you it’s the wide open spaces. It’s everything between the Sabine and the Rio Grande. It’s the Llano Estacado; it’s the Brazos and the Colorado. It’s the spirit of all the people who share this land.”¹⁹⁷

In 1981, the Geezinslaw Brothers returned for a Lone Star ad in which they sing about how, although the image of the Texan has been popularized across the country, in order to be a real Texan, you must live in Texas. This commercial is notable in that it is the first to market Lone Star as the “National Beer of Texas.” The Geezinslaws sing, “They’re wearin’ blue jeans up on Broadway now and Stetsons in Seattle. They’re doing the ‘Cotton Eyed Joe’ out in L.A. They got Yankees punchin’ cattle.” They explain, however, that “if they want to be real Texans, they’re gonna have to come down here. ‘Cause here’s the home of Lone Star and that’s the Texas National Beer.” The Geezinslaws continue, “They got the Cowboys and the Oilers to be proud of. And Luckenbach is hot, there is no doubt. People say, if you live real good in Austin, when you die you go to Willie Nelson’s house.”¹⁹⁸ By advertising Lone Star as the National Beer of Texas, the Geezinslaw Brothers imply that, even in a modern, metropolitan world, one can still prove his or her “Texan-ness” by drinking Lone Star beer.

Another Geezinslaw commercial from 1981 features a cowboy in a bar ordering a Lone Star while on the run from a giant armadillo (a reference to both the popular Lone Star television commercial playing at the time and Jim Franklin’s armadillo drawings).¹⁹⁹ The Geezinslaw Brothers sing “Well, here he comes, really kickin’ up a fuss. Got a Bob Wier headband; he’s

built like a Greyhound bus. Got a live rattlesnake around his hat over an evil frown. And if you try to slow him up, he'll slap you down. He's over seven feet tall; he's got a growlin' drawl." While in the bar, the cowboy "snarled in the mirror, he screamed at the wall. He chewed up some pool balls and broke the mechanical bull...I need a Lone Star quick 'cause I gotta flee. There's a big ole armadillo chasin' me." The band then ends with "You got the National Beer of Texas-Lone Star."²⁰⁰

Later that year, Lone Star returned to the live venue format in a radio ad featuring Isaac P. Sweat and his band playing a version of the famous dance hall number, "Cotton-Eyed Joe," with new lyrics promoting Lone Star. "Now this is Isaac Payton Sweat, King of the Cotton-Eyed Joe, along with the Texas Sweat Band!" The audience cheers and the fiddle then plays the main melody of the "Cotton-Eyed Joe" followed by the first verse. "Now I'd have had a beer a long time ago if it had not of been for that armadillo. Where did it come from; where did it go? We've got to catch that armadillo." Eventually, the fiddle plays the main melody as the song fades and the announcer delivers the tag "The National Beer of Texas!"²⁰¹

In another series of Lone Star radio ads from 1981, a cowboy delivers a speech (in the style of a preacher's sermon) to an auditorium full of Texans about being loyal to Lone Star beer. "I want to talk to you about that light beer you've been drinkin'. And the fact that I brew Lone Star Light and the fact that it just so happens to be the best light beer you've ever tasted...Now, I know Lone Star is not the only light in your life. I know it's hard to be 100% loyal all the time. When you turn on that television, there's nothin' but five minutes on there where there's not some beer from Manhattan or Amsterdam or Milwaukee talkin' to you and whisperin' in your ear!" The cowboy continues, "So, you try one every now and then. You do...experiment. You think I don't know? Well, here I am, I'm making this thirst quenching light-tasting nectar right here under your nose. Well, that's all in the past." He ends with a challenge. "Stand up for Lone Star Light. The National Beer of Texas."²⁰²

Another commercial uses a similar format, with the same cowboy "preaching" to a crowd. "Now last time we agreed that tryin' one of those other light beers...is sort of normal...But now we're going to talk about, forgettin' who ya are! You're from Texas-Texas! You think we made that name Lone Star up? You think we shipped that light-lovin' liquid in here from Nagasaki? Or St. Louis?" He ends with "Well anyway, that's behind us now. We bought this radio time, friends, to tell you to come home. It's time to come home to Lone Star Light, the National Beer of Texas."²⁰³

One of the most notable aspects of these new ads of the 1980s, produced under the new owner, G. Heileman, is that music is no longer prominently featured. Nevertheless, the emphasis on Texas "nationalism" remains strong. For example, Sam Yeates's

1981 poster, called "the Returnable," shows a giant longneck bottle with space shuttle-like engines and fuel tanks attached to it poised on a launch pad ready to be sent into orbit.²⁰⁴ In this drawing, Yeates makes a visible connection between "The National Beer of Texas" and the Houston-based NASA space program, whose shuttles are recycled and reused, much like longneck bottles. As Yeates later explained "I think everyone really liked the space shuttle. It's something innovative and positive in terms of America moving forward and our space program. I think it was very positive to read news and this thing was used over and over again...Returnable."²⁰⁵

Another Yeates poster features a giant armadillo attacking a Lone Star beer truck (which references Franklin's original armadillo art of the early 1970s). In this illustration, called "Out of Hibernation," a black and yellow highway caution sign with the outline of an armadillo is in the foreground closest to the viewer. In the background is a giant armadillo burrow with footprints that indicate the creature's advance toward a demolished Lone Star beer truck sitting on the side of the highway. The armadillo is moving toward the city of Austin, while Spuds McKenzie (the canine mascot for Lone Star's competitor, Budweiser) is fleeing terrified in the opposite direction.

Several Yeates posters from the 1980s feature Texans eating chili. One 1982 ad, called "Trail Ride Night Stop," features a group sitting around a campfire with a pot of chili cooking. Several Lone Star longnecks are visible in the hands of the chili-eaters as a Lone Star delivery truck sits parked in the background. This image implies that, by drinking Lone Star beer, customers can reenact the trail rides from the rural Texas past. Another ad from 1982, called "A Taste of Texas," incorporates a collage of different icons reinforcing the notion of pastoral Texas regionalism in anticipation of the upcoming 1986 Texas Sesquicentennial. In the center of the picture, a cowboy plays an electric guitar over an outline of Texas comprised of an oil pump, a longhorn steer, and a bell tower from a San Antonio mission. Above the outline of Texas is a Yellow Rose, a near-mythic symbol of Texas history and culture dating back to the 1836 Texas war for independence from Mexico. Placed in the corners of the drawing are a Houston city skyline, a rodeo, sailboats along a Texas beach, and a picnic. Sitting on the table is a bowl of chili, jalapeño peppers, and, notably, a Lone Star longneck. In another ad four years later called "Lone Star Chili," a cowboy (whose face is out of frame) is eating chili from a Texas-shaped bowl in the middle of a canyon. In clear view of the cowboy are several Lone Star longneck-shaped rock formations emerging from the earth.²⁰⁶

Under Heileman's direction, the focus was on making Lone Star beer more affordable. However, lowering the price created an impression that the quality of the beverage had diminished. This

allowed competitors (particularly the Shiner Brewing Company) to market their beers as premium brews. Heileman's management also put an end to Jerry Retzliff's practice of cultivating personal relationships with Texas musicians. This meant that Retzliff missed out on the opportunity to work with such up-and-coming singers as Clint Black and George Strait, who could have done a great deal to help promote Lone Star beer. To make matters worse, the new owners did not approve of Retzliff's more casual appearance. As a result of these changes, Retzliff switched from being a salesman to working as a special events manager who made appearances on behalf of Lone Star at local festivals.²⁰⁷

In 1986, Retzliff organized a promotional event for Lone Star (still under the ownership of G. Heileman) to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Texas independence from Mexico. Retzliff's friend Red Caldwell wrote an updated "Texas Declaration of Independence," which promised to protect the "fun-seekers" of the state from the influence of northerners crossing the Red River with their condominiums and governmental regulations. Retzliff and 150 friends gathered at the western-themed town of Luck, owned by Willie Nelson and built for the film *Honeysuckle Rose*, to sign the document as a part of a larger celebration of Texas Independence.²⁰⁸

Sam Yeates captured the signing of the document in a drawing that later became a poster ad.²⁰⁹ In the picture, a large crowd of cosmic cowboys, both women and men, observe the signing of the document by Retzliff. Included in the picture are several notable figures associated with Texas music and Lone Star beer, including Sally Retzliff, Willie Nelson, Billy Gibbons (of ZZ Top), Stevie Ray Vaughan, and Yeates himself in the foreground holding a long neck bottle.²¹⁰

This "Second Declaration of Texas Independence" was a light-hearted attempt by Retzliff and his friends to try and preserve some of the state's traditions that seemed to be disappearing by the late 1980s. It is true that the American Southwest had undergone dramatic economic and demographic changes since the end of World War II. However, just as futile as it was to try and shield Texas from the influence of northerners and other "outsiders," it also proved impossible for Lone Star to continue dominating the regional beer market. By the 1990s, Lone Star beer had declined in popularity, both as a beverage and as a cultural icon. Today it still can be found in bars, restaurants, and grocery stores throughout the state, but it is no longer the ubiquitous symbol of youthful Texas culture that it was in the 1970s and early 1980s.

Conclusion:

During the 1970s, progressive country music developed as a grassroots phenomenon in Austin, blending elements of

1960s' counterculture with the image and traditions of a rural Texas past. Progressive country musicians and fans embraced the idealism and anti-authoritarianism of the 1960s' anti-war and civil rights movements, but they articulated their countercultural leanings by creating a unique genre of music that blended together new and old styles, along with a variety of ethnic musical influences.

Artists and audiences shared this music at venues, where they celebrated and re-enacted a mythic Texas past by borrowing from traditional, revisionist, and pastoral visions of the Texas mystique. Most of those involved in the progressive country scene were post-World War II baby boomers who were seeking to reconcile the more rustic, politically and culturally conservative traditions of their parents' generation with the increasingly urban and politically liberal world in which they found themselves during the 1960s and 1970s.

The efforts of the Lone Star Brewing Company, in particular Jerry Retzliff, to tap into this emerging youth market included product promotion through radio ads, poster art, a presence at music venues and events, and collaboration with popular musicians, who often invoked themes of pastoral Texas and a traveling Texan "wanderlust" meant to appeal to progressive country fans.

In a 1990 Lone Star beer publication marking the brewery's 50th anniversary, Retzliff recalls his years with the company. After reflecting on his career and the many friends he made along the way, he emphasizes two key points. First, "Bringing back the armadillo (the symbol of the progressive country movement) would be like bringing back the feeling the first time you fell in love, shot an 8-point buck, or caught a 10-pound speckled trout, but times have changed. I say let's get back to the basics, work with our present tools and always keep an eye out and ear open for new creative promotional deals."²¹¹

Secondly, Retzliff says, "the music association of Lone Star was fun and unique. It is interesting to note Lone Star virtually pioneered this approach to selling beer, which is presently being used by Budweiser, Miller, Canada Dry, and many other corporations." Retzliff then tries to clear up a common misperception about how he sold beer. "To recap, the [musicians] didn't physically sell beer for us, but they caused image and endorsements to happen. This in turn led to a consumer relating the product to fun and good times, which caused consumer sampling and increased beer sales." As if to offer a rallying cry for the next generation of Lone Star salesmen, Retzliff ends with the same tag used in radio ads from the 1970s—"Good Times, Great Music and the smooth taste of Lone Star beer—No place but Texas."²¹² ★

Notes

- 1 This article is based on the author's 2016 M.A. thesis of the same name.
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- 45 Retzliff, Lone Star radio ads, Box 1 Folder 12.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Retzliff, Lone Star radio ads, Box 1 Folder 12.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Retzliff, interview with author, Gruene, Texas, February 26, 2016.
- 50 This was a business owned by Walter Retzliff called the Port Aransas Fishing Guide.
- 51 Retzliff, interview with author, Gruene, Texas, March 11, 2016.
- 52 Jimmy Beock, interview with author, San Antonio, April 26, 2016.
- 53 Retzliff, interview with author, Gruene, Texas, February 26, 2016.
- 54 Retzliff, interview with author, Gruene, Texas, February 26, 2016.
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- 100 Peña, *Música Tejana*, 173-175. While originally known for the 1963 pop hit "Talk to Me," Sunny Ozuna reformed the Sunliners and, by 1974, changed the band's style to reflect the emerging Chicano movement. During the 1970s, Sunny and the Sunliners, Little Joe y La Familia, and other Texas-Mexican groups were blending elements of rock and roll with traditional Mexican folk music as a way of reconciling older and newer musical styles, similar to what many Anglo progressive country musicians were doing.
- 101 Tragically, King died from bleeding ulcers and heart failure in 1976 at the age of 42. Hartman, *History of Texas Music*, 83.
- 102 Mellard, *Progressive Country*, 89-90.
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- 104 Hector Guerra, interview with author, Harlingen, Texas, April 19, 2016. According to Retzliff, the price of Schlitz gave the company a major advantage within the Mexican-American market. Retzliff recalls seeing a grocery store in 1973 in the town of Del Rio that sold Schlitz for 59 cents a six-pack as opposed to Lone Star's 70 cents per six-pack.
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