

## Drive-By Truckers "The Three Alabama Icons"

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i grew up in north alabama back in the 1970s when dinosaurs still roamed the earth. i'm speaking, of course, of the three great alabama icons: GW, BB, and RVZ. Now, RVZ wasn't from alabama, he was from florida, he was a huge neil young fan but in the tradition of merle haggard writing Okie From Muskogee to tell his dad's point of view on the hippies in vietnam, Ronnie felt that the other side of the story should be told. Neil Young always claimed that Sweet Home Alabama was one of his favorite songs and legend has it that he was an honorary pallbearer at Ronnie's funeral, such as the duality of the southern thing. ...and Bear Bryant wore a cool lookin' red checkered hat and won football games, and there's few things more loved in Alabama than football and the men who know how to win at it. So when the Bear would come to town, there would be a parade. Me, I was one of them pussy boys cuz i hated football, so i got a guitar but a guitar was a poor substitute for a football with the girls in my high school. So my band hit the road, and we didn't play no Skynyrd, neither. I came of age rebelling against the music in my high school parking lot. It wasn't until years later after leaving the south for a while that I came to appreciate and understand the whole Skynyrd thing and its misunderstood glory. I left the

south  
and learned how different people's perceptions of the  
Southern Thing was from what I had seen in my life,  
which  
leads us to George Wallace...  
...now Wallace was, for all practical purposes, the  
governor  
of Alabama from 1962 until 1986. Once when a law  
prevented him from succeeding himself, he ran his  
wife  
Lurleen in his place and she won by a landslide. He's  
most  
famous as the belligerent racist voice of the  
segregationist  
south, standing in the doorways of schools and waging  
a war  
against the federal government that he decried as  
hypocritical. Now Wallace started out as a lawyer and a  
judge with a very progressive and humanitarian track  
record  
for a man of his time, but he lost his first bid for  
governor in  
1958 by hedging on the race issue against a man who  
spoke  
out against intergration. Wallace ran again in '62 as a  
staunch segregationist and won big and for the next  
decade  
he spoke out loudly. He accused Kennedy and King of  
being  
communist and he was constantly on national news  
representing "the good people" of Alabama.  
...and ya know race was only an issue on tv in the house  
that  
i grew up in. Wallace was viewed as a man from  
another  
time and place, but when i first ventured out of the  
south i  
was shocked at how strongly Wallace was associated  
with  
Alabama and its people. Racism is a worldwide  
problem, and  
it's been like that since the beginning of recorded  
history and  
it ain't just white and black, but thanks to George  
Wallace, it's  
always a little more convenient to play it with a  
southern  
accent.  
Bands like Lynyrd Skynyrd attempt to show another  
side of  
the south, one that certainly exists, but few saw beyond

the  
rebel flag and this applies to their critics and  
detractors but  
also their fans and followers. So for a while, when Neil  
Young  
would come to town, he'd get death threats in  
Alabama.  
Ironically, in 1971, after a particularly racially charged  
campaign, Wallace began backpeddling and he  
opened up  
Alabama politics to minorities at a rate faster than most  
northern states or the federal government. Wallace  
spent  
the rest of his life trying to explain away his racist past  
and in  
1982 he won his last term in office with over 90% of the  
black vote, such as the duality of the southern thing.  
...and George Wallace died back in '98 and he's in hell  
now,  
not because he's a racist. His track record as a judge  
and his  
late life quest for redemption make a good argument  
for his  
being, at worst, no worse than most white men of his  
generation, North or South. Because of his blind  
ambition  
and his hunger for votes, he turned a blind eye to the  
suffering of black America and he became a pawn in  
the fight  
against Civil Rights cause.  
...fortunately for him, the devil is also a southerner.

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