Country music, or hillbilly music as it was called in the formative years of its commercial history, is a racialized music. Though it may be subtle or overt, race has always been a part of its commercial packaging. The entertainment industry over time has generated the perception that country music is created, performed, produced, and marketed exclusively by white people for white people despite a multiplicity of ethnic influences, participants, and consumers. For example, in a November 1996 article in the *New York Times* titled, “Has Country Music Become a Soundtrack for White Flight?,” author Bruce Feiler quoted record executive Tony Brown of Universal South, and formerly of MCA Nashville, saying “country basically is white music…,” and country music journalist and author Edward Morris, who said “country these days is fundamentally based on the white experience…” These statements by music industry insiders raise several questions, the most important of which is: How did country music, a music so deeply imbued with stylistic traits of Anglo-Celtic and African origins, become so exclusively white, as though it had a sign hanging above it reading “for whites only?”

It is with this in mind that this thesis is proposed as a means of making visible the racialization of commercial country music, thereby undermining previous discourse which has treated the concept of race in country music superficially or not at all. The primary objectives include: first, to show the correlation between the aesthetic category of country music and social and legal boundaries; second, to reveal the kinds of whiteness embodied by country music; and third, to expose racism within country music by examining the exclusionary practices of the industry, and by demonstrating how some country music has been an expression of support for legal and social segregation as well as white supremacy. It is hoped that this thesis will be a catalyst for further examination of the systems of racial power operating within the cultural domain of American music and will inspire continued challenges to the dominant discourse in country music.