

REDLINING IN COUNTRY MUSIC:

Representation in the Country Music Industry (2000-2020)

DR. JADA E. WATSON

 @data_jada

REDLINING IN COUNTRY MUSIC:

Representation in the Country Music Industry (2000-2020)

DR. JADA E. WATSON

 @data_jada

This report examines representation in country music, focusing on race/ethnicity of the artists, ensembles and collaborations. The report draws on datasets of the 11,484 songs played on country format radio (2002-2020), the 411 artists signed to the three major Nashville labels (2000-2020), and the 187 artists nominated for Country Music Association and Academy of Country Music Awards (2000-2020). By analyzing the data generated by these four industry spaces, this study examines the results of internal decision-making processes and practices and consider the connections between them. Taken together, this data tells part of the story about the ways in which the industry has privileged white artists and denied opportunity to BIPOC artists.

The key findings for this study reveal that at every level of analysis – percentage of songs played, of airplay, of charting songs, of artists signed to major labels, and of award nominations, BIPOC artists make up less than 4.0% of the commercial country music industry.

The nineteen-year period examined in this study can be divided into three periods defined by activity for songs by BIPOC artists. The key findings hold true for all levels of analysis – from the number of songs on playlists, to the amount of airplay these songs received, and to the number songs that charted. The three periods can be defined as follows:

- 1. 2002 to 2007:** BIPOC artists are nearly absent from country format radio in the first six years of this study period, an average of just 0.5% of the songs played were by BIPOC artists, and those songs averaged 0.3% of the airplay.
- 2. 2008 to 2013:** representation increases (marginally) to an average of 1.5% of the songs played. These songs received an average of 2.0-2.5% of the airplay across this period.
- 3. 2014 to 2020:** representation increases again in the final six years of this period and average of about 3.7% of the songs played by 2020 and received 4.8% of the annual airplay.

Even though the data shows an increase across this period both in terms of the songs played (0.5% to 3.7%) and the airplay for those songs (0.3% to 4.8%), this increase was exclusively for songs by BIPOC men. Overall, BIPOC artists received 2.3% of the airplay over the last nineteen years, 95.7% of which went to songs by BIPOC men, 2.7% of which were for songs by BIPOC women – including cross-over artists. The remaining 1.6% went to songs by other BIPOC men. Over the last nineteen years, Black women have not had enough airplay to reach the Top 20 of the chart, which limits the opportunities available to them within the broader industry.

Black LGBTQ+ artists are absent from the country music industry. Except for Lil Nas X, whose “Old Town Road” received very limited airplay on country format radio, no songs by LGBTQ+ artists of color are included in the dataset.

The results for representation on country format radio suggest a racial hierarchy that exists within the industry and considers the deep connections between each facet of the industry. Radio airplay remains an integral component of the development of an artist’s career, including the promotional support received from a label and eligibility for awards by the two main trade organizations. This data suggests that the lack of representation on airplay does not just impact the trajectory of an individual artist, it also impacts the careers of those around them and of future artists.

What is critical to understand from this study is that these are not just historic issues, they are contemporary issues. The study Brief is followed by a full Report that offers an overview of the historic exclusion of BIPOC artists, and then explains the result of the findings to highlight how industry practices work together to perpetuate already existing inequalities within the industry and push BIPOC artists to the margins. By focusing on how radio, labels, and awards perpetuate cultural redlining in this space, this report shows that the industry’s business model is a self-fulfilling prophecy that maintains the white racial framing on which the industry was established in the 1920s. It then concludes with a discussion of steps to making change in the industry.

This study would not have been possible without the support, expertise and feedback of many individuals with whom I work. Special thank you to Cam, and to Rissi Palmer’s *Color Me Country*, Kamara Thomas’s *Country Soul Song Book*, Stephanie Jacques’s *JacquesTalk*, Hunter Kelly’s *Proud Radio*, *Country Queer* and its Artist Directory, and to Olivia Beaudry at the Centre for Popular Music, which have been integral resources for this study.

This research is supported by grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and by the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ottawa.

REDLINING IN COUNTRY MUSIC

DR. JADA E. WATSON

 @data_jada

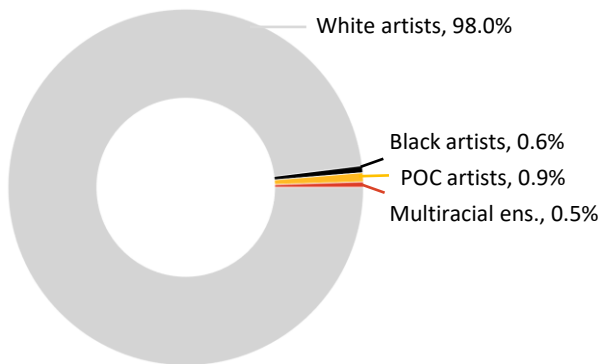
BIPOC ARTISTS ARE UNDERREPRESENTED ON COUNTRY RADIO

2,164 unique artists and ensembles with songs played on country format radio (Mediabase reporting) from 2002-2020



Representation of country artists with songs on radio

Percentage of unique country artists with songs played on country radio (Mediabase reporting) from 2002-2020



percentage of BIPOC country artists: **1.5%**

0.6% Black artists

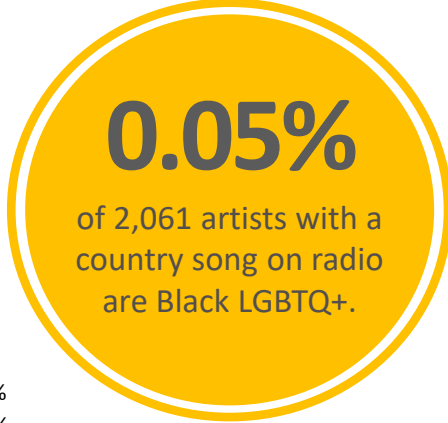
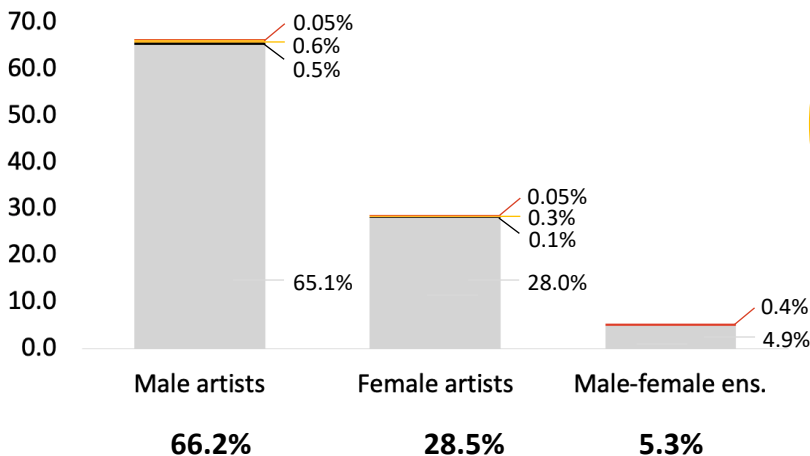
0.1% Biracial artists

0.4% Hispanic/Latinx artists

0.2% Indigenous artists

0.1% Filipino heritage

*Percentage of BIPOC artists and multiethnic ensembles decreases when removing 103 non-country artists with songs played on country radio.



FEW SONGS BY BIPOC ARTISTS ON COUNTRY RADIO

Unique songs played on country format radio (Mediabase reporting) from 2002-2020

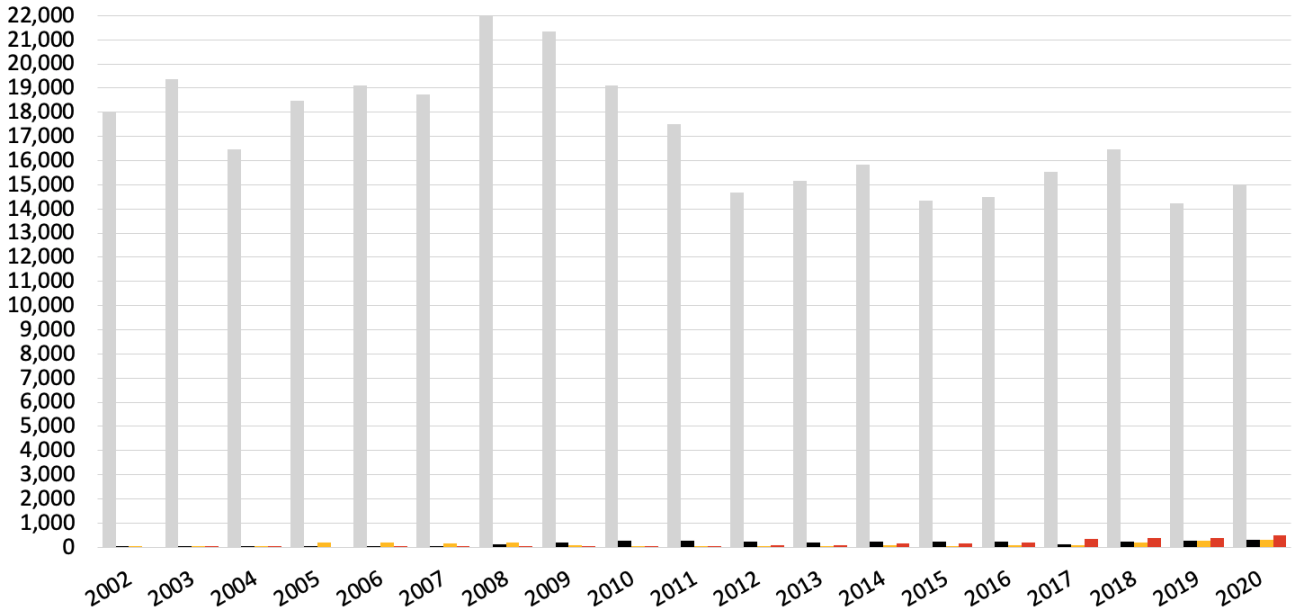
2%

unique songs

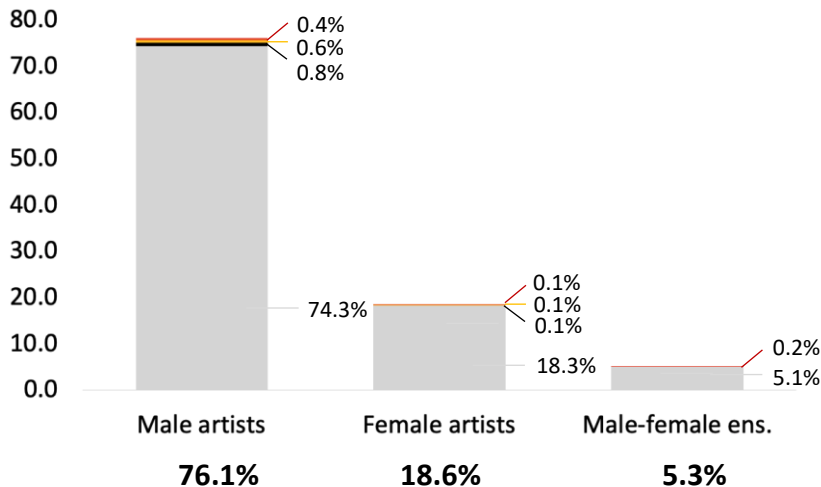


Two-decade average of 1.6% programming for BIPOC artists

Distribution of songs by race/ethnicity country format radio (Mediabase reporting) from 2002-2020



Over the course of this nearly two-decade period, the number of songs by BIPOC artists and Multiethnic ensembles played on country format radio has increased – but only marginally and almost exclusively for male artists. This graph maps the distribution of songs by weekly airplay over the last nineteen years, showing an increase from 0.3% in 2002 to 1.5% between 2008 and 2013. In the period that follows (2014-2020) representation increased to an average of 3.7%, but this airplay, too, was almost exclusively for BIPOC men and Multiethnic male ensembles.



19 years.
11,484 songs.
ONLY
13 Black artists.
ONLY
03 Black women.

BIPOC ARTISTS UNHEARD ON COUNTRY RADIO

Percentage and distribution of spins on country format radio (Mediabase reporting) from 2002-2020

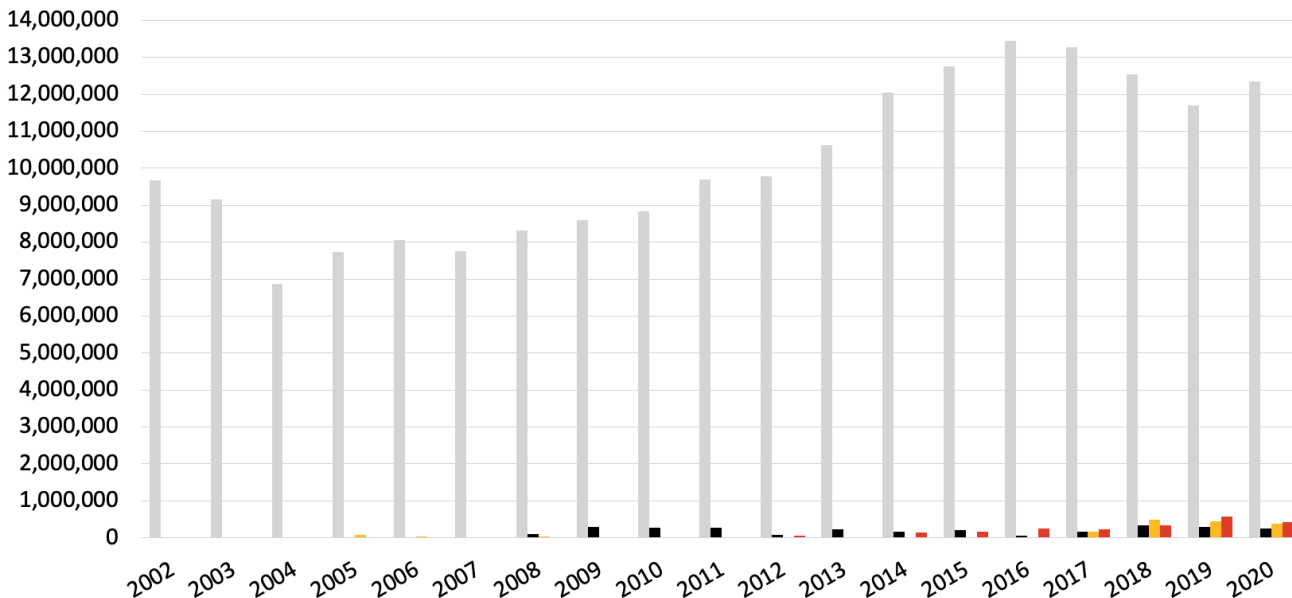
2.3%

overall spins

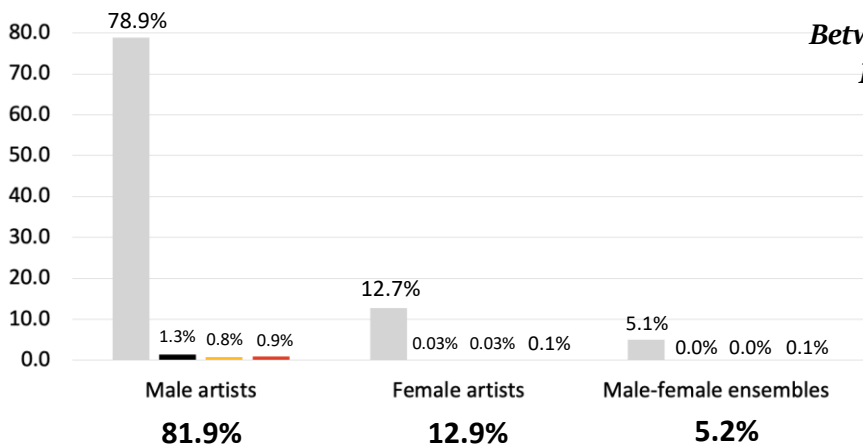


Weekly distribution of spins for songs by BIPOC artists

Distribution of spins by race/ethnicity on country format radio from 2002-2020



Airplay for songs by BIPOC artists increased from an average of 0.3% between 2002 and 2007 to 1.7% by 2008. Between 2008 and 2013, BIPOC artists averaged 2.5% of the annual spins. The biggest change occurred in the final four years of this period, where airplay averages 4.8% for BIPOC artists. The spins across this nineteen-year period went almost exclusively to songs by male artists. Between 2008 and 2010, BIPOC women averaged just 0.5% of the annual airplay. In 2015, they received just 0.3%, dropping to 0.01% by 2020. Throughout this period, BIPOC women have not had sustained support or significant success on country format radio to help launch their careers in the mainstream.



Between 2002-2020, songs by Black women received

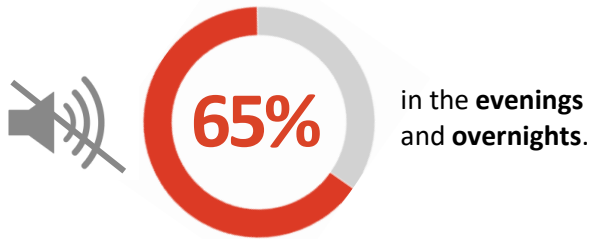
0.03%

of the radio airplay.

IN 2008 AND 2015, BIPOC WOMEN NOT PLAYED IN PRIMETIME HOURS

Distribution of spins for BIPOC women in 2008 and 2015 on country format radio (Mediabase reporting)

In the years in which BIPOC women received the most airplay...

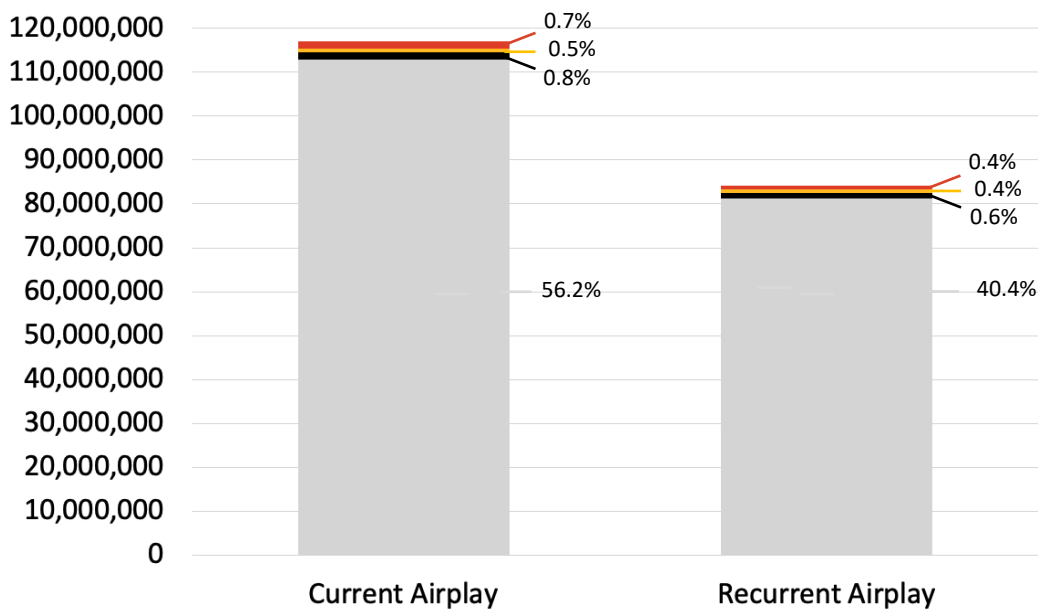


2008 Songs by BIPOC artists received 1.7% of the annual airplay – 1.2% of which went to songs by men.

2015 Songs by BIPOC artists received 2.8% of the annual airplay – 2.5 of which went to songs by men.

Songs by BIPOC women are not retained in recurrent airplay

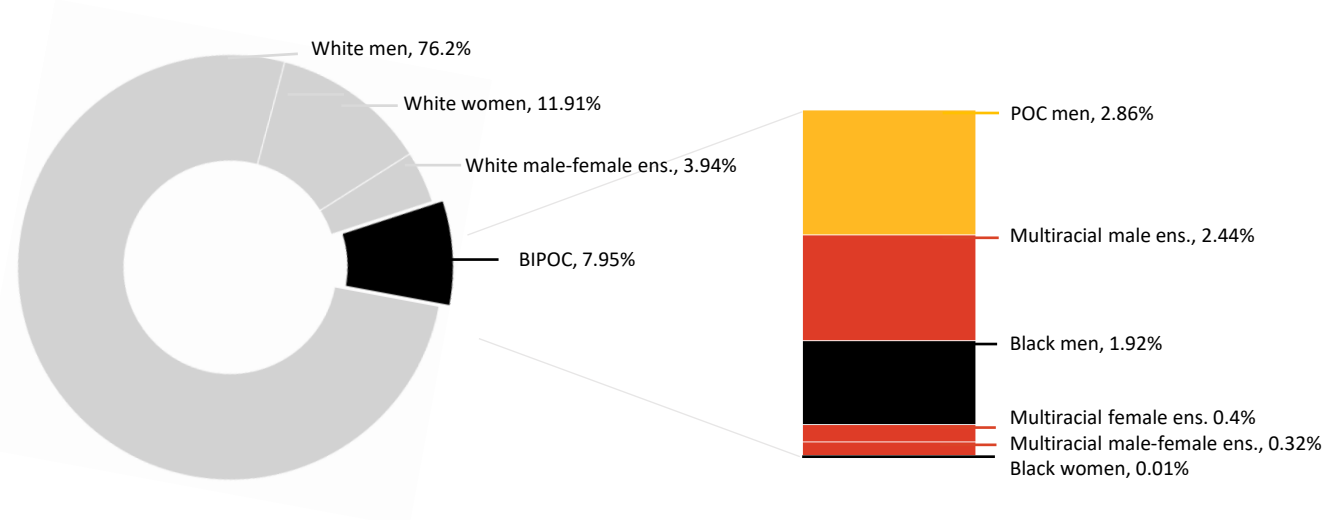
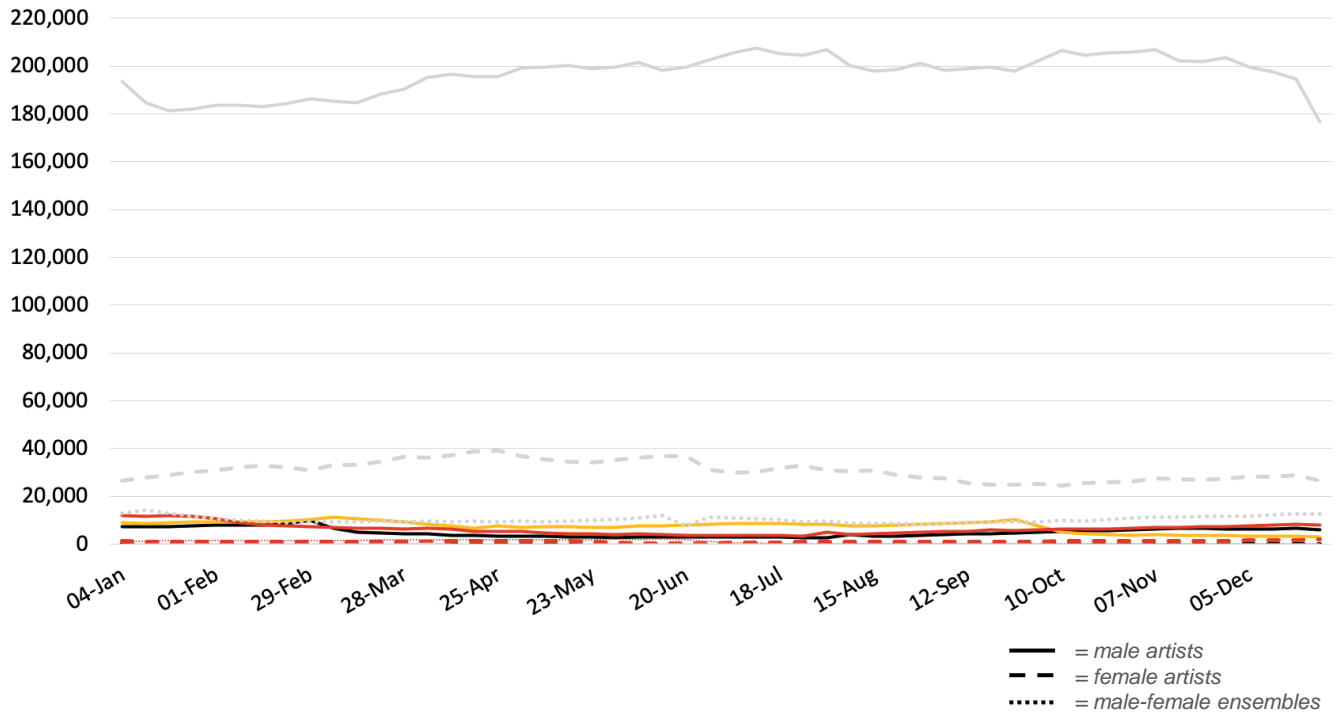
Spins for current and recurrent songs played on country format radio (Mediabase reporting) from 2002-2020



Songs by white artists receive 96.7% of the current and recurrent airplay. The remaining 3.3% is divided between Black and POC artists and Multiethnic ensembles. When evaluated by gender, BIPOC artists are filtered out of recurrent airplay. But the greater disparity occurs for BIPOC women, whose songs drop from 0.05% of the current to 0.003% of the recurrent airplay. Their songs are essentially tossed away after just a few weeks of recurrent rotation, never to be added to a station's playlist for longer retention.

IN 2020: BIPOC WOMEN STILL UNPLAYED ON COUNTRY RADIO

Distribution of spins by race/ethnicity and gender-identity on country format radio (Mediabase reporting) in 2020

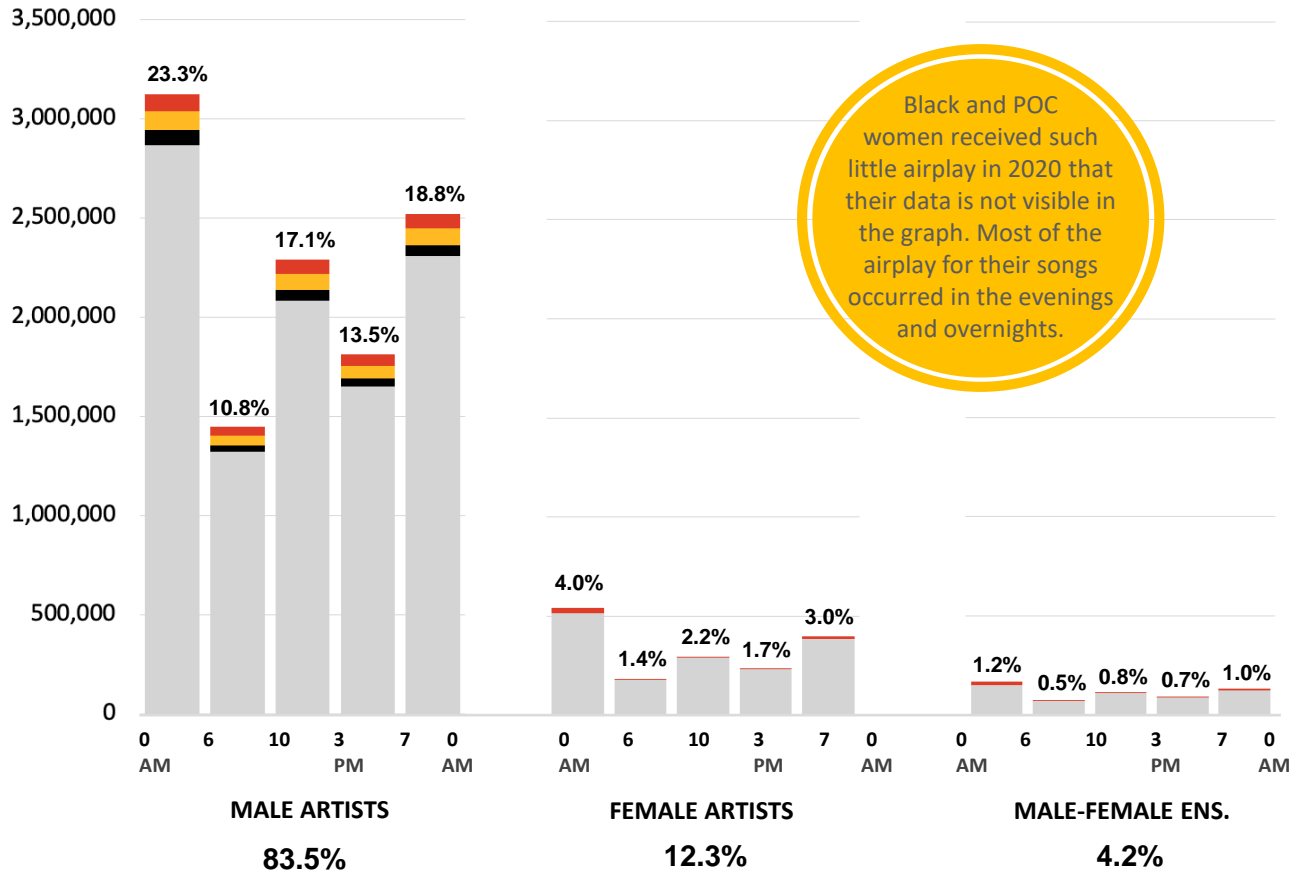


Taking a closer look at the annual average of spins by race/ethnicity and gender shows that there has been a notable increase in the percentage of spins for BIPOC and Multiracial ensembles/collaborations by 2020. This increase, however, has been largely for songs by male artists. Black men and Black women rank at the bottom of their respective groupings, receiving just 1.92% and 0.01% of the annual spins, respectively. Most of the spins for artists and ensembles of color went to POC men (largely the result of airplay for one male artist) and Multiracial ensembles (for one male ensemble). Falling at the bottom of the ranking, but above Black women, are Multiracial ensembles female and male-female ensembles.

While not represented in this graph, it is imperative to note that the Black LGBTQ+ artist with airplay on the format received just 0.001% of the annual spins. The exclusion of Black queer, transgender and non-binary artists on this format reveals another layer of discrimination in programming.

REDLINED INTO THE EVENINGS AND OVERNIGHTS IN 2020

Distribution of spins across 5 dayparts (Mediabase reporting) in 2020



It is integral in this discussion of equity and diversity in the industry to consider the placement of spins for BIPOC artists through the 24-hr period. This graph tracks the distribution of spins across the five dayparts in radio programming, from midnight to midnight (left to right). This graph makes two points clear about programming: (1) white artists receive the bulk of the airplay in all five dayparts and (2) white men are the most privileged in this space. While songs by white female artists have indeed drastically declined in airplay in the last two decades, they still receive more support than BIPOC artists in the country music industry.

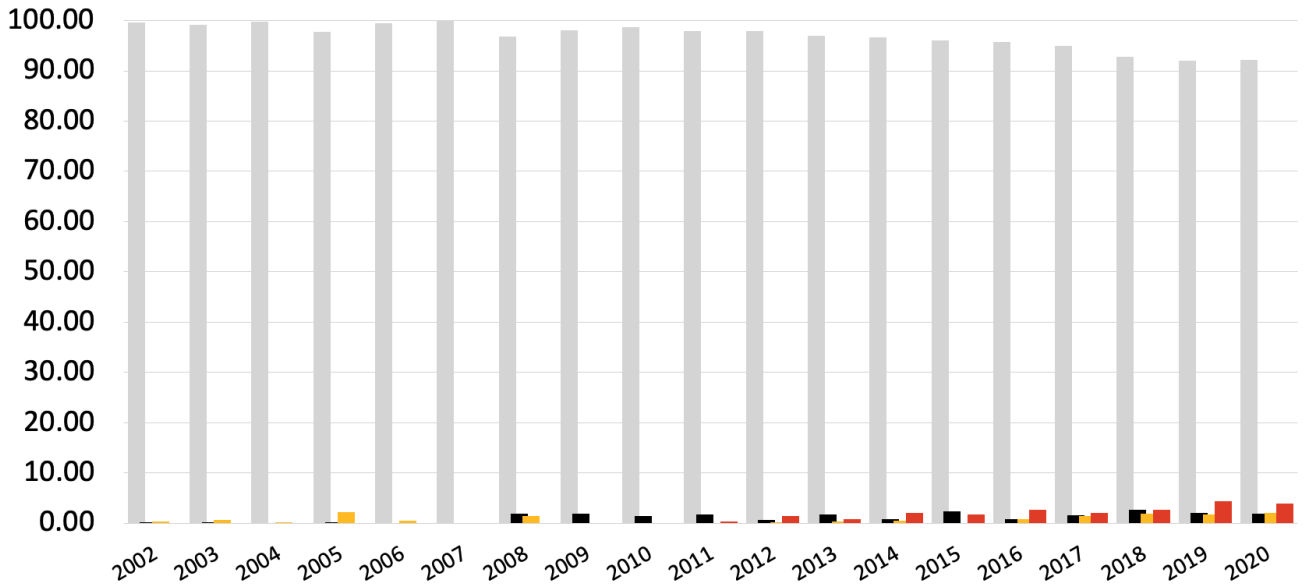
Critically, as can be seen here, most of spins for Black and POC artists and Multiracial ensembles have occurred in the evenings and overnights. This is particularly dire for Black and POC women, whose songs are redlined into the evenings and overnights. BIPOC women received 0.01% of the annual airplay, 27.1% of which occurred in the evenings and 43.6% in the overnights. While new songs are typically added in the overnights first, a historic practice at radio, this is a form of cultural redlining that avoids investment in Black women by relegating their songs to a daypart with no audience.

1.20%
OF SPINS FOR SONGS
BY BLACK MEN

0.01%
OF SPINS FOR SONGS
BY BLACK WOMEN

REPRESENTATION ON THE WEEKLY AIRPLAY CHARTS

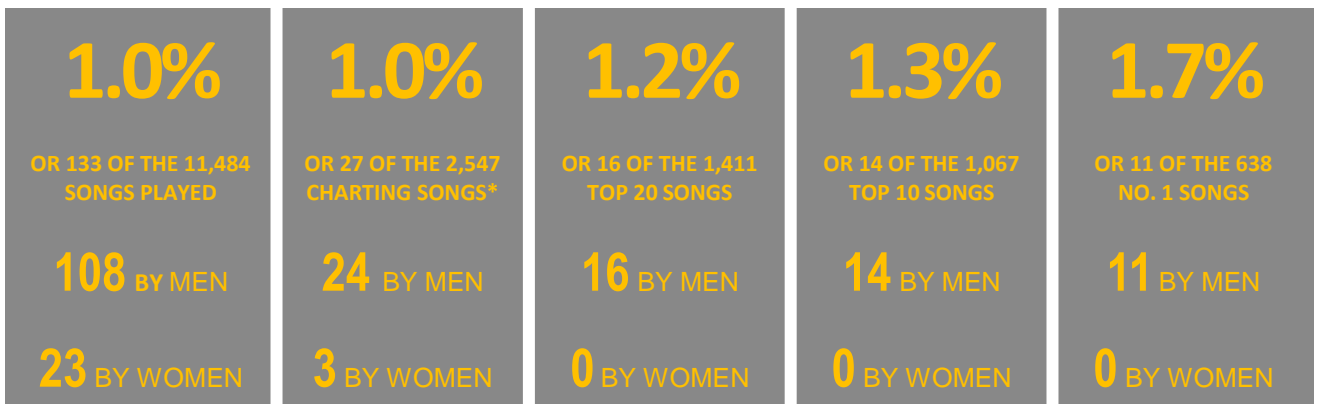
Distribution of songs on weekly airplay charts (Mediabase reporting) from 2002-2020



White artists dominate the charts, holding a 99% average of the charting songs between 2002 and 2007, dropping (marginally) to 97% in 2008. The “biggest” change occurs in the last three years of this period, when two new BIPOC men start receiving airplay and climbing the charts. Thus, despite an increase of 3.5 percentage points in the number of charting songs by BIPOC artists between 2002 and 2020, this increased representation was almost entirely for male artists. BIPOC women remain absent from the charts. Their exclusion from country format radio, means that they lack the support required to break into the weekly airplay charts. The highest ranking BIPOC women on country format radio is Ojibwe artist Crystal Shawanda, whose “You Can Let Go” reached #19 on the Mediabase and #21 on the Billboard airplay charts in 2008. The highest peaking Black female artists remains Linda Martell, whose “Color Him Father” peaked at #22 on the Billboard chart (not an airplay chart) in 1969, followed by Mickey Guyton with “Better Than You Left Me” at #30 on the Mediabase and Billboard airplay charts in 2015.

Black artists from radio airplay to charts

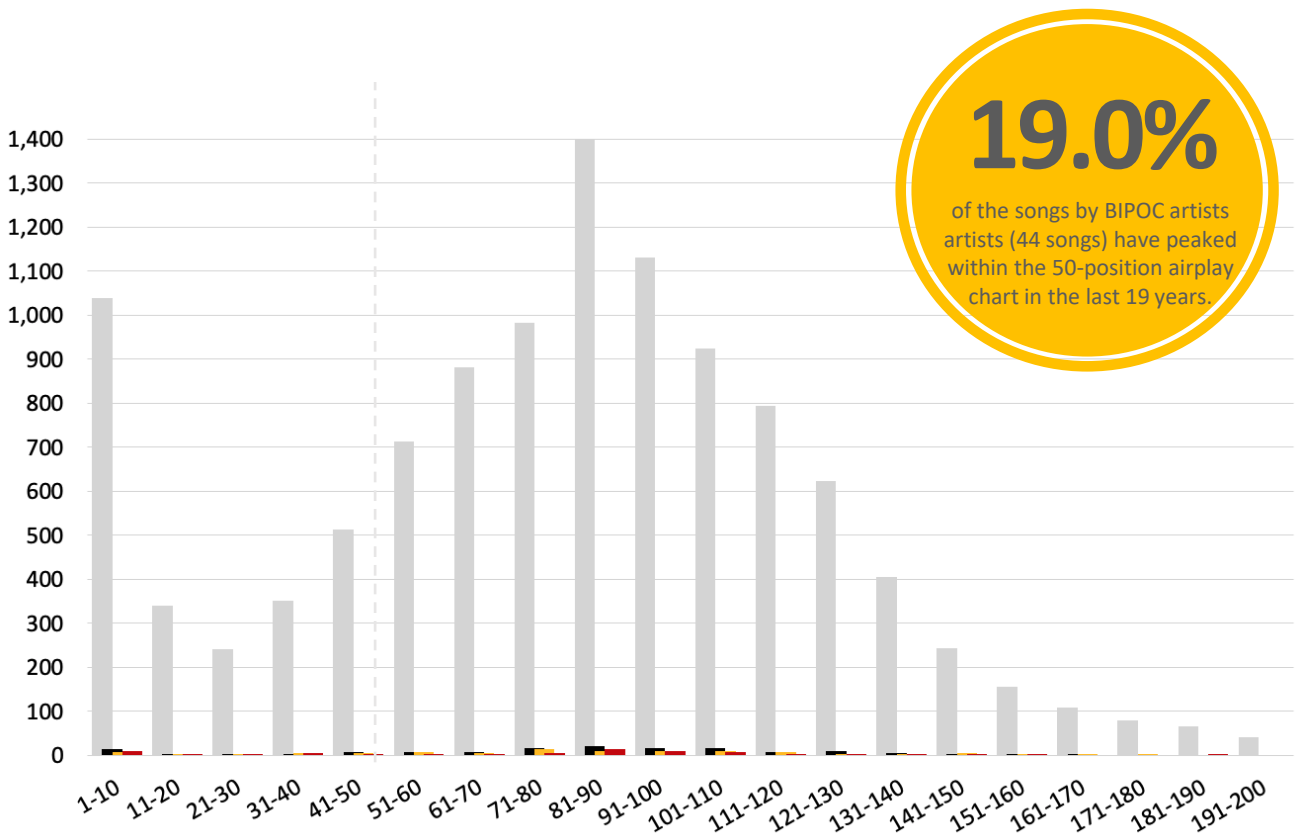
Across 11,484 unique songs to receive airplay on country format radio from 2002-2020



Just 27 of the 133 songs (20.0%) of the songs by Black artists had enough airplay to make it into the weekly charts, 10.0% of which reached the top positions of the chart. **Black women have not had enough airplay to reach the Top 20 of the chart.**

MOST SONGS BY BIPOC ARTISTS PEAK OUTSIDE CHART

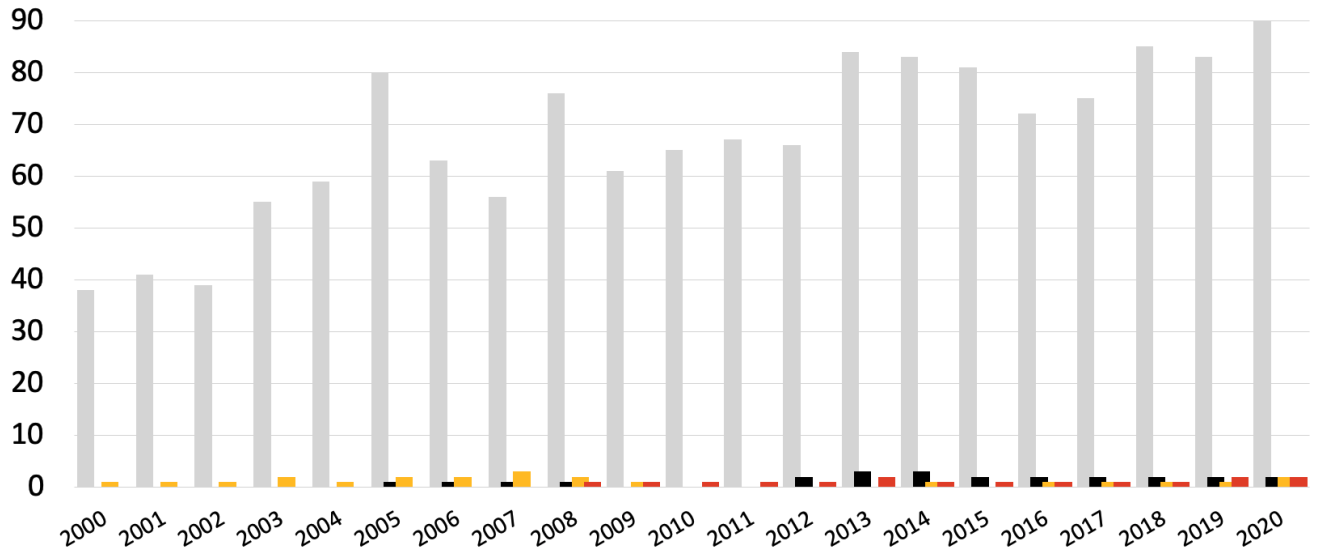
Frequency of songs by white, Black, POC and Multiethnic ensembles by peak position (top 200 positions weekly reports)



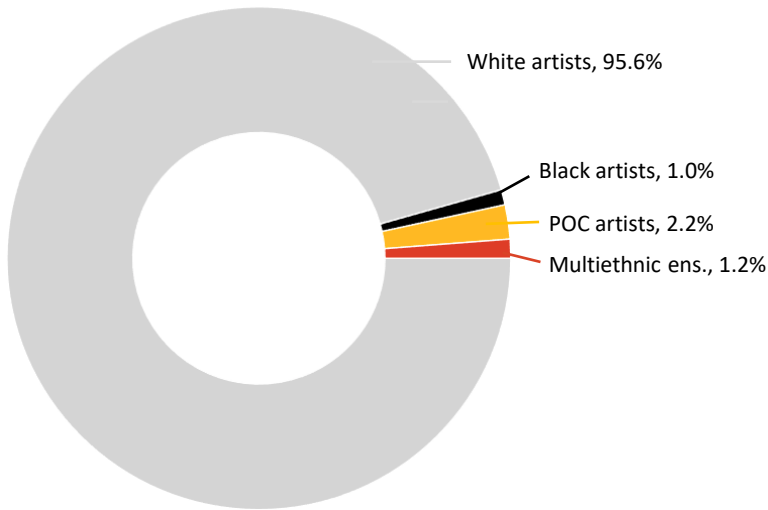
Examining the frequency of unique songs by their peak position puts into stark relief the racial inequities on country format radio programming, as it shows us where within the weekly ranking space songs by Black, POC and Multiethnic ensembles peak. With just 2.0% of the songs in the top 200 position of the weekly reports over this 19-year period, more than three quarters of those songs peak between #51 and #130 – outside of the 50-position chart. Of the 19% of the songs that peak within the charts, just 7 of the songs (0.4% overall) have been by a BIPOC female artist.

REPRESENTATION ON MAJOR LABELS

Distribution of artists signed to Sony, UMG and Warner Nashville from 2000-2020



Over the last two decades, the three major Nashville labels have maintained an almost entirely white artist roster, averaging 96% over this period. Just 17 BIPOC artists or Multiethnic ensembles (4.1%) have been signed to a major label in this period, 4 of which (1.0%) have been women. In 2020, 4.0% of the artist rosters are BIPOC and 2.0% are Multiethnic ensembles – the peak of this period.



percentage of **BIPOC country artists: 3.2%**

1.0% Black artists

0.5% Biracial artists

0.5% Hispanic/Latinx artists

0.7% Indigenous artists

0.2% Filipino heritage

0.2% Japanese heritage

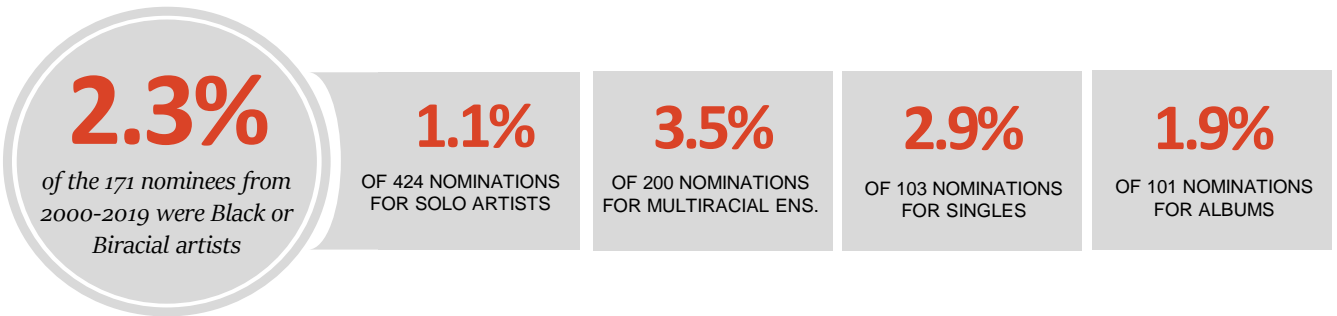
0.9%

OF THE 411 ARTISTS SIGNED ARE BIPOC WOMEN

REPRESENTATION IN ACM NOMINATIONS

Representation of unique artists amongst the 828 nominations at the ACMs between 2000 and 2019

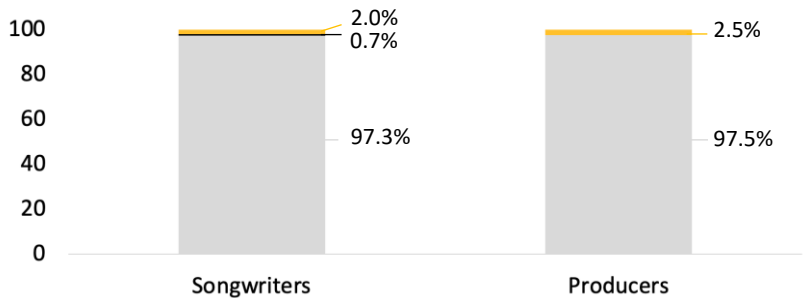
(1) New Artist (all categories), Female and Male Vocalist, Entertainer; (2) Duo and Group, (3) Single & (4) Album categories



ACM-nominated Songwriters & Producers

Over the last two decades, 150 unique songwriters and 120 unique producers have been nominated in the category of Song and Single of the Year, respectively.

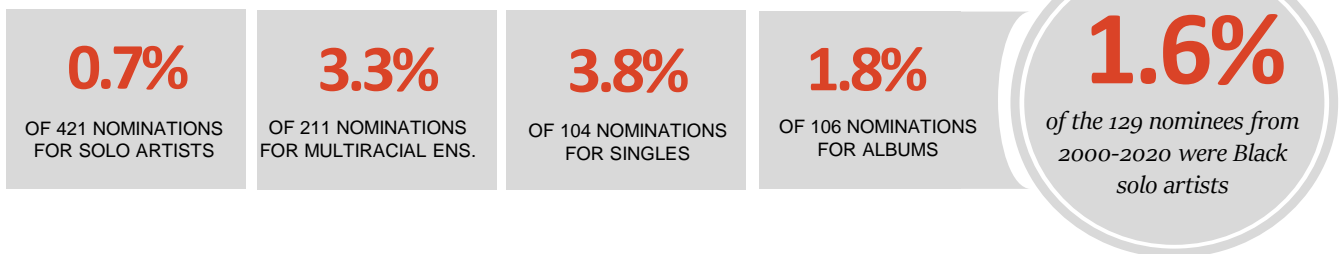
In both categories, just over 97.0% of the nominees were white, while about 2.0% are BIPOC. Just 1 Black songwriter from outside of the Nashville system was nominated in this category.



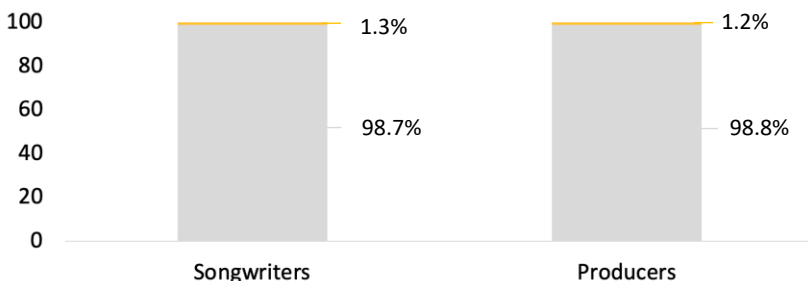
REPRESENTATION IN CMA NOMINATIONS

Representation of unique artists amongst the 842 nominations at the CMAs between 2000 and 2020

(1) New Artist, Male and Female Vocalist, Entertainer, (2) Duo and Group, (3) Single and (4) Album categories



CMA-nominated Songwriters & Producers



Over the last two decades, 150 unique songwriters and 84 unique producers have been nominated in the category of Song and Single of the Year, respectively.

In both categories, nearly 99.0% of the nominees were white, while about 1.2% were artists of color. Neither the songwriters nor producer were Black. Just two writers of color were nominated.

REDLINING IN COUNTRY MUSIC

DR. JADA E. WATSON

 @data_jada

HOW WE GOT HERE...

The popular music industry developed in the 1920s along a musical color line that echoed Jim Crow segregation. Even though Black and white musicians played and listened to the same music, when record executives developed their marketing strategies for records in the 1920s, they created two categories – “hillbilly music” and “race music” – through which they would market music to white and Black communities, respectively (Hagstrom Miller 2010). While these specific marketing categories are no longer used today (replaced over time with Country and Soul/R&B), the racial segregation established in the 1920s has been reinforced through the development of the radio and recording industries (Hughes 2015; Stimeling 2020), the centralization of the music business in Nashville in the 1950s (Martinez 2021), and the development and continued maintenance of the industry’s popularity charts (Molanphy 2014; Leight 2019; Watson 2021a/b). These practices are deeply interconnected and continue to be perpetuated today through the ways in which labels sign, promote and support artists, and in the algorithms that underpin streaming services. Despite the industry’s multiracial and multiethnic roots and the fact that the industry’s most celebrated white stars were heavily influenced by Black musicians (Pecknold 2016), the industry’s historic white washing of the country music narrative continues to center the voices of white artists.

The institutionalization of whiteness by the country music industry has far-reaching impacts on this cultural space. As Karen Pittelman (2014) has written, the white supremacist roots of these practices are maintained through outright appropriation, discrimination and genre policing. Discussions about “authenticity” have historically served to create barriers for Black, Indigenous and Artists of Color (BIPOC) who are put in a position of defending their place in the genre. Embedded in this discussion are debates surrounding traditionalism versus country-pop leaning sound, the use of hip-hop or trap-beat influences, or R&B-sounding vocal, which contribute to ongoing policing of the boundaries of the genre. At the core of this discourse is a debate about who is or is not permitted to create country music, which dictates the decision-making of gatekeepers that control access to resources and opportunities within the industry. These were precisely the issues at play in reactions to Beyoncé’s performance of “Daddy Lessons” on the stage of the 50th anniversary of the Country Music Association Awards – and the later rejection of that song by the Grammy Country committee (Coscarelli 2016; Associated Press 2016). It was also exhibited in *Billboard*’s decision to drop Lil Nas X’s “Old Town Road” from Hot Country Songs chart because it did “not embrace enough elements of today’s country music to chart in its current version” (Leight 2019). These constructs are just some of the ways in which white supremacy is upheld in contemporary country music, and one through which the genre defines and continues to maintain its legacy of whiteness.

These issues are not historic; they are contemporary. The country music industry has not even attempted to dismantle its structure. Instead, industry policy and collective prejudice have worked together to maintain what George Lipsitz (2018) calls a “possessive investment in whiteness” that is responsible for the racialized hierarchies that persist within country music. Lipsitz’s work maps well to the country music industry, where whiteness has historically had a “cash value”. Whiteness accounts for advantages that come to white artists and businesses, namely those secured by discriminatory programming practices, through insider networks that channel airplay and opportunities to white artists on major labels, and through inherited

criteria that “pass on the spoils of discrimination to succeeding generations” (Lipsitz 2018). In a capitalistic enterprise such as the country music industry, the business model is a self-fulfilling prophecy: it *encourages* an investment in whiteness because it remains integral to upholding the identity politics that provide financial advantages.

This is not just evident in the historic racial inequity on country format radio and label rosters, but also in the development and maintenance of criteria used to determine eligibility for nomination to the industry’s awards and honors (Watson 2019d, 2020a). Awards like those granted by the Country Music Association (CMA) and the Academy of Country Music (ACM) reflect the state of the industry and are a visible marker of the absence of BIPOC artists from the industry’s mainstream. These awards use a variety of performance indicators to determine eligibility, including the using criterion such as radio airplay as a marker of artistic “merit”. But this is a color-blind approach determining eligibility, as it ignores the role that industry practices play in excluding BIPOC artists from full participation in the industry. Discrimination within the system prevents merit-based success. Race and ethnicity – like gender and sexuality – matter, as they affect opportunities, perceptions, and income within the country music industry. Avoiding discussion about how racism impacts industry practices individualizes an artist’s experiences, rather than examining the larger system and context within which this artist’s experiences have unfolded (Williams 2011).

Deeply connected to this white supremacist foundation are other forms of oppression that have likewise served to limit or exclude artists from participation in the genre. Sexism, homophobia and transphobia are critical to any discussion regarding representation within the industry. Sexism has been at the fore of public debate within the industry for at least six years, with data-driven studies that explore the declining presence of female artists in the genre (Annenberg 2019; Watson 2019a/b/c, 2021a). What has not been explored through these studies is the connection between sexism and other intersections of identity, to better understand how these oppressions reinforce each other through industry policies and practices (Pittelman 2014).

This study seeks to take a first step to addressing these issues, centering race and ethnicity, alongside gender identity and sexuality, to better understand representation within the country music industry. Drawing on datasets that document weekly radio airplay (2002-2020), label rosters of Sony, UMG and Warner Nashville (2000-2020), as well as the nomination histories of the CMA and ACM over the last two decades, this report examines how industry practices impact the careers of BIPOC artists. By analyzing the data generated by these four industry spaces, this study shows the impact of internal decision-making processes of those in power and considers how these actions oppress BIPOC artists – especially women and LGBTQ+ artists – within the system.

Examining representation through an intersectional lens brings to light the dynamics of power and oppression based on the overlapping identities of artists included – and excluded – from participation. Taken together, these datasets tell part of the story about the ways in which the industry has maintained its whiteness, and its enduring cis-gendered, heteronormative values. While ability was not coded into this study, it is imperative to acknowledge from the outset that a significant component of this constructed white narrative is a dismissal of artists with disabilities and a rejection of non-Christian values.

The color-coding scheme for this study follows the race/ethnicity of artists in the dataset:

- White artists and/or ens.;
- Black artists and/or ens.;
- Biracial, Indigenous, Hispanic/Latinx, Filipino artists and/or ens.;
- Multiracial/ethnic ensembles and collaborations.

It is imperative to recognize from the outset that combining artists that are not white or Black together in one category is not ideal. To prepare this dataset, I referred to previous studies examining race and gender on *Billboard* charts to develop these codes (Lafrance et al. 2018; Watson 2021a/b). Like these studies, using one term to draw together artists of several ethnicities might be read as an attempt to reinforce the hierarchy of racial importance by positioning white and Black artists as a standard and Biracial, Indigenous, Hispanic/Latinx and Filipino artists as an exception. Rather, this decision was taken in order to ensure coherent and consistent analysis across all four datasets. More importantly, because there is such little airplay for songs by Biracial, Indigenous, Hispanic/Latinx and Filipino artists in the dataset, collapsing these categories meant that their contributions would be visible within the results. As such, it allows for a more relevant and meaningful discussion of the broader issues surrounding representation in the country music industry. It is also important to note that many of the artists of color are white passing, but it was critical to this study to remain faithful to coding practices. As will be seen in the findings presented here, both Black artists and POC artists (even those that are white passing) are severely underrepresented in this industry – to the point where their data is often not visible on graphs.

WHERE WE ARE TODAY...

Over the last nineteen years, 2,164 artists have had songs played on country format radio. The overwhelming majority of the artists with songs played in this period – 96% – were white, and only 3.0% were Black (2.0%), Indigenous, Biracial, Hispanic/Latinx, or Filipino (POC, 1.0%), and 1.0% were Multiracial/ethnic ensembles or collaborations. These figures include 103 non-country artists whose songs were played on the format.

Removing the non-country from the list results in a reduction of the percentage of BIPOC artists from 3.0% overall down to 1.5% (0.6% Black, 0.9% POC), and as a result increases the representation of white country artists from 96.0% to 98.0%. Songs by just 13 Black country were played on country radio in this period, while those by 1 Biracial, 5 Indigenous, 9 Hispanic/Latinx, and 1 Filipino American artist also had songs on the format. Twenty are men, while just 9 are women.

Table 1. Unique country artists

	Male artists	Female artists	Male-female ensembles
White artists	65.1%	28.0%	4.9%
Black artists	0.5%	0.1%	0.0%
POC artists	0.6%	0.3%	0.0%
Multiracial/ethnic ens.	0.05%	0.05%	0.4%

The key findings for this study reveal that at every level of analysis – percentage of songs played, of airplay, and of charting songs BIPOC artists make up less than 4.0% of the commercial country music industry. Black LGBTQ+ artists make up an even smaller percentage of the population: just one Black queer artist (0.05%) has had a song played on the format – and he received just 0.001% of the total airplay.

Over the course of this period, BIPOC artists received just 2.3% of the overall airplay. More critically, most of the songs, spins, charting songs, and nominations for BIPOC artists were by just three BIPOC male artists, who accumulated 95.7% of the overall spins over the last nineteen years. The majority of the BIPOC artists that have participated in this space over the last two decades – *especially* women and LGBTQ+ artists – have been marginalized on the format. Radio has played on a handful of songs by BIPOC women and much of their airplay was pushed into the evenings and overnight. As a result, their songs peaked in the back end of the charts (if at all).

The nineteen-year period examined in this study can be divided into three periods defined by activity for songs by BIPOC artists. The key findings hold true for all levels of analysis – from the number of songs on playlists, to the amount of airplay these songs received, and to the number songs that charted.

The three periods can be defined as follows:

1. **2002 to 2007:** BIPOC artists are nearly absent from country format radio, just 0.5% of the songs played were by BIPOC artists, and those songs averaged 0.3% of the airplay.
2. **2008 to 2013:** representation increases (marginally) to an average of 1.5% of the songs played. These songs received an average of 2.0-2.5% of the airplay across this period.
3. **2014 to 2020:** representation increases again in the final six years of this period and average of about 3.7% of the songs played by 2020, and 4.8% of the annual airplay.

Even though the data shows an *increase* across this period both in terms of the songs played (0.5% to 3.7%) and the airplay for those songs (0.3% to 4.8%), this increase was exclusively for songs by BIPOC men. Three BIPOC men accumulated 95.7% of the airplay for songs by BIPOC artists, while all other BIPOC artists (26 artists) received the remaining 4.3% of this airplay. BIPOC women, by comparison, received just 2.7% of the spins for songs by BIPOC artists across this period. Within the broader picture of radio, when considering airplay for all artists, BIPOC women were responsible for just 0.4% of the songs played on the format and received just 0.06% of the airplay over this period (0.03% each for Black and POC women). The one Black LGBTQ+ artist was responsible for 0.008% of the songs played on the format.

In addition to this small increase in representation for BIPOC artists, the data shows an increase (again, marginally) of representation of Multiracial/ethnic ensembles or collaborations. Between 2002 and 2011, less than 0.5% of the songs were by Multiracial ensembles – accumulated almost entirely for airplay for *American Idol* collaborations. From 2011 to 2020, airplay for Multiracial country ensembles and collaborations began to increase to a period high of 4.4% by 2019. As with the statistics for BIPOC artists, airplay for songs by Multiracial ensembles was dominated a male ensemble who received 80.0% of the spins over this period.

Distribution of spins by time of day

Drilling into this data to examine the distribution of spins across the 24-hour radio cycle is critical to understanding representation within country format radio, as it offers information on *when* an artist is most likely to be heard by listeners. The 24-hour cycle at terrestrial radio is divided into five dayparts: the morning (6:00 to 10:00 a.m.), midday (10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.), afternoon, (3:00 to 7:00 p.m.), evening (7:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m.) and the overnights (12:00 to 6:00 a.m.). According to a Nielsen study (Bouvard 2019), 42% of most radio listening occurs during the morning and afternoon drive times (21% in each daypart) and that 26% occurs in the midday period – but these are often the times of day with the fewest songs played. As such, examining *how much* airplay songs by BIPOC artists receive according to daypart helps us to see *when* their songs are played, and *how likely* they are to be heard by listeners throughout the day (Watson 2019c).

While it is true that most spins for all artists occurs in the evenings and overnights, this distribution practice is more critical for artists that are underrepresented within the industry, as it offers fewer opportunities for their music to be heard. This is especially critical for BIPOC artists – especially woman and LGBTQ+ artists – who are attempting to break into an industry with historically and structurally discriminatory practices. This practice of relegating the bulk of airplay for songs by BIPOC artists into the evenings and overnights is what I have described elsewhere as cultural redlining, as an act of pushing artists of color to the outer margins of the daytime. Not only does this practice ensure that BIPOC artists won't be heard by radio listeners, but it also serves to uphold and maintain the racial framing of the genre that privileges the music of white artists by placing their songs in primetime programming. This then has implications across all other facets of the industry, as airplay does not then translate into chart activity, which the renders songs ineligible for awards.

BIPOC artists received 2.3% of the airplay between 2002 and 2020 (1.4% for Black artists, 0.9% for POC). But this study finds that airplay for songs by BIPOC men *increases* (especially from 2007 to 2020), while airplay for songs by BIPOC women *decreases*. Songs by BIPOC country female artists were nearly absent from radio for most of this period, with almost no airplay between 2002 and 2006 and extremely limited airplay from 2007 to 2020. In 2008, BIPOC women received 0.5% of the annual airplay, 25.0% of which was in the evenings and 38.0% in the overnights.

In 2015, BIPOC women received just 0.3% of the airplay, 20.5% of which fell in the evenings with a significant 48.0% in the overnights. And in the final year of this study period, 2020, airplay for BIPOC women dropped again to an average of 0.01% of the airplay, the majority of which occurred in the evenings (27.1%) and overnights (43.6%).

Throughout each of these years, songs by BIPOC men increased (marginally) in airplay – from 2.5% in 2008 to 4.8% by 2020. Most critically, the distribution of this airplay is similar to that of white men, with an average of 25.0% in the overnights and 22.1% in the evenings.

Distribution of spins for songs in current and recurrent status

Graphing distribution by current and recurrent status provides an important lens into how much and how long songs by BIPOC artists factor into radio programming. Current songs are those that are new releases to radio and are vying for contention on airplay charts. Recurrent songs are those that have peaked and exited the weekly airplay chart but are maintained in a station's recurrent playlist for continued playing. These also include songs that are retained as part of a station's back catalogue of "gold" songs. With such little support from country format radio and songs that peak almost entirely outside of the Top 20 (discussed below), songs by BIPOC women are absent from recurrent and gold rotation status, as are songs by BIPOC LGBTQ+.

Combined, BIPOC artists receive 1.3% of the current airplay and 1.0% of the recurrent airplay. The bulk of this current and recurrent airplay, 1.24% and 1.01% (respectively), was for songs by BIPOC men.

Why does this distribution matter? While radio airplay has the potential to introduce an artist and to provide support for their music to enter and climb charts (which is tied to other opportunities within the industry), the *retention* of songs as part of a station's back catalogue is just as important to contributing to the longevity of an artist's career. This means that once their songs peak and exit the chart, that they are retained for continued play into the future. More critically, this is part of "canon-building" within the industry, as the songs retained within a station's gold catalogue of songs become not just recognizable to audiences, but they are also foundation-building to the culture and sound of the genre. This data shows that songs by BIPOC women are eliminated from playlists once their songs exit the chart. Within a year of their chart debut, their songs are absent from these weekly reports.

This type of programming, then, serves to reinforce the white racial frame or what Pittelman (2014) refers to as the "white sound" of this industry.

Table 2a. Distribution of spins for current singles

	Male artists	Female artists	Male-female ensembles
White artists	44.95%	8.32%	2.96%
Black artists	0.76%	0.03%	0.00%
POC artists	0.50%	0.03%	0.00%
Multiracial/ethnic ens.	0.54%	0.13%	0.06%

Table 2b. Distribution of spins for recurrent records

	Male artists	Female artists	Male-female ensembles
White artists	34.00%	4.28%	2.07%
Black artists	0.60%	0.00%	0.00%
POC artists	0.39%	0.00%	0.00%
Multiracial/ethnic ens.	0.37%	0.01%	0.01%

Who's spinning into the charts?

Over the course of this nineteen-year period, just 19.0% of the songs by BIPOC country artists peaked within the 50-position weekly charts. Echoing the trend outlined above for radio airplay, representation on the charts increases from an average of 0.3% between 2002 and 2007, increasing to an average of 1.5% between 2008 and 2013, and up to an average of 2.0% from 2014 to 2020.

Here, too, as above, most of these songs were by three BIPOC men, with just 3.0% (7 songs) by BIPOC women (3 by Black women, 3 by Hispanic/Latinx women, and 1 by an Indigenous woman). Just 1 of these 7 songs peaked within the Top 20 of the weekly airplay charts and remains the highest charting song by a BIPOC woman in the history of the country charts (Watson 2020b). While the results show that all BIPOC artists are marginalized within this space, BIPOC women have been the most oppressed by the format and have not had the support required to sustain a career in the industry.

Despite international attention, Lil Nas X's "Old Town Road" failed to enter the airplay charts, peaking 15 positions outside the chart at #65. There are several critical issues at play with this song; race and sexuality are contributing factors in decisions to exclude this song from rotation.

Outside of the three BIPOC men that have had chart success in the last decade, all other BIPOC men that have released songs in this period had minimal radio support. Thus, while the findings certainly show an increase in representation of BIPOC over the last four years, that increase has been largely the result of tokenism within the industry.

Table 3. Unique charting songs

	Male artists	Female artists	Male-female ensembles
White artists	71.7%	19.9%	5.6%
Black artists	0.9%	0.1%	0.0%
POC artists	0.7%	0.2%	0.0%
Multiracial/ethnic ens.	0.5%	0.2%	0.2%

This is true for Multiracial/ethnic ensembles as well. There were no charting songs by Multiracial ensembles between 2002 and 2010. Trends for airplay are also reflected in the chart history: the first Multiracial ensemble charted in 2011 (0.3% of the charts that year) and increases from this point to 4.0% by 2019 and 2020.

Summary

The results for representation on country format radio reveal the racial hierarchy that exists within the industry. Continuing to program in the same manner as has been done historically within the industry, serves to privilege and center the music of cis-gendered, heterosexual, white male artists. As a result, all other artists are pushed to varying degrees to the margins of the industry.

Within this hierarchy, BIPOC artists, especially BIPOC women fall below all white artists. The graph of distribution of spins for BIPOC artists in 2020 reveals that Black men and Multiracial ensembles appear at the bottom of the ladder – but still *well* above Black women. Understanding the deep connections between these processes and the ways in which they work together to reinforce racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia is important to unpacking how the system upholds its historic white racial framing. Black women and Black LGBTQ+ artists are drastically underrepresented within (if not, absent from) this system. It is critical to understanding where efforts to make concerted change within this cultural system must begin.

Representation on Label Rosters

Given the extreme underrepresentation of BIPOC artists on country format radio, it is thus not surprising that rosters for the three major Nashville-based labels reveal the same lack of diversity on their rosters as on terrestrial radio. Evaluating representation on the rosters of Sony, UMG and Warner Nashville between 2000 and 2020, shows that just 3.2% of the artists signed (overall) are BIPOC.

Over the course of the last two decades, just 3.0% of the artists signed to each roster were BIPOC. Only UMG and Warner have had Black artists on their rosters. Of the BIPOC artists signed, just two of them – both men – have had the support required for chart-topping hits. What is most disconcerting, the one Black woman signed to a major label has not even been afforded the opportunity to record a full-length album in her 10 years on UMG’s Capitol Nashville label.

Table 4. Unique artists on major labels

	Male artists	Female artists	Male-female ensembles
White artists	61.7%	29.3%	4.6%
Black artists	0.7%	0.2%	0.0%
POC artists	1.5%	0.2%	0.0%
Multiracial/ethnic ens.	1.0%	0.0%	0.2%

Of course, labels respond almost directly to the ways in which radio supports and programs the music of their artists. Airplay, then, impacts how labels sign and support existing artists, determines whether they keep artists signed to their rosters. It likewise dictates future signing practices.

Building a Canon: Representation at the ACM & CMA Awards

The enduring legacy of white supremacy is most visible in the results of

the nominations for CMA and ACM between 2000 and 2020 (and indeed in the decades prior to this study period). Awards are a critical representation of what is happening in an industry and are often a sign of the underlying issues regarding inclusion and inequity. Radio airplay has both a direct and indirect role in determining eligibility for these awards. Not only do several of the awards require that an artist’s songs reach a particular position on the airplay chart, but it also often based on other markers of excellence or contributions to the industry that can only occur for an artist that *has* significant support from radio and their labels. Artists whose music is redlined into the evenings and overnights and doesn’t appear within the industry charts have fewer opportunities. Indeed, using popularity charts to determine eligibility creates barriers for BIPOC artists.

Focusing only on the artist-centered categories of Female and Male Vocalist, New Artist(s), Duo, Group and Entertainer categories as well as the nominees for Single and Album of the Year to consider representation amongst nominees shows that BIPOC artists are severely underrepresented in for both the CMA and ACM awards.

Between 2000 and 2020, just 4 of the 171 (2.3%) nominees for an ACM Award in the artist-centered or Single/Album categories were Black or Biracial artists. Just one Black female artist has received an ACM nomination in this period, which was the first nomination for a Black woman in the history of the organization (and of the industry as a whole). BIPOC artists received nominations in the categories of New Male and New Female Artist and Single of the Year. A Black or Biracial artist has not won in these categories of the ACM Awards.

The situation is similar with the CMA Awards. Between 2000 and 2020, just 2 of the 129 unique nominees were Black and both were men (receiving 0.5% of the 842 nominations in the period). They received nominations in the categories of New Male, Male Vocalist and Single of the Year. A BIPOC female country artist has yet to receive a nomination for a CMA. This is not just true of the last twenty years, but of the history of the awards dating back to the first ceremony in 1967. Just one Black male artists has won in these categories in the last twenty years.

The overwhelming whiteness and heteronormativity of the nominees and the winners of the industry awards in these categories are incredibly troubling. Not only is it a sign of the underlying discrimination occurring within the industry, but these artists, songs and albums are then part of the canon-building process of the music that represents the industry’s history. The exclusion of BIPOC artists and their music from this process means that their contributions are more likely to be erased and forgotten in the annals of country music history.

Eligibility criteria pose a significant problem for creating opportunity for BIPOC artists. However, the televised award ceremonies do not. Both the ACM and the CMA can increase representation by creating opportunities for BIPOC to perform their own music on the televised show. The ACMs have been active in this regard, first by inviting Mickey Guyton to perform “What Are You Gonna Tell Her?” in September 2020 and then announcing on March 11, 2021 that she will [co-host](#) the April 18, 2021 ceremony with Keith Urban. She was the first Black female country artist to perform her own song on the ACM Award show stage and the first to co-host. These opportunities significantly increase her visibility within the country music industry.

Songwriters & Producers

The overwhelming whiteness of the country music industry is not just a problem on radio playlists, label rosters and artist nominations, but also within the broader country music community. While data-driven study of studio and touring musicians, publishing rosters, engineers and producers, sound engineers, road crew, artist management, and employees at labels, publishers, radio, digital service providers (and more) would provide a more wholistic perspective on representational issues in the industry, the ACM and CMA nominations for Songwriters and Producers responsible for Song and Single of the Year (respectively) offers some insight into the prevailing white, cis-gendered and heteronormative that dominates the industry’s creative space.

Over the last two decades, just one Black songwriter contributed to a song nominated in the category of Song of the Year with the ACMs – and that writer was not Nashville-based. Outside of this nomination, only two songwriters of color received a nomination. Just one producer of color was included in the nominations. Otherwise, both the songwriters and producers responsible for the nominated the ACM and CMA Songs and Singles were entirely white and mostly male creatives.

SongData's [May 2020](#) report, prepared for the ACM Diversity and Inclusion Task Force, found that none of the writers nominated in the Songwriter category were BIPOC, nor were the nominees for Producer and Engineer, or across the 7 instrument categories for Musician of the Year. These categories also reveal significant gender imbalance: only 2 of the nominees for ACM Songwriter were white women with 4 nominations (9.0%) in total, and 3 of the nominees across the 7 musician categories were also white women (1.1%). In the period of that study, none of the nominees for Producer or Engineer were white women – a record that was broken with February 2021 nominations for Engineer. Not only are the artists mostly white, but the musicians, songwriters, engineers and producers around them are as well.

REDLINING IN COUNTRY MUSIC

The results of this study show the rate at which BIPOC and Black queer artists are pushed to the margins of the country music industry. That this level of inequity persists in the country music industry in 2020 – at a time when the multiracial and multiethnic roots of the genre are well known and readily discussed – is a sign of the deep embeddedness of white supremacy within every realm of the industry's structures. These results reflect nearly a century of inherited practices from the days of Jim Crow segregation and an invested commitment in whiteness.

One of the goals of this report was to consider the impact of the radio and label practices on the broader culture, as represented through awards and honors.

What emerges throughout this report is a deep form of cultural redlining that relegates the music of BIPOC artists – especially women – to the margins of the industry. While the concept of “redlining” has historically been used to understand how customers have been denied policies based on race and ethnicity, Safiya Umoja Noble (2018) has applied this term to our modern data-driven era, looking at the ways algorithms directly or indirectly use criteria like race, ethnicity, gender (and more) to make decisions, assessments, recommendations and even eligibility criteria. Much of her writing on technological redlining and algorithmic/data discrimination resonates in cultural spheres, where contemporary decisions are based on historic – and discriminatory – data. What is critical to understand is that the data supporting these decisions, assessments and recommendations are *human-made*, they are the results of practices in the industry – not of an audience or market response to music.

Redlining is most visible in this industry in the dayparting of programming on country format radio and in the ranking of songs by their peak positions. While one shows how songs by BIPOC women to be pushed into the dayparts with the smallest listening audience, the other offers a greater perspective on where they fall within the country industry landscape. Not only are these songs very unlikely to be heard by a radio listener, but they are unlikely to test well with audiences as a result. If testing is then used as a marker of placement within a station's playlist, these songs are even more unlikely to break into the Top 30 of an airplay chart, and to meet eligibility criteria for awards.

While streaming is becoming increasingly important in the broader popular music industry, radio airplay remains integral to success within country music. Income, resources, opportunity and awards are all linked to the support that an artist receives as a result of airplay from country radio. Not only does airplay impact the ways in which labels support and promote the handful of existing BIPOC artists, but it also plays a role in their decision not to sign *more* artists to their rosters.

These practices then play a significant role in the ACM's and CMA's management and maintenance industry awards. Rooted in the concept

of “excellence”, awards and honors in the industry are bound within a framework that promotes a set of criteria designed with “merit” in mind. Chart rankings, radio airplay, digital media, live concert ticket sales, television and film appearances, songwriting credentials, and contributions to the industry are all taken either separately or together as criteria for which an artist may be deemed “eligible” for nomination. Given the system outlined above for daytime programming, recurrent retention and chart history, songs by BIPOC women (and Black LGBTQ+) are unlikely to meet the basic terms of *entry* for eligibility. How are the contributions of artists who do not have this type of support to be weighted in comparison to the cis-gendered, heterosexual white men and women in the industry who have easier access to opportunities within the industry?

The context of award criteria is particularly troubling when changes narrow the pool of eligible candidates. This is the case with the [CMA's May 2020](#) revision of eligibility criteria for Single of the Year category. Instead of reaching the Top 50 of *Billboard's* and Country Aircheck's Chart (already insurmountable for most BIPOC women), the new criterion requires that a song reach the Top 10 of these charts to be eligible for consideration.

While narrowing the chart positions was done to diversify nominations (to increase opportunity for [white] women), the new criterion puts an extra burden on BIPOC women, who have historically been disadvantaged by industry practices. The same is true of Black LGBTQ+ artists who are completely absent from the mainstream system. Under this new criterion, not a single BIPOC woman in the industry's history would have been eligible for a CMA nomination in this category. The chart results for 2020 already show that if these eligibility criteria remain in force, a BIPOC woman will not be eligible for CMA's Single of the Year category in 2021 and are unlikely to be eligible for any award that requires a Top 50 charting song.

These same issues ultimately impact the induction processes for the Country Music Hall of Fame and are of critical concern for the role that the institution plays in the upholding and cementing of the white racial framing of the country music story. Of the 142 inductions to date, 119 are white men, male ensembles or industry representatives (85.9%), 17 are white women or industry representatives (12.0%), and three are white male-female (family) ensembles (2.1%). Only three of these artists are BIPOC – all of whom are men inducted after 2000: DeFord Bailey in 2000, Charley Pride in 2005, and Marty Stuart in 2020.

Awards and honors such as these become the “face” and “sound” of the industry and are an integral part of the constructed canonization of artists and songs. The results show that the face of this industry is white, predominantly male, cis-gendered and heteronormative.

These issues are thrown into stark relief when considering that Sunday, March 14, 2021 marks the historic evening in which the only Black female country artist signed to a major label is up for a Grammy Award. The first Black female country artist to receive a nomination (45 years after The Pointer Sisters received a Grammy for Best Country Performance by a Duo or Group in 1974), Guyton has received no support from country format radio. The historic underrepresentation of BIPOC women in this industry doesn't just impact representation in the *country* industry, but it also radiates into the broader industry, which then impacts public *perception* of what it means to be “country”.

The current practices render it impossible for BIPOC artists to be considered equitably for opportunities in the industry or within any nomination process. These artists have not just been excluded from participation in the industry, but their contributions have been forgotten or erased from narrative that the industry has constructed. More critically, these artists are not even *considered* when these criteria are being (re)evaluated. The institutional inequities that exist within the industry do not just prevent merit-based success; they prevent contributions from being recognized. Nomination and eligibility like those for the CMA and ACM awards and anonymity of the committees such as the one responsible for the Country Music Hall of Fame induction play a role in the perpetuation of these inequalities.

Data that this industry process generates are used to make contemporary business practices. The historic exclusion of BIPOC artists means that there is no “data” to support the development of artistic careers of these artists in country music. Instead of seeing their absence from the list of potentially eligible artists as a sign of a problem, the data gap has served instead to *justify* and maintain institutional practices. As Sara Ahmed (2014) states, “this is how inheritance is reproduced.”

BUILDING AN EQUITABLE FUTURE

These practices are not new. They were not created by the current industry, but they are being perpetuated and repeated every day in the ways in which BIPOC artists are denied entry into the industry and the barriers within the system that block opportunity for the handful that get signed. The industry has perpetuated a color-blind approach that fails to recognize the contributions of those that are most impacted by this discriminatory system. It is integral that the impact of these practices on the entire ecosystem be understood.

In *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together*, economist and social policy expert Heather McGhee (2021a) shared ground-breaking data to show the ways in which racism impacts everyone. As she stated in a recent NPR interview (Davies 2021), racist policies within our society impact their target first and worst. But McGhee believes that racism ultimately impacts everyone in an interconnected space like this. Racist policies that she identified in her book are not unlike those that operate within the country music industry. Racism, she states “distorts economic policy decision-making for everyone.” Because of the categorical segregation of musical genres, Black musicians are excluded from the industry, denied resources and opportunities, made to defend their place within the genre and their “sound”, and face significant barriers once inside the system. The results presented here make clear that the white supremacist structures upon which the radio and recording industries were built in the 1920s are still at play today and economic policies within the system have, indeed, impacted everyone. The discriminatory practices that prevail within this system are integrally linked to the foundational construct that privileges the cis-gendered, heterosexual, able-bodied white men for whom and by whom the industry was built.

One of the critical issues that contributes to the perpetuation of the inequity within the industry is holding on to the “zero-sum” paradigm of

racial competition – the idea that “progress for one group has to come at the expense of the other” (McGhee 2021b). McGhee argues that this zero-sum idea is the core narrative that threatens society: the only people that benefit from it, she states, are individuals that hold economic power. If we view the industry’s practices through McGhee’s framework, we can more clearly see the ways in which the zero-sum paradigm has created a pyramid that places economic power of the industry in the hands of white men who control the money, make most of the roster and programming decisions, and are then afforded the opportunity to control the writing, recording and production of the music. This then ripples through the industry – to charts, touring, festivals and award nominations. Ultimately, these practices are then institutionalized in the bronze plaques that grace the walls of the Country Music Hall of Fame rotunda.

How can change be made? Going to the root of the problem. As Andrea Williams (Apple Music 2021) has argued, if the industry is going to build more a more equitable business, it must dismantle racist policies and structures that uphold its practices. Changing practices to support those at the bottom of the racial hierarchy – both the artists and those surrounding them in the studio and in business offices – will be integral to this process. Using the success of three BIPOC men as a marker of progress is a mistake – one that has historically been made in this industry with the ways in which it has used and tokenized the late Charley Pride as a sign of its “inclusivity”. Not only does this not contribute to equity efforts, but it also undermines the ability for collective action to make change in the industry.

Follow-up studies to examine the rate at which BIPOC creatives and industry workers are passed on for opportunities in the country music business are an essential next step. This is necessary for understanding the compounded economic gains for white men in the country music industry versus the economic loss for everyone else.

At the time of publication, [Sony announced](#) a joint venture with The Penthouse to work Willie Jones’ music (after a significant independent launch of his first album by The Penthouse/Empire). Future data studies will look at how he is supported at the label and will be received at radio.

The advantages that come from maintaining this possessive investment in cis-gendered, heteronormative whiteness do not outweigh the benefits of dismantling white supremacy. Not only is the industry shutting out BIPOC artists, but it is cutting off a fanbase starving for inclusive and diverse representation within all spheres of the industry.

We reached out to the Country Music Association, Academy of Country Music, CMT, Cumulus and iHeart to include statements regarding current efforts alongside this report. Statements are included below.



CMT remains committed to diversity and inclusion of underrepresented voices in the format, across all CMT platforms, signature franchises including CMT Next Women of Country (NWOC) and CMT Equal Play initiative, as well through partnerships both within ViacomCBS and beyond.

CMT Equal Play has expanded its mission beyond 50/50 gender representation to now include all underrepresented voices in the format.

- In January, CMT inducted its [most diverse class of honorees](#) into its NWOC franchise, committing to increased artist exposure across all CMT platforms throughout the year, including CMT Digital and the newly permanent [‘CMT Equal Play’ channel](#) on Pluto TV featuring country music 24/7 with an equal male/female playlist. Additionally, the program has expanded this year to include a first-time artist resource program with independent social impact development opportunities.
- In February, CMT collaborated with [Smithsonian Channel](#) to present an [in-depth panel discussion](#) on race in country music surrounding the new documentary from supergroup Our Native Daughters. The doc received a CMT broadcast premiere and the conversation was streamed across CMT social platforms.
- CMT continues to provide cross-brand support for diverse artists and videos across multiple ViacomCBS sister brands including MTV and BET with recent multi-network premieres for artists including Willie Jones, Valerie June, Mickey Guyton and Amythyst Kiah, among others.
- Finally, CMT is committed to deepening its partnerships with such organizations as Nashville Music Equality, GLAAD and more, to help ensure thoughtful, diverse representation across all platforms.

Appendix

Accumulated spins for Top 10 artists on weekly airplay reports (2002-2020)

	TOP WHITE MALE ARTISTS	TOP WHITE FEMALE ARTISTS
1	6,534,613	3,827,084
2	5,726,958	2,270,709
3	5,613,744	1,929,421
4	5,579,052	1,344,085
5	5,097,018	1,214,703
6	4,576,729	1,171,107
7	4,574,711	1,113,534
8	4,378,097	875,274
9	4,108,681	673,927
10	3,577,620	506,536

	TOP BIPOC MALE ARTISTS	TOP BIPOC FEMALE ARTISTS
1	2,095,778	47,826
2	1,516,619	35,373
3	569,015	21,799
4	103,310	9,904
5	10,091	2,581

Data Sources:

[1] Weekly radio airplay reports as tabulated by Mediabase.

[2] Label rosters of Sony, Warner and UMG published in *Music Row News*' annual artist directory (December issues)

[3] Academy of Country Music Awards nomination history extracted from data provided by the ACM in April 2020, verified on the [ACM database](#) and on Wikipedia pages of artists.

[4] Country Music Association Awards nomination history extracted from the association website accessed via the Internet Archive, and then verified on the Wikipedia pages of artists.

SOURCES

- Annenberg Inclusion Initiative. 2019. "[No Country for Female Artists: Artist & Songwriter Gender on Popular Country Charts from 2014 to 2018](#)." *Annenberg Inclusion Initiative*, April.
- Apple Music. 2021. "[Striving for Diversity and Authentic Representation in Country Music](#)." YouTube video, 26:40.
- Associated Press. 2016. "[Beyoncé's 'Daddy Lessons' Rejected by Grammy Country Committee](#)." *Billboard*, 7 December.
- Bouvard, Pierre. 2019. "[Perception vs. Reality : Drive Time Isn't The Only Time For AM/FM Radio](#)." *WestwoodOne*, 19 February.
- Coscarelli, Joe. 2016. "[Beyoncé's C.M.A. Awards Performance Becomes the Target of Backlash](#)." *New York Times*, 3 November.
- Davies, Dave. 2021. "['Sum of Us' Examines Hidden Cost of Racism – for Everyone](#)." *NPR: Fresh Air*, 17 February.
- Hagstrom Miller, Karl. 2010. *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop music in the Age of Jim Crow*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Hughes, Charles. 2015. *Country Soul: Making Music and Making Race in the American South*. Chapel Hill, NC: U. of North Carolina Press.
- Lafrance, Marc, Casey Sheibling, Lori Burns, and Jean Durr. 2018. "Race, Gender and the *Billboard* Top 40 Charts Between 1997 and 2007." *Popular Music & Society* 41(5): 522-38.
- Leight, Elias. 2014. "[Lil Nas X's 'Old Town Road' Was a Country Hit. Then Country Changed Its Mind](#)." *Rolling Stone*, 26 March.
- Lipsitz, George. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Stimeling, Travis. 2020. *Nashville Cats: Record Production in Music City*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Martinez, Amanda Marie. 2021. "[The Crossroads Facing Country Music After Morgan Wallen's Use of a Racist Slur](#)." *The Washington Post*, 17 February.
- McGhee, Heather. 2021a. *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together*. New York: One World.
- McGhee, Heather. 2021b. "[What the 'Zero Sum' model of Racial Competition Gets Wrong](#)." YouTube video, 3:26.
- Means, Lauren. 2020. "[Paving Their Own Way: Local LGBTQ+ and Ally Musicians Speak About Their Experiences](#)." *Focus*, 9 April.
- Molanphy, Chris. 2014. "[I Know You Got Soul: The Trouble With Billboard's R&B/Hip-Hop Chart](#)." *Pitchfork*, 14 April.
- Noble, Safiya Umoja. 2018. *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. New York: New York University Press.
- Pecknold, Diane, ed. 2016. *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Pittelman, Karen. 2018. "[Another Country: On The Relationship Between Country Music and White Supremacy and What We Can Do About It](#)." *Medium*, 17 December.
- Watson, Jada. 2019a. "Gender on the *Billboard* Hot Country Songs Chart, 1996-2016." *Popular Music & Society*, 42(5): 538-560.
- Watson, Jada. 2019b. "[Gender Representation on Country Format Radio: A Study of Published Reports from 2000-2018](#)." *SongData Reports*; Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, 26 April. Prepared in consultation with WOMAN Nashville.
- Watson, Jada. 2019c. "[Gender Representation on Country Format Radio: A Study of Spins Across Dayparts](#)." *SongData Reports*; Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, 6 December. Prepared in consultation with WOMAN Nashville.
- Watson, Jada. 2019d. "[Gender Representation of CMA Awards: A Study of Nominees and Winners, 2000-2019](#)." *SongData Reports*, 12 November.
- Watson, Jada. 2020a. "[Inclusion and Diversity in the ACM Award History: A Study of Nominees and Winner, 2000-2019](#)." *SongData Reports*, May.
- Watson, Jada. 2020b. "[How Inheritance is Reproduced. Or, How the Country Industry Fails to Address Diversity](#)." *Keepers of the Flame* (blog), 28 October.
- Watson, Jada. 2021a. "[Billboard's 'Hot Country Songs' Chart and the Curation of Country Music Culture](#)." *Popular Music History* 13(1-2): 168-90.
- Watson, Jada. 2021b. "Overlooked Voices, Race and Gender on the *Billboard* Hot Country Songs Chart (1944-2016)." International Country Music Conference; Nashville, TN.
- Whitburn, Joel. 2018. *Top Country Singles 1944-2017*. Menomonee Falls, WI: Record Research, Inc.
- Williams, Andrea. 2020a. "[Why Haven't We Had a Black Woman Country Star?](#)" *Nashville Scene*, 6 August.
- Williams, Andrea. 2020b. "[Charley Pride Deserved Better Than what Country Music Could Ever Give Him](#)." *Vulture*, 15 December.
- Williams, Monnica T. 2011. "[Colorblind Ideology is a Form of Racism](#)." *Psychology Today*, 27 December.