

The Three Great Alabama Icons

Drive-By Truckers

I grew up in North Alabama, back in the 1970's,
When dinosaurs still roamed the earth Speaking
Of course of the Three Great Alabama Icons
George Wallace, Bear Bryant and Ronnie Van Zant
Now Ronnie Van Zant wasn't from Alabama, he was
From Florida He was a huge Neil Young fan
But in the tradition of Merle Haggard writin'
Okie from Muskogee to tell his dad's point of
View about the hippies 'n Vietnam, Ronnie felt
That the other side of the story should be told.
And Neil Young always claimed that Sweet Home
Alabama was one of his favorite songs. And legend
Has it that he was an honorary pall bearer at
Ronnie's funeral such is 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'd be a parade. And me, I was one a' them
Pussy boys cause 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 either I came of age rebellin'
Against the music in my high school parkin'
Lot It wasn't till years later after
Leavin' 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'd 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 Lerline in his place and she won
By a landslide He's most famous as the
Belligerent racist voice of the segregationist
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South Standing in the doorways of schools and
Waging a political war against a Federal
Government that he decried as hypocritical And
Wallace had 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
Integration Wallace ran again in '62 as a
Staunch segregationist and won big, and for the
Next decade spoke out loudly He accused Kennedy
And King of being communists. He was constantly on
National news, representing the "good" people
Of Alabama And you 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
And when I first ventured out of the South, I was

Shocked at how strongly Wallace was associated
With Alabama and its people Ya know racism is a
Worldwide problem and it's been 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. And bands like
Lynyrd Skynyrd attempted to show another side of
The South One that certainly exists, but few
Saw beyond the rebel flag And this applies not
Only to their critics and detractors, but also
From their fans and followers. So for a while,
When Neil Young would come to town, he'd get
Death-threats down in Alabama Ironically, in
1971, after a particularly racially charged
Campaign, Wallace began backpedaling, and he
Opened up Alabama politics to minorities at a rate
Faster than most Northern states or the Federal
Government. And Wallace spent the rest of his life
Trying to explain away his racist past, and in
1982 won his last term in office with over 90% of
The black vote Such is 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 But 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 the Civil Rights cause
Fortunately for him, the Devil is also a
Southerner