

# Representation in the Americana Radio Chart

2018-2021





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A decorative graphic consisting of numerous thin, white, curved lines that originate from a central point on the left side of the page and fan out towards the right, creating a sense of movement and connection. The background is a solid, muted green color.

**“We create our world and its future through a process of connecting with each other, sharing knowledge and know-how, and building relationships – all through the process of collaborative conversation. When we consciously focus attention on ‘questions that matter’ — for our families, organizations, and communities — we are contributing to the evolution of the knowledge and wisdom that we need to co-create the future.”**

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# Representation has been a leading topic of discussion within the Americana music industry over the last decade.

Given the multiracial and multiethnic roots of American and roots music, journalists have centered much of their discussion on the underrepresentation of Black, Indigenous and artists of color (hereafter as BIPOC) in the Americana ecosystem. *“If Americana represents some broad definition of American identity,”* Giovanni Russonello wrote in a 2013 article for The Atlantic, *“then how does it manage to exclude the influence of so much music made here in the past 40 years? And where, you’ve got to wonder, are the artists of color? Can a genre that offers itself up as a kind of fantasy soundtrack for this country afford to be so homogeneous and so staunchly archaic?”*

In the years that followed, questions like these persisted, focusing on the absence of racial and ethnic diversity within the industry and at events, such as Americana Music Festival and Conference.<sup>2</sup>

The period of 2016-2019 was particularly notable for the increase in critical discussion of the place of BIPOC artists within the industry. The authors of many of these articles engaged in open dialogue with each other, with headlines capturing issues with the diversity and identity of the genre:

- “Americana’s Year Of Reckoning” (MTV)
- “Considering Diversity and Representation in Americana” (Nashville Scene)
- “Inside the Americana Genre’s Identity Crisis” (Rolling Stone)
- “Does Americana Have a Diversity Problem?” (Billboard)
- “Americana Music in Black and White” (No Depression)
- “Definition is Americana’s Greatest Challenge, Not Diversity” (Saving Country Music)

These authors analyzed Americana Music Award nominees and winners, looked at Americanafest showcase lineups, and grappled with definitions of what Americana is, presenting varying viewpoints about representation in Americana music.

These issues were addressed again in articles celebrating Americana music’s 20 year anniversary in 2019. Then, the narrative centered on the industry’s work toward inclusion and diversity. Writing for WMOT, Craig Havighurst reflected on the industry’s and fans’ knowledge of its blues foundation:

*“The most significant evolution of the Americana idea over twenty years has been its journey of inclusion and diversity. It’s been a complex, sometimes awkward dance, but roots artists and fans know in their bones that the blues is the foundation of American popular music and as essential to what we make and love as salt is to food.”<sup>3</sup>*

Diversity has, as Lynn Margolis wrote in American Songwriter, *“plagued the organization since it began giving awards in 2002.”* Reflecting on responses to the lack of representation amongst the 2018 Award nominees, she stated.

*“In sometimes heated discussions following 2018’s awards, voters and non-voters alike seem to agree that awards should be based on merit, not sex, race or sexual orientation. But with only six voted categories and only four nominees per award, perhaps the AMA should consider disallowing nominations in the same category in the year following a win, or establish a hall of fame for those who win instrumentalist, artist or duo/group awards three times. [...]”*

1 Giovanni Russonello, *“Why Is a Music Genre Called ‘Americana’ So Overwhelmingly White and Male?”* The Atlantic (1 August 2013).

2 See the works cited at the end of this report for a list of articles addressing representation in the Americana industry since 2013. Note that this list is not comprehensive.

3 Craig Havighurst, *“With Momentum And Growing Diversity, Americana Celebrates 20 Years,”* WMOT (8 September 2019).

4 Lynn Margolis, *“The Pendulum Swings — Slowly — For Diversity at the Americana Awards.”* American Songwriter (12 September 2019).

*“As one observer noted, change is a slow pendulum swing. This year, the awards moved closer than ever to where they belong — and that effort also made for one of the most exciting shows in recent memory. But just like America itself, that pendulum has still got some traveling to do.”<sup>4</sup>*

During the recent Covid-19 pandemic, coverage of the Americana industry and Americanafest painted a picture of progress. For *The Boot*, Rachel Cholst wrote “Building a Bigger Table: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Americanafest.”<sup>5</sup> In this article, Cholst offered an overview of efforts being made to create more opportunities for BIPOC, women and LGBTQIA+ artists leading up to the 2021 festival.

That year concluded with an article written for *NPR* by Andrea Williams, Marcus Dowling and Jewly Hight on “How Black women reclaimed country and Americana music in 2021.” Writing of 2021 as a year of reclamation, the authors point to the role of labels, publishers and radio (often overlooked in this discussion) in the lack of diversity in the industry:

**“If 2020 was the kickstart of a reckoning—of country/Americana music (and, really, all of America) being forced to come to terms with its history of racism and exclusion—2021 was the year of reclamation. Even as sustainable, systemic change remains elusive, Black women, in particular, have leveraged the power of streaming platforms and social media to bridge the chasms previously carved by labels, publishers and radio.”<sup>6</sup>**

With a community actively engaged in discussion and debate, and starting to claim that progress has been (or is being) made, it begs questions... How is Americana faring? What progress (if any) has been made? Has there been an increase in representation in the industry?

Given the central role that radio plays in distribution (for the industry) and artist discovery (for fans), this report presents a data-driven analysis of representation on the relatively new Americana Radio Top 50 Singles Chart from its inception in 2018 to 2021. In the hopes of contributing to this aforementioned and ongoing discussion, this report takes first steps toward an intersectional analysis of representation in the Americana music industry, centering the results on the rate at which songs by BIPOC and women artists appear on the Americana Radio Singles Chart and the space that they occupy.

As the music industry strives for transformative change in pursuit of equity, diversity and inclusion, it is imperative to take stock of systems in place in Americana music. With more understanding of what has occurred in the past, and what is happening now, more equitable systems can be developed. Radio is not only a vital tool for discovering new music and artists, it is also continuously measured via charts. More critically, radio airplay data is often used by industry professionals as a barometer for success and a tool for decision-making with regard to the promotion and support of artists. As such, it offers an opportunity to measure and take stock of radio as a facet of the Americana music industry system.

5 Rachel Cholst, “Building a Bigger Table: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at AmericanaFest,” *The Boot* (20 September 2021).

6 Andrea Williams, Marcus Dowling, and Jewly Hight, “How Black Women Reclaimed Country and Americana Music in 2021,” *NPR* (14 December 2021).

# Why do Americana radio research?

While there is ample research about the mainstream music industry overall, there is still a lot to learn about the way cultural values, social behaviors and business decisions play out across specific genres in the music industry. Assumptions about what fans want and what music fits in Americana exist, but there has been little data to support assumptions - many of which become self-perpetuated myths.

To “get real” and truly know the state of things in music, each genre must be studied in depth persistently to track and detect shifts that happen over time. There is a real opportunity to learn if genres share some of the practices that are making a positive impact, so professionals and genres can learn from one another.

This study does not measure a starting point, for efforts to increase representation in Americana music started years ago. Instead, it marks a milestone point of reference that measures representation of the industry over a 4-year period from 2018 thru 2021, a point in time that coincides with the start of the singles-driven radio chart.



*Jason Isbell and the 400 Unit by Alysse Gafkien*

# Industry context

Since its invention, radio has played an integral role in the distribution of music and promotion of artists and public personalities to music audiences. While it is outside of the scope of this report to provide an overview of American radio history, it is imperative to note that historically and still today, most radio charts track spins of individual songs while sales charts track performance of sales/streams.

Like in all genres, radio reform has been and will continue to be central to music industry evolution. To understand a radio chart, it is important to know its history, purpose, and methodology.

## Americana Music

In the 1990s, as commercial Country radio increasingly featured more crossover Pop Country hits, some industry executives observed there was less room in Country for classic and independent spirited artists. For a period, the music they made was referred to as “Alternative Country” or “Alt Country” (or even alt.country). That moniker did not sit right with folks making the music, and a group of industry executives saw fit to create a new genre — primarily a radio format at first — that separated the music from Country.

No Depression magazine launched in 1995, primarily serving the Americana community. At the time and prior to it, a primary method of communication in the Americana community was a listserv called Postcard2 (known as P2), operated out of Seattle by two KEXP radio professionals.<sup>7</sup>

In 1997, the first Americana gathering was presented by Gavin in Squam Lake, New Hampshire.

## Americana Music Association

At SXSW 1999, there was a meeting of industry professionals to gauge interest in the formation of an Americana-related trade organization. In October 1999, a facilitated retreat was held and the Americana Music Association was founded. The first Americana Music Association Convention was held in September 2000 in Nashville.

## Americana Radio Charts

In January 1995, the first Americana radio chart was published. That chart was organized by record label executive Rob Bleetstein and radio promoter Jon Grimson, and existed for 4 years before the Americana Music Association was founded. It was published by The Gavin Report, a San Francisco radio trade magazine founded in 1958. Radio stations reported to the chart voluntarily, submitting playlists with spincounts weekly. Some stations reported actual spins and some sent guesstimates if they did not have technology, systems or resources to track in detail. Stations would identify tracks in heavy, medium or light rotation as a measure of frequency.

<sup>7</sup> Barry Mazor, “[Booting up Alt.Country’s Online Dance](#),” Medium (1 Apr 2015); Steve S. Lee and Richard A. Peterson, “Internet-based Virtual Music Scenes: The Case of P2 in Alt.Country Music,” in *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual* (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2004).

When Gavin stopped publishing the chart in the fall of 2000, rock/pop publication Album Network agreed to take it over. They missed only 2 weeks of charts, and immediately picked up where Gavin left off utilizing the same chart methodology and process.

The sudden loss of Gavin illustrated to the Americana Music Association how fragile the chart may be if it depended on a media partner to publish it, and they launched their own competing chart. For a period of time, there were two Americana radio charts, and then Album Network agreed to print the Americana Music Association's chart. When Album Network went online only in 2003, Radio and Records published the chart until its final issue in 2009. After 2009, the chart continued to be published online only — on Americana Music Association's website — as it still is today.

Two things were consistent in all those years:

- The Americana radio chart was an album chart — meaning they tracked performance of Albums (aggregate spins of songs released on the same album), not Singles (spins by individual songs)
- The chart compiled airplay as reported by radio stations voluntarily

## Monitored Reporting

In 2017, Americana Music Association decided to move to a monitored chart, so they partnered with CDX - a radio distribution and promotion company who was already operating monitored radio "TRACtion" charts for Mainstream Country, Southern Gospel & Positive Country and other formats. CDX's other charts, like most radio charts, were focused on singles. So at that time, in addition to carrying Americana's albums chart forward, Americana's first Singles chart was created.

## Americana Radio Singles Chart

Launched in 2018, the Americana Radio Singles Chart focuses on ranking the popularity of singles based on radio airplay. This chart has been monitored since the beginning by CDX TRACtion via online stream of reporting radio station signals to capture weekly spin counts of both singles (for the Singles Chart) and albums (for the Albums Chart).<sup>8</sup>

As outlined on the AMA Radio Airplay Charts FAQ, the Singles Chart policy and method indicates:

*"Once a single enters the Top 50 it is protected until after 5 weeks of appearing in the Top 50, although not necessarily consecutive weeks (the single might appear 5 times over the course of 9 weeks). It is possible for a single to enter in and out of the Top 50 while it is gaining its legs, but starting on its 6th chart appearance the policy goes strictly performance based and any singles which then meet all of the following criteria will automatically go recurrent. Recurrent policy for a single occurs when current spins fail to meet a required spin threshold (65% of peak spins), there are two consecutive weeks of chart position decline and there are two consecutive weeks of spin decline."*<sup>9</sup>

Each reporting radio station is monitored over a seven day period from Tuesday morning 12:01am to the following Monday at 11:59pm. The AMA outlines rules for retaining reporter status on their website.

8 More information about the chart's rules and methodology, including a list of reporting stations and frequently asked questions are available on Americana Music Association's website here: <https://www.Americanamusic.org/Americana-radio>.

9 Learn about how reporting stations are monitored on the Americana Music Association website, <https://Americanamusic.org/Americana-radio>. List of reporting stations, <https://pages.e2ma.net/pages/12695/8192>.

# Known gaps and areas for future research

Americana radio has always been *album-oriented* and *artist-oriented* rather than *singles-oriented*, which impacts the way the industry promotes and programs music on the radio. Decision-makers do not just focus on promoting or programming singles, but instead they take an album-centric approach in their marketing strategies, and in decisions they make programming radio shows.

While that is true about Americana music, it is not true of most radio formats (genres). Since the ability to draw comparisons to other genres was a priority, this study focuses on analysis of the Americana Radio Top 50 Singles Chart. While this limits the ability to draw comparisons within Americana prior to 2018, it is a good starting point for this research. It still exhibits which artists received the most airplay via singles.

Additional study of the Americana Albums chart is recommended to track a longer period of time within Americana radio. (See more details and suggestions provided later in this report.) While the methodology of looking at singles in an album/artist oriented genre poses some limitations on understanding representation in the broader ecosystem, it is a start.



# Who we are - the researchers

In January 2021, an independent Americana artist posed the following question to manager, professor and researcher Michelle Conceison: *“Has the AMA or anyone outside done a study on gender parity in the top 50 and top 20 Americana radio airplay charts?”*

Not having an answer, Michelle asked Michele Rhoades and Jed Hilly at Americana Music Association if such a study had been done. It had not. With experience in media analytics and market/stakeholder research, but no experience studying radio charts beyond the usual tracking analysis managers do, Conceison agreed to give it a try - expanding the scope of analysis to go beyond just gender. Shortly after starting the work, she met Dr Jada Watson and invited her to join the study.

Michelle Conceison’s experience working directly with Americana artists and industry, and being an active daily part of the Americana music scene for over two decades, provided a familiarity with people, process, and instilled trust and goodwill from the start of the project. Dr. Watson’s experience studying Country music charts lent process and methodology to this study, making it possible to draw comparisons and see similarities and differences between genres. She also brought a perspective from outside the Americana community, which provided objectivity in analysis and warded off any bias Conceison may have from working in the genre/industry.

Most industry studies have historically been conducted by university professors and researchers analyzing industry data - with or without cooperation from music industry professionals. Historically, there was friction between academia and the industry. Researchers were often met with hostility from industry professionals who felt they had little use for the research being conducted, or fear that findings would negatively affect them. Fast forward to a music industry now led by internet and mobile native professionals, it is no longer deemed “uncool” to leverage data working in the music industry — rather, it is critical. Professors are not studying from afar — they are teaching while leading the industry through change happening in real time.

Additionally, social media has made it easier for researchers to connect with industry personally. During the pandemic, there was a boon of educational opportunities — virtual speakers series, conferences, and panel webinars rapidly connected people. While the world was shut down from gathering in person, we found new ways to collaborate remotely to learn and propel the music industry forward.

The two primary researchers who worked on this study are examples of academics who are also actively engaged in the music industry - in different ways.





**Michelle Conceison is a white, cisgender, LGBT+ artist manager, professor, and community organizer who lives and works in Nashville - on the traditional lands of the Shawnee, Yuchi and Eastern Cherokee people.** She founded artist management and marketing firm Mmgt in 2004. Mmgt currently manages Kyshona, The McCrary Sisters and Della Mae, and provides marketing services for many artists and organizations. She is a tenure-track assistant professor at Middle Tennessee State University, teaching artist management, music marketing, concert promotion, entrepreneurship and strategic planning for the arts.

Prior to music, she worked in digital media, leading teams at multiple global advertising agencies working on behalf of Fortune 50 clients. Michelle has served on the boards of Folk Alliance International (former President) and the International Bluegrass Music Association (former Secretary and Chair of their Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee). She leads mentorship programs for Women In Music (Global) and East Coast Music Association (Canada). Her fields of research include audience and industry stakeholder analysis, fair pay, marketing, media, merchandising, and leadership in music organizations. Learn more: [www.mmgt.co](http://www.mmgt.co)



**Dr. Jada Watson is a white settler scholar who lives and works on the unceded and unsundered lands of the Algonquin Anishinaabe First Nations.** She is an assistant professor of digital humanities in the School of Information Studies at the University of Ottawa. Principal investigator of the SSHRC-funded SongData project, Jada's research focuses on the role of market data and data-driven systems in the formation and evolution of genre categories. Her current project explores how the market data regime reinforce the white supremacist and patriarchal structures upon which the popular music industry was built.

Jada has published a series of public studies on representation in the country music industry with the Woman of Music Action Network, as well as a report prepared in partnership with CMT's EqualPlay campaign. Her research has received international press, and was cited in a brief submitted to the US Federal Communications Commission in response to the National Association of Broadcaster's proposal for further deregulation, as well as in the Recording Academy's Report on Inclusion and Diversity. Learn more: [www.SongData.ca/RadioData](http://www.SongData.ca/RadioData)

# Methodology of the study

From January 2021 through April 2022, Jada and Michelle met weekly to work their way through the data. Data was extracted from CDX's archive of Americana weekly and year-end chart reports. Access to CDX was provided by Jed Hilly and Michele Rhoades at the Americana Music Association, and technical support was offered by Joe Kelly and Mark Piland at CDX. The data extracted from CDX includes the top 50 charting songs every week between January 1, 2018 to December 31, 2021, amounting to more than 10,300 rows of data for the 927 tracks that charted in this four-year period. It is imperative to note that these songs are current singles - newly released tracks by contemporary Americana artists. The dataset does not include recurrent tracks – meaning, tracks that have been removed from chart contention because they have either reached their peak position or do not meet the conditions for singles.<sup>10</sup> The dataset also does not include what one might refer to as “gold” or back catalog tracks that are included in radio playlists. The dataset does include tracks that were “reactivated” in compliance with AMA policy. In this way, the dataset is not meant to capture the full picture of Americana radio programming, but the constantly evolving chart ecosystem.

Once the weekly reports were extracted from CDX, the data was cleaned for consistency and accuracy and each artist was coded manually - requiring research on every artist in detail in the process. Data was coded for 526 artists and 927 tracks in all, and the identity of the artist/ensemble was recorded.

The researchers acknowledge that there are more identity classifications in global cultures than appear in the data set. The following classifications were used when coding, based on their appearance in the data set:

## Ensemble Type

- solo, duo, group, featured +/- or multi-artist collaboration

## Gender identity

- cisgender female, cisgender male, female-led mixed gender ensemble, male-led mixed gender ensemble, nonbinary
- transgender was captured in a separate field, as a separate aspect of gender identity

## Race / Ethnicity

- Black, artists of color (Biracial, Indigenous, Hispanic/Latinx, Asian, Pacific Island and other), multiethnic/multiracial ensembles, white
- this was tracked both for groups overall and for leads/front people of groups

## Sexual Orientation (LGBT+)

- Gay or lesbian, bisexual, pansexual or other orientation, mixed orientation ensemble, straight or heterosexual

## Country of origins

- Name of country, mixed nationality ensemble

<sup>10</sup> For more details on recurrent chart rules, see <https://www.Americanamusic.org/Americana-radio>.

It is imperative to note from the outset that combining artists who are not white or Black together in one category is not ideal. To prepare this dataset, we referred to previous studies examining race and gender on *Billboard* and Mediabase charts.<sup>11</sup> 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 the standard and Biracial, Indigenous, and Hispanic/Latinx artists as an exception. Rather, we endeavor to ensure coherent and consistent analysis of the dataset. Furthermore, as will be clear in the following analysis, Black and Artists of color are significantly underrepresented in the Americana radio charts and combining artists in fewer categories means that their contributions are more visible within the visualizations. As such, it allows for a more relevant and meaningful discussion of the broader issues surrounding representation in Americana, while at the same time enabling comparability with previous research on other genres.



Jade Bird by Colin Lane

No assumptions were made about artists. All traits were documented and substantiated using credible sources, as indicated in language of the artist's official website, verified social media profiles, press releases, bios, and communications with media. This information was coded for both group leaders and members.

- An artist was only coded as LGBT+ if that facet of their identity was documented in a bio, interview, or article that is publicly available.
- If an artist's racial and/or ethnic background is documented and public, whether or not the public is largely aware, they were coded according to the racial or ethnic identity substantiated in the data set.
  - \* For example, Loretta Lynn is of Irish and Cherokee descent and Marty Stuart is part Choctaw.<sup>12</sup> While it is possible not all fans (and radio programmers) know these facts, both artists have actively promoted this facet of their backgrounds, so it is possible it has been known by industry and radio decision makers.
- A few exceptions were recorded in this area of the dataset - which may require alteration of coding in future studies.
  - \* For example, while it is documented that Rosanne Cash's mother was of mixed ethnicity including African American ancestors, this was only recently confirmed on a February 2021 episode of PBS's *Finding Your Roots* with Henry Louis Gates' Jr. Since the Americana music industry, fans and Cash herself would not have known this fact during the majority of the dataset, Cash was coded as white.

11 See Marc Lafrance, et al. "Race, Gender and the Billboard Top 40 Charts between 1997 and 2007," *Popular Music & Society* 41, no. 5 (2018) and Jada Watson, "Redlining in Country Music: Representation in the Country Music Industry," *SongData Reports* (March 2021). <https://bit.ly/SongData-RedliningCM-Mar2021>.

12 Loretta Lynn discusses her Cherokee heritage in chapter 3 of her autobiography *Coal Miner's Daughter*. Marty Stuart's Choctaw heritage is identified in several sources, including articles archived on the artist's website. See, for instance, David Price, "Marty Stuart: Channeling Crazy Horse, Custer, and Johnny Cash," <http://www.martystuart.com/ZArt-ConcRev-6-29-14.htm>.

The data was coded with future analysis in mind — recognizing as it becomes more culturally accepted to share aspects of identity with the public, some elements of the biographic descriptions of artists in the dataset may change. So while results showed 0 artists representing certain identities, those were kept in the dataset for the sake of future follow-up study.

In this report, “men” and “women” may be referred to when reporting observations regarding gender identity. In these instances, it is the writer’s intent to refer to cisgender men and cisgender women. While the data set was structured to be able to capture non-binary gender identities, there is one instance of an artist publicly expressing non-binary gender identity in this dataset. No transgender artists had songs on the Americana Radio Chart, suggesting that their music is underprogrammed at radio. These facts should not be read to suggest that there are no nonbinary or transgender artists in Americana music. On the contrary, it could be a result of artists keeping their identities private, or reflect that artists who have publicly disclosed those identities are not receiving significant radio airplay. The data was inconclusive on this, and warrants further study.

It should also be acknowledged that while this study strives to take an intersectional approach to studying representation in Americana radio, it is necessary to separate statistics at times to draw important conclusions. Also, it is true that some facets of identity that should be studied were not included in this report. For example, when coding the data about artist identity, the researchers did track if it was publicly known that an artist is disabled, but this data is not yet complete and at a point of being ready for inclusion in this discussion. The researchers would not want that to reflect any lack of care or concern about representation of disabled artists in Americana music. On the contrary, the lack of data suggests that either artists are keeping their disabilities private, or artists with publicly disclosed disabilities are not receiving significant radio airplay.

## Qualitative Input

When analysis of the data was nearly done, the researchers held a dozen informational conversations with Americana radio stakeholders via Zoom. These conversations helped the researchers ensure they were accurately interpreting the data and provided further understanding of some of the root causes that may be delivering results observed.

Stakeholders communicated with included Americana radio:

- Program Directors, Music Directors, DJs and Hosts
- Radio promoters working within record label structures
- Radio promoters working independently
- Artist managers representing Americana artists
- Americana recording artists

These were not official interviews, so there is no statistical data gathered from those conversations. But they did provide insight about dialogue that may be useful for the community discussing this report.

## Trigger warning

Before diving in, the researchers would like to acknowledge that the statistics that follow in this report might be triggering for some readers. Seeing this type of data can be difficult and upsetting. It is natural for anyone reading to relate the data to their own experiences. Feedback, questions, anecdotes, and suggestions are welcome. The researchers hope this data will foster dialogue, goal setting, policy revisions, and creativity in the music field, but before any of that can happen it must be acknowledged that this is difficult to look at.

# Findings

## Charting Artists and Songs

Over a four year period (2018-2021), representation of artists by race and ethnicity and gender identity remained relatively unchanged.

Of the 526 artists who had singles chart in the Top 50 during this period, cisgendered white men consistently dominated the Americana radio singles chart. Nearly all of the women on the Americana radio chart were white:

- 87.6% of artists on the chart were white
- 54.2% of artists were white and cisgender male

Nearly all of the women on the Americana radio chart were white

- 23.6% of artists on the chart were cisgender women (21.1% white women)
- 2.5% were BIPOC women (2.1% were Black women)

Among BIPOC artists, Black artists were most represented at 5.3% of the artists charting between 2018 and 2021. Of mixed gender duos or groups charting, the majority were white (12.1% of 14.5%).



## REPRESENTATION OF UNIQUE ARTISTS ON AMA CHART (2018-2021)

	MEN	WOMEN	MIXED GENDER DUOS/GROUPS	NONBINARY ARTISTS	
WHITE ARTISTS	54.2%	21.1%	12.1%	0.2%	87.6%
BLACK ARTISTS	2.7%	1.9%	0.7%	0.0%	5.3%
ARTISTS OF COLOR	2.9%	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%	3.3%
MULTI-ETHNIC ENSEMBLES	1.9%	0.2%	1.7%	0.0%	3.8%
	61.7%	23.6%	14.5%	0.2%	

\*526 unique artists charted over this four-year period on the AMA chart.

White artists were responsible for 86.8% of the songs that charted in this period, and 63.2% were by men. While there were fewer Black women artists charting than men (table above), they charted more songs in this study period (table below).

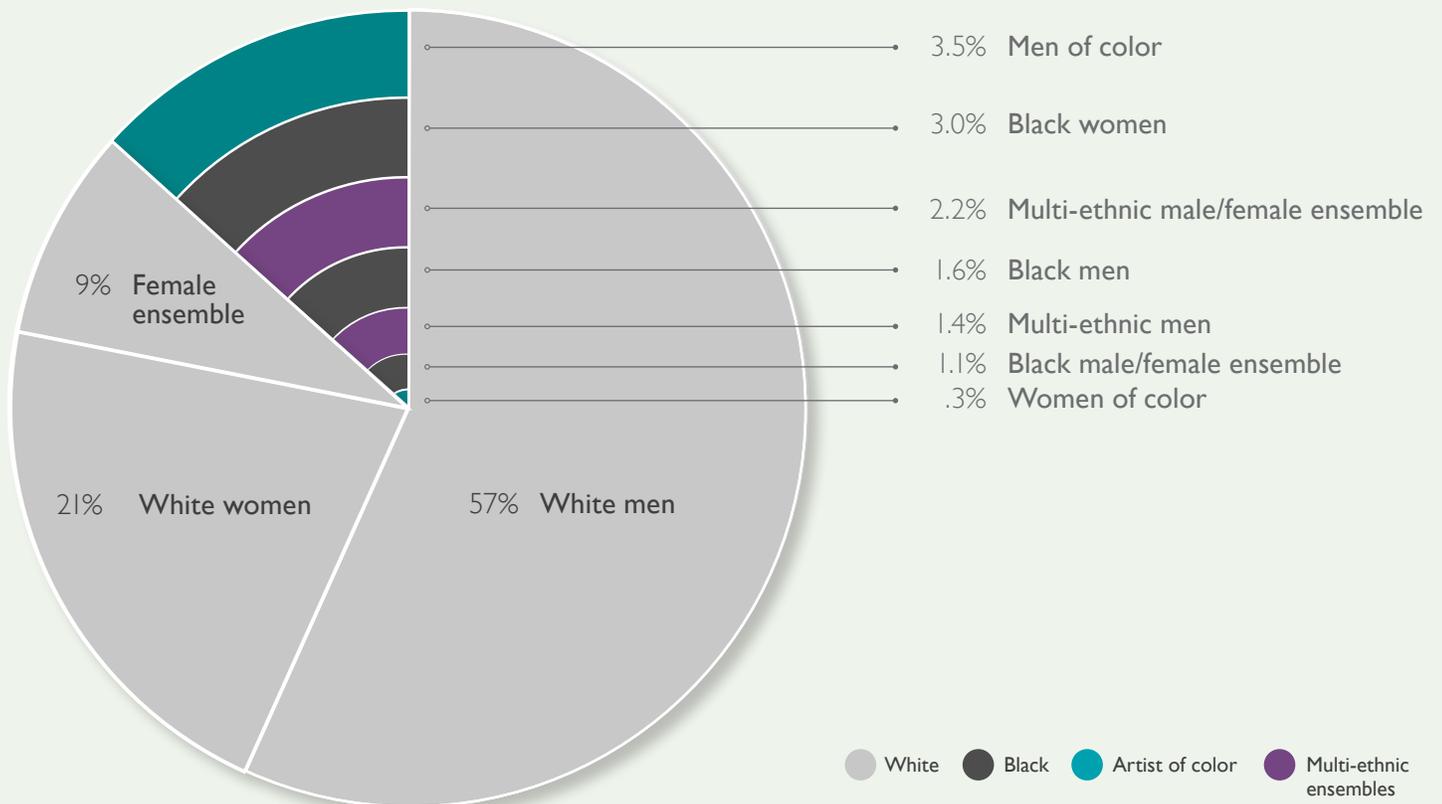
## REPRESENTATION OF WEEKLY SONGS ON AMA CHART (2018-2021)

	MEN	WOMEN	MIXED GENDER DUOS/GROUPS	NONBINARY ARTISTS	
WHITE ARTISTS	56.7%	21.3%	8.6%	0.2%	86.8%
BLACK ARTISTS	1.6%	3.0%	1.1%	0.0%	5.7%
ARTISTS OF COLOR	3.5%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	3.8%
MULTI-ETHNIC ENSEMBLES	1.4%	0.1%	2.2%	0.0%	3.7%
	63.2%	24.7%	11.9%	0.2%	

\*10,350 weekly songs charted over this four-year period on the AMA chart.

Graphing the data visually offers a greater perspective on representation of artists responsible for the songs on the AMA chart. The pie chart below reveals a racial and gendered hierarchy in which white men have the most songs on the chart over this four year period, with white women coming in second in number of songs charting. They represent less than half the space that men occupy, followed by white mixed-gender ensembles. Collectively, Black, Indigenous, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and Latina/Latinx artists are responsible for a combined 9.5% of the songs that charted from 2018-2021. This increases to 13.2% when including multi-ethnic ensembles.

## REPRESENTATION OF SONGS BY WHITE, BLACK, ARTISTS OF COLOR AND MULTI-ETHNIC ENSEMBLES



## Tracking Annual Representation from 2018-2021

So far, this report has looked at summed and averaged results from a 4 year time period, 2018-2021. In order to get a sense of representation in the Americana industry, it is important to look at how the data has changed over time. More can be learned by breaking out the data by year to see how songs are distributed across the period.

The following analysis looks at figures that count song titles. Not only do the findings here reflect those shared in the previous section, but the results for actual airplay (spins) showed nearly identical distribution as the percentage of songs charting. As such, the findings will be shared via two graphics for comparison, but will not be repeated here. Also note, the researchers would have liked to display race and ethnicity together with gender identity, but

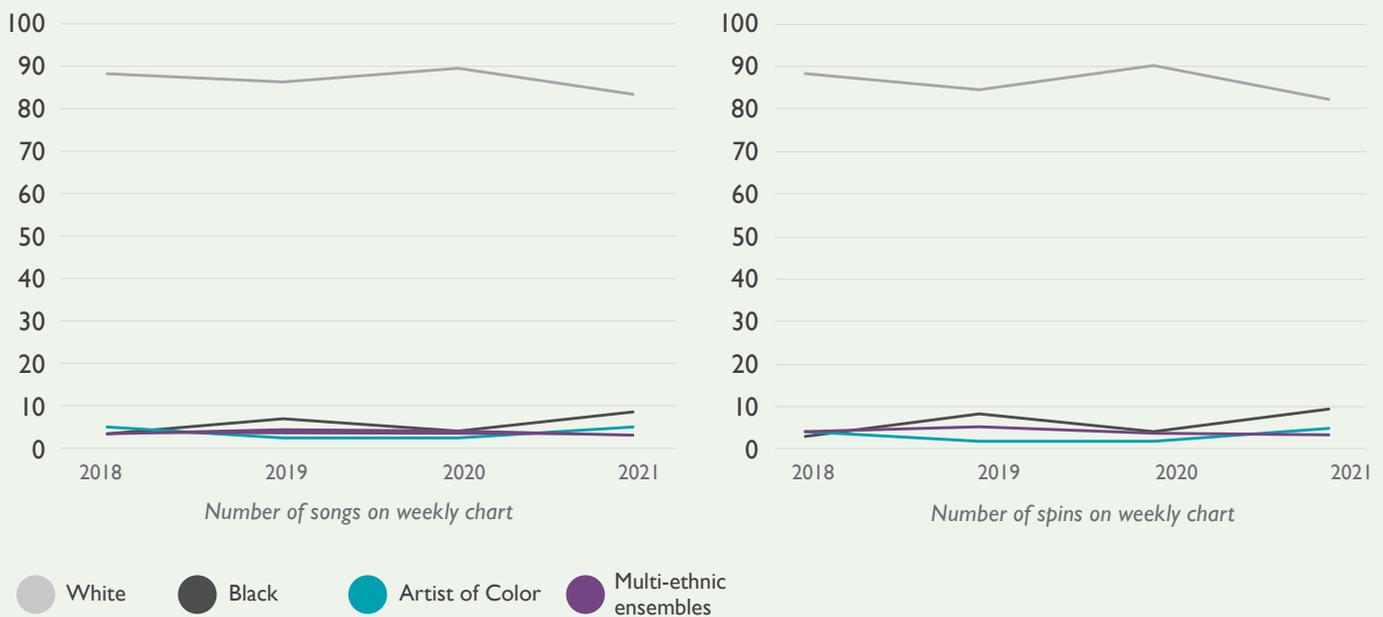
doing so rendered graphs difficult to read, so ethnic and gender identity are split out for the sake of readability. The researchers consider these facets of identity indelibly linked and this will be discussed in greater detail in the discussion section.

The line graphs below reveal the extent to which white artists have been privileged within programming at radio, leading to their dominant position on the charts each year in this period.

In summary:

- White artists averaged 88% of the weekly airplay chart, with a peak of 90% in 2020
- Black artists averaged 6%, with a low of 3% in 2018 and a high of 9% in 2021
- Artists of color averaged 3%, with a low of 1% in 2020
- Multi-ethnic ensembles averaged 6%, with a high of 7% in 2018

## DISTRIBUTION OF SONGS BY WHITE, BLACK, ARTISTS OF COLOR, AND MULTI-ETHNIC ENSEMBLES ON AMERICANA SINGLES CHART (2018-2021)

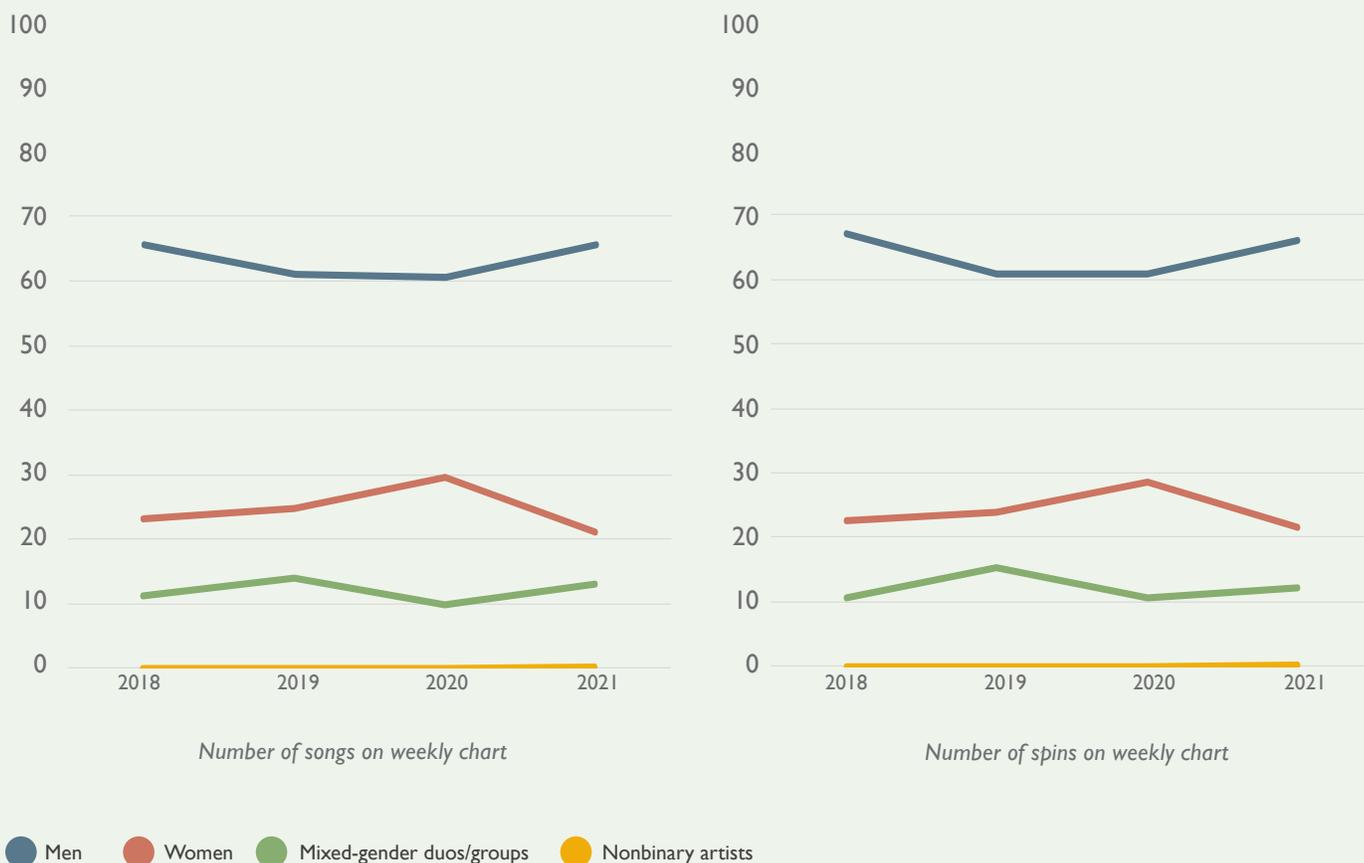


Songs by white artists hold an average of 86.7% of the songs charting on the Singles Charts, with an average of 86.2% of the spins. Airplay for songs by white artists peaked at 90% in 2020. Songs by Black artists increased from 3.0% to 8.6% of the spins across this four-year period - the only group of artists to see an increase. These statistics are nearly identical for spins (increasing from 3.1% to 9.6% between 2018 and 2021).

Turning our focus to representation of artists by gender identity, the same trends are observed with regard to both the overall trends for male artists, female artists, mixed-gender ensembles and non-binary artists (as described on the previous page) and when evaluating the data via charting songs or spin count. In summary, the findings reveal:

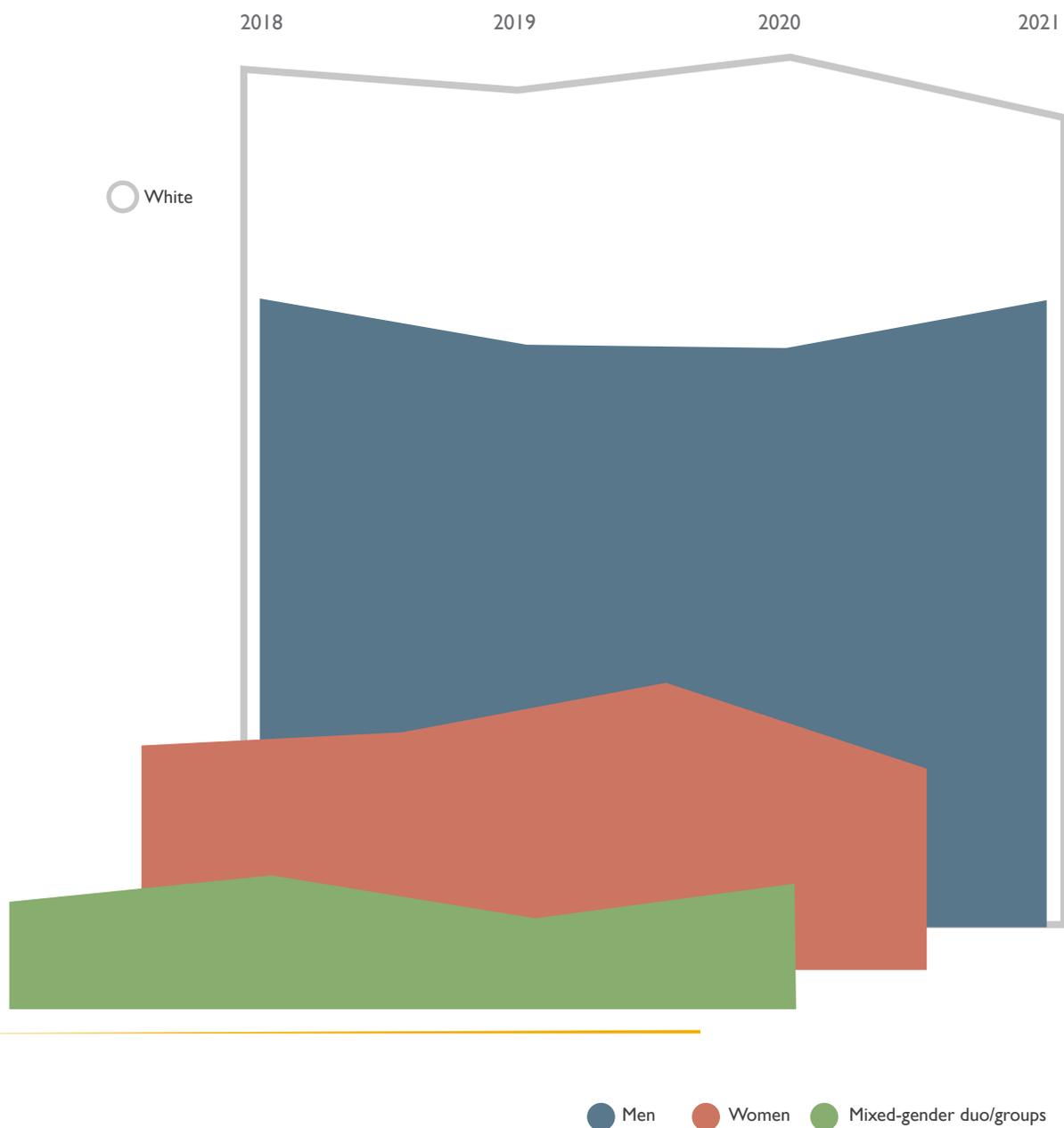
- Male artists averaged 63.2% of the weekly airplay chart, with a peak of 65.6% in 2018 and 2021.
- Female artists averaged 24.7%, peaking at 29.5% in 2020, dropping to 21.2% in 2021 (period low).
- Mixed-gender ensembles held a 12.0% average of this period, peaking at 14% in 2019.
- Nonbinary artists are completely absent from the chart until 2021.

## DISTRIBUTION OF SONGS BY WHITE, BLACK, ARTISTS OF COLOR, AND MULTI-ETHNIC ENSEMBLES ON AMERICANA SINGLES CHART (2018-2021)



*Caption: Songs by male artists average 63.2% of the weekly charts, with their highest years at 65.6% in both 2018 and 2021 (left graphic). Female artists average 24.7%, peaking at 29.5% in 2020, dropping to 21.0% in 2021 (a period low for female artists). Mixed-gender ensembles held an average of 12.1% across this period, peaking at 14.0% in 2019. Nonbinary artists are absent from the chart until 2021. Again, these figures hold true for evaluation of spins (right graphic).*

Taking these two perspectives together (tracking race and ethnicity and gender identity) reveals the continued privileging of white male artists, with all other artists (white women, BIPOC men and women, and nonbinary artists) receiving less exposure via radio charts. In this space, as with mainstream Country format radio, Black and of color artists are consistently the most marginalized within this industry space, receiving significantly less airplay to support and push their music onto and up the charts.



## Volume of tracks released, year over year

During the study period, a shift in how many tracks were released each year was observed, with the most tracks monitored in 2018 and 2021, and fewer releases monitored in 2019-2020. Still, the percentage of tracks reaching the Top 50 of the Americana Radio Singles Chart was relatively consistent, with a range of 3.0-4.3% of tracks released appearing on the chart. Interestingly, slightly more tracks charted in the two years with fewer releases.

While that percentage of tracks released charting may seem low, it is important to note that in Americana music every track on every album is counted in total tracks released. When a new album is released, the label, radio promoter, manager or artist submits album information to the Americana Music Association, and all tracks on the album are entered into the database for CDX to monitor airplay. That does not mean every track in the database is a single that is being specifically promoted for radio airplay, but rather tracks that are made available for radio to program if they wish to do so.

## Chart movement, chart position and diversity

Within the context of evaluating representation on radio charts, it is important to understand their movement through the charts: at what position do they debut on the chart, how quickly/slowly do they climb the chart, how long they remain on the chart (which can be affected by chart methodology), and where they peak (how high they get before exiting the chart whether because they reached their summit or were shifted into recurrent airplay). By the same token, it's critical to understand how many tracks an artist has on the chart at a given moment - and the impact that has on their number of weeks on the chart. The number of tracks appearing may be influenced by how frequently an artist releases, the popularity of the artist, the popularity of the song, and the level of rotation each track released receives (light, medium, heavy or recurrent).

The table below presents a breakdown of the top 20 artists by their number of weeks-on-chart between 2018 and 2021. Given the findings presented below, it is not surprising to see that the vast majority of the top 20 artists by weeks on chart are white men (65%), with the remaining 35% divided between white women and male artists of color (10% each), Black women and

ARTIST	WEEKS IN TOP 50
Charley Crockett	130
Jade Bird	124
Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real	122
Nathaniel Rateliff & The Night Sweats	113
Chris Stapleton	97
Jason Isbell and the 400 Unit	88
Tyler Childers	87
The Wood Brothers	87
The War And Treaty	86
Josh Ritter	84
Margo Price	82
Lake Street Dive	81
Yola	79
The Record Company	79
Hayes Carll	77
Willie Nelson	74
Hiss Golden Messenger	72
The Lone Bellow	71
Cody Jinks	70
Brent Cobb	68

mixed-gender ensembles (5% each), and multi-ethnic mixed-gender ensembles (5%). Thus, here, as previous, the deeper we drill into the dataset the same racialized and gendered division of the chart emerges.

The picture of representation changes in some ways when evaluating the top 20 artists by weeks spent at the #1 position of the chart. While the top of the chart is still dominated by white artists (85%), we see here that white women represent a higher percentage of weeks at #1 (20%), with 55% for white men. As previous, representation of Black (10%), of color artists (0.0%) and multi-ethnic ensembles (5.0%) remains low. Here, though, we see that two Black women are among the top 20 artists with multiple weeks at #1 of the singles chart. This is particularly important to draw out, as it contrasts representation on the mainstream Country charts, where Black women are excluded from participation.



Lake Street Dive by Shervin Lainez

ARTIST	WEEKS AT #1
Nathaniel Rateliff & The Night Sweats	27
The Lumineers	16
Jason Isbell and the 400 Unit	14
Robert Plant & Alison Krauss	14
Elvis Costello & The Imposters	11
Sturgill Simpson	11
Nathaniel Rateliff	10
The Avett Brothers	8
Hayes Carll	8
Josh Ritter	8
Yola	8
Brittany Howard	7
Grace Potter	7
Hiss Golden Messenger	7
Chris Stapleton	6
The Record Company	6
Margo Price	5
Jade Bird	4
Lucinda Williams	4
Tedeschi Trucks Band	4

Drilling into the data to identify the top 20 songs by weeks-on-chart, 85% (17 songs) are by white artists: 60% by men (12 songs), 10% by women (2 songs), and 15% by mixed-gender ensembles (3 songs). As depicted in the table below, three artists had multiple tracks that spent the most weeks at #1 on the Americana Singles Chart. All three acts were white groups or a multi-ethnic ensemble led by a white man. Collectively, the three bands are comprised of 19 men and 2 women. Among all the songs with most weeks at #1, only 2 were by Black artists (10%), both women, and both solo performers.

TRACK	TRACK / ARTIST	WEEKS AT #1
You Worry Me	Nathaniel Rateliff & The Night Sweats	15
Can't Let Go	Robert Plant & Alison Krauss	14
Gloria	The Lumineers	11
I Don't Mind	Sturgill Simpson	11
Unwanted Number	Elvis Costello & The Imposters	11
And It's Still Alright	Nathaniel Rateliff	9
A Little Honey	Nathaniel Rateliff & The Night Sweats	8
Diamond Studded Shoes	Yola	8
None'ya	Hayes Carll	8
Old Black Magic	Josh Ritter	8
Be Afraid	Jason Isbell and the 400 Unit	7
Dreamsicle	Jason Isbell and the 400 Unit	7
High Steppin'	The Avett Brothers	7
Sanctuary	Hiss Golden Messenger	7
Stay High	Brittany Howard	7
Life To Fix	The Record Company	6
Letting Me Down	Margo Price	5
Love Is Love	Grace Potter	5
Brightside	The Lumineers	4
Hard Case	Tedeschi Trucks Band	4

\* White cells signify artists who have multiple tracks with most weeks at #1

When we then consider the songs with the most airplay over this period, a different picture emerges. While this study did not focus primarily on spins, it is worth noting that in a four-year period over 1.4 million spins were tracked for songs on the chart, and the volume of spins increased each year.

Songs by the artists in the previous chart spent the most weeks on chart, but the songs listed in the following chart are those with the highest spin count in this four-year period. Note the differences in the names of artists on the chart.

While there is some overlap, the artist with the most weeks on chart (Charley Crockett) does not have a song on the list of songs with the most spins in this period, suggesting that his songs were kept in rotation but they did not transition into higher rotation slots in radio playlists. But we do see that artists listed in the previous chart do appear on both (like Nathaniel Rateliff, Yola, Jason Isbell and the 400 Unit, Margo Price). So while some artists with the most weeks on chart do not correlate to the most spun songs, we do see that established artists emerge and appear in both lists.



Yola by Joseph Ross Smith

The list of the tracks from the Americana Top 50 Singles Chart that had the most spins in the time period reveals a consistent trend with the increase in overall spins (two tracks released in 2018, four in 2019, seven in 2020 and 6 in 2021). As before, songs by white men received the most airplay (65% - 13 of the top 20 songs). Of the remaining songs with the most spins, 15% were by Black women (3 songs), 10% were by white mixed-gender ensembles (2 songs), and 5% were by a Black mixed-gender ensemble and a white woman (5% or 1 song each).

TRACK	ARTIST	YEAR RELEASED
All Your'n	Tyler Childers	2019
Can't Let Go	Robert Plant & Alison Krauss	2021
You Worry Me	Nathaniel Rateliff & The Night Sweats	2018
And It's Still Alright	Nathaniel Rateliff	2020
Diamond Studded Shoes	Yola	2021
Stay High	Brittany Howard	2019
Gloria	The Lumineers	2019
Be Afraid	Jason Isbell and the 400 Unit	2020
Bad Case	Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real	2019
A Little Honey	Nathaniel Rateliff & The Night Sweats	2018
Roots and Wings	The Wallflowers	2021
Letting Me Down	Margo Price	2020
Dreamsicle	Jason Isbell and the 400 Unit	2020
Survivor	Nathaniel Rateliff & The Night Sweats	2021
Old Black Magic	Josh Ritter	2019
Call Me A Fool	Valerie June	2021
Five More Minutes	The War and Treaty	2020
I Don't Mind	Sturgill Simpson	2020
Victory	The Avett Brothers	2020
Sanctuary	Hiss Golden Messenger	2021

\* White cells signify artists who have multiple tracks with the most spins

Drilling into this information annually, to view the top 10 artists by weeks-on-chart in each year of the period, we see some consistency in the repetition of familiar names, but also a shift in which artists are charting most. Seven acts were among the artists with the most weeks-on-chart for multiple years.

2018	2019	2020	2021
Nathaniel Rateliff & The Night Sweats	Hayes Carll	Jason Isbell and the 400 Unit	Charley Crockett
The Wood Brothers	Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real	Margo Price	Jade Bird
Jade Bird	Josh Ritter	Tyler Childers	Sturgill Simpson
The Record Company	Molly Tuttle	Nathaniel Rateliff	Yola
John Prine	The Lumineers	Marcus King	Aaron Lee Tasjan
Kacey Musgraves	Mandolin Orange	Chris Stapleton	Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real
Chris Stapleton	Mavis Staples	Kathleen Edwards	Valerie June
Lake Street Dive	Tyler Childers	Pokey LaFarge	Lake Street Dive
Willie Nelson	Tanya Tucker	The Avett Brothers	Paul Thorn
Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real	The Highwomen	Charley Crockett	Hiss Golden Messenger

\* White cells signify artists who appear in this table multiple years



Nathaniel Rateliff & The Night Sweats Live by/Retz Rogers

When looking at a list of all artists who have consistently reached the Top 50 on the Singles chart every year from 2018-2021, regardless of how high they peaked or how many spins they garnered, some new names appear that were not on the other lists. However, the statistics shift closely to the overall picture discussed in the previous chart with white men at 66.7% and white women at 20.0% (totaling 86.7% overall - again, as described previously).

While earlier we observed that songs by Black women figured into discussion about weeks and airplay in the #1 position, they are absent from the annual tracking of artists with the most weeks on chart between 2018-2021 collectively. This suggests that songs by Black women have benefited from

radio support that propels their songs to the top of the chart, but not the consistent and sustained support that would allow their songs to chart in greater numbers or for longer periods of time, thus giving their music more exposure via radio programming over time.

The only sustained representation of Black artists in terms of weeks on chart is for the husband-wife duo The War and Treaty, who (with the exception of 2019) have consistently remained within the longest charting artists of this four-year period. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the first table presented here, Charley Crockett has likewise been a consistent presence on the charts, increasing from 13 weeks on chart in 2018 to 57 weeks by 2021.

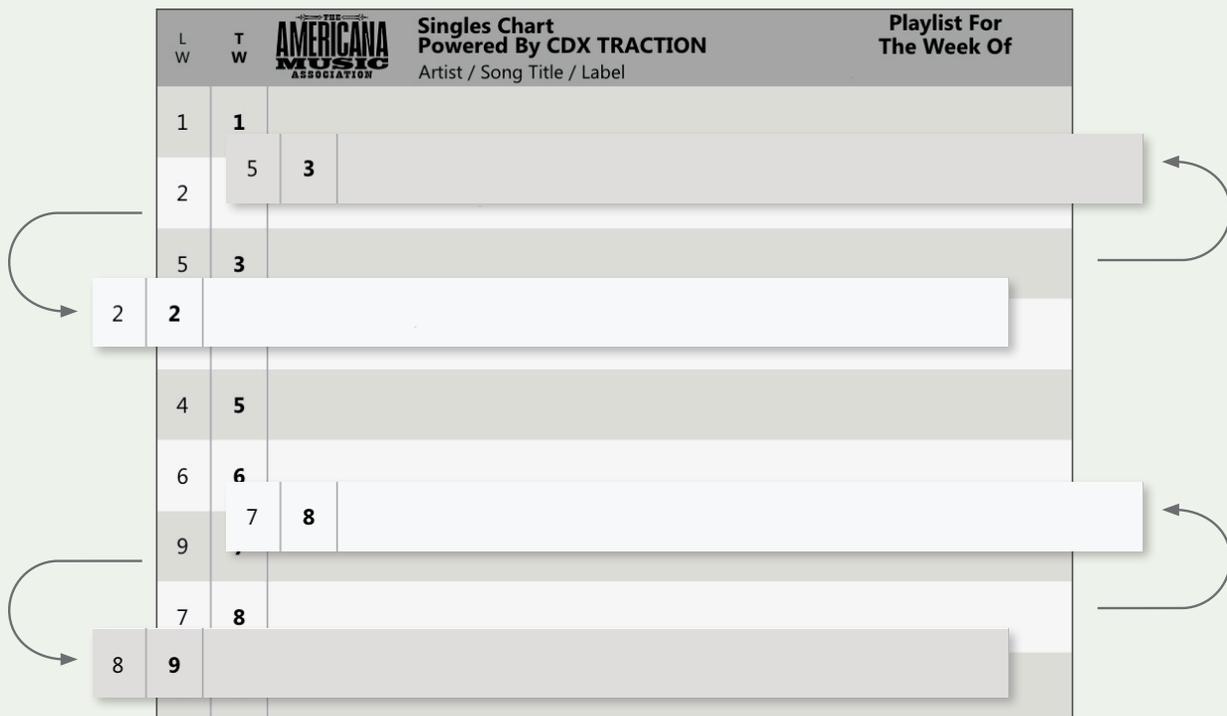
WEEKS ON CHART BY YEAR	2018	2019	2020	2021
Charley Crockett	13	24	36	57
Jade Bird	47	24	7	46
Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real	37	45	5	35
Tyler Childers	1	35	49	2
The War And Treaty	30	10	27	19
Josh Ritter	17	40	18	9
Hiss Golden Messenger	12	27	4	29
The Lone Bellow	10	5	33	23
Cody Jinks	18	17	22	13
Grace Potter	13	27	19	9
Aaron Lee Tasjan	15	8	7	36
The Band of Heathens	17	5	23	8
Sam Morrow	32	2	12	4
Cordovas	4	4	19	22
Samantha Fish	1	13	10	15

While the preceding data focuses primarily on the artists and songs at the very top of the Americana radio chart, the top artists do not tell the full picture of what is happening on the chart.

Within this context, histograms offer an opportunity to graph more than just the very top songs according to their peak position on the chart over this 4-year period. This method of visualization was incorporated into SongData’s reports on gender and racial inequity in mainstream Country format radio as a way to detect trends for songs by BIPOC artists and women via their peak positioning in chart history.<sup>13</sup> It is also possible to observe trends about songs that merely make the chart but do not climb, songs that debut at the top and the rate at which they stick or fall, and the like. The way songs move on a chart can indicate the breadth of music the radio format welcomes, the health of labels’ and artists’ businesses/their ability to release new material, the way in which “stars” dominate the genre, etc.

Histograms can be graphed by 10-position “bins” (groupings of 10 chart positions), and then compare their peaks by gender identity or race and ethnicity. It is a useful way to learn more about the space that songs various artists occupy within the ecosystem - and the rate at which they peak in the top positions or peak and exit through the bottom of the chart. The following histogram reviewing Country Airplay charts in 2019 illustrates what is commonly seen in a radio chart position histogram, and it offers a point of comparison for what is observed in Americana’s Track chart around the same period.<sup>14</sup>

Chart studies and market research have shown that the majority of songs in radio peak in the top 10 and back 10 positions, with the bins in between functioning as “pass-thru” positions on the climb and descent.<sup>15</sup> Some scholars and radio professionals theorize that some songs that enter the charts in those bottom 10 positions do not have the momentum to move higher, that simply debuting on the chart inside of the top 40 positions is a path to greater longevity and peak positioning on the chart.

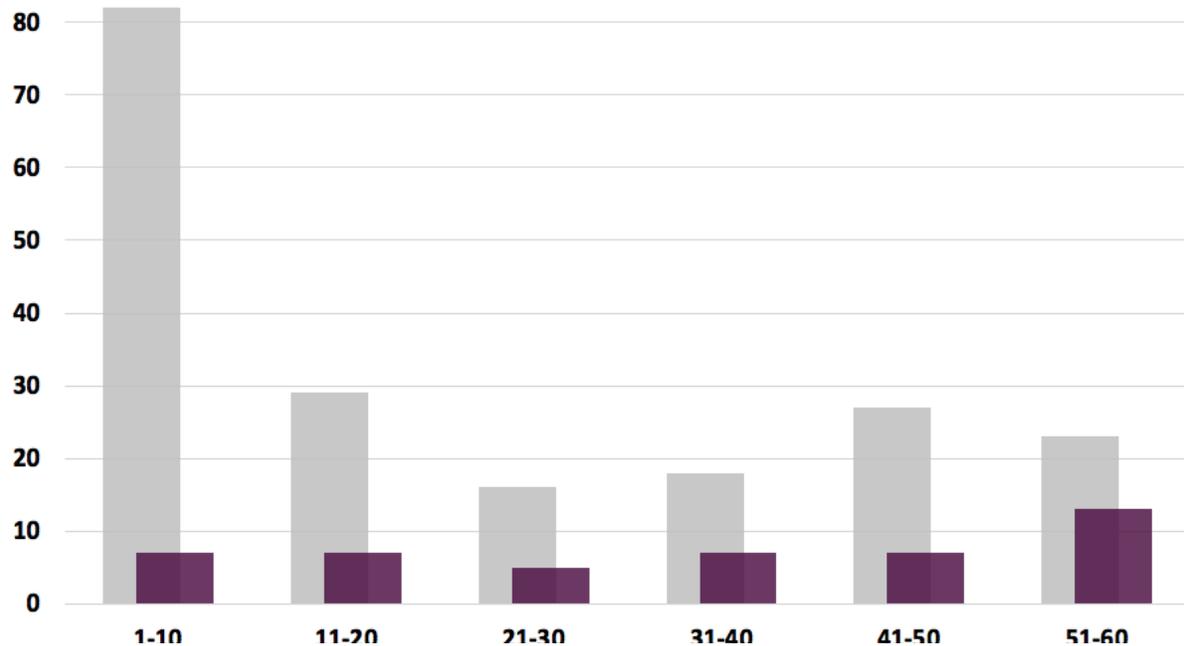


13 This method of visualizing representation was first used in Watson’s *SongData Report* on “Gender Representation on *Billboard’s* Country Airplay Chart: A Study of Weekly Charts from January 2018 to July 2019,” (August 2, 2019), prepared in consultation with the Woman of Music Action Network. <https://bit.ly/SongData-Billboard-Aug2019>.

14 See Jada Watson, “Gender Representation on Mediabase’s Yearend Country Airplay Reports from 2010-2019,” *SongData Reports* (February 2020), prepared in partnership with CMT’s EqualPlay Campaign. <https://bit.ly/SongData-EqualPlay-Feb2020>.

## FREQUENCY AT PEAK POSITION

Frequency of songs by men and women at their peak position on Country Airplay charts



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SongData

The above example shows songs by male and female artists on the Country airplay charts, as published in a SongData's report prepared in partnership with CMT's EqualPlay campaign.<sup>16</sup> Clearly depicted, the Country chart conforms to this trend of the top 10 and bottom 10 having the highest percentage of songs, but gaps within the bins were detected when data on gender was cross-referenced.

Looking at that chart renders it easier to conceptualize hierarchical ranking and to consider the space songs by historically marginalized constituencies occupy within the ecosystem. The following questions emerged through this study:

- Do they peak within the top positions? If so, by how much?
- Do they linger in the middle of the pack? For how long?
- How long do tracks stay on the chart? What does that signify?

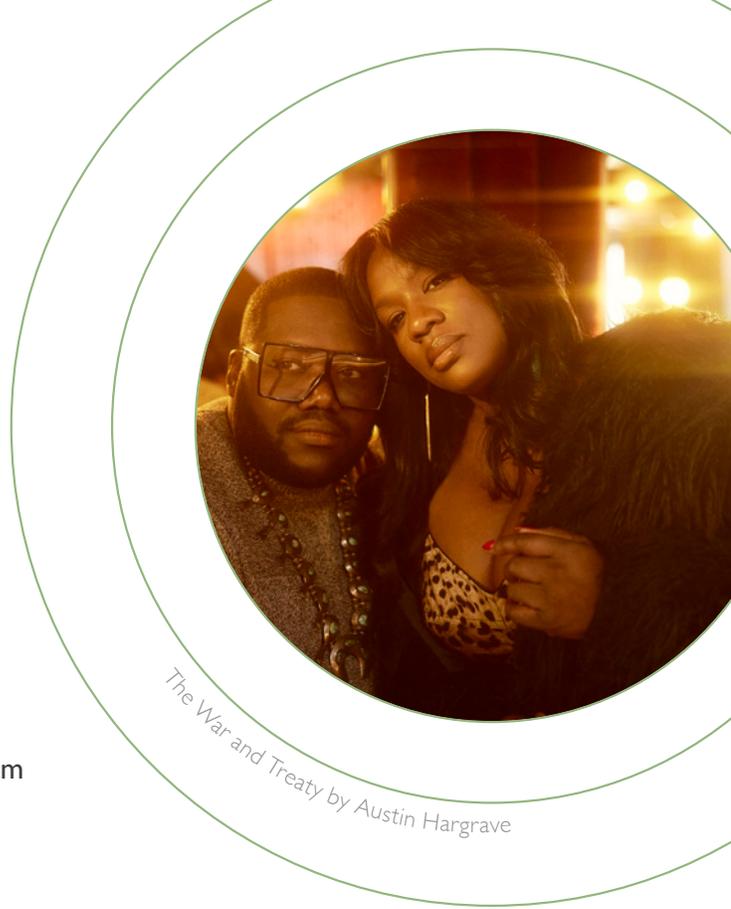
15 See Will Straw, "Mediality and the Music Chart," *SubStance* 44, no. 3 (2015) and Jada Watson, "Billboard's 'Hot Country Songs' Chart and the Curation of Country Music Culture," *Popular Music History* 13, no. 1-2 (2020).

16 See Jada Watson, "Gender Representation on Mediabase's Yearend Country Airplay Reports from 2010-2019," *SongData Reports* (February 2020), prepared in partnership with CMT's EqualPlay Campaign. <https://bit.ly/SongData-EqualPlay-Feb2020>.

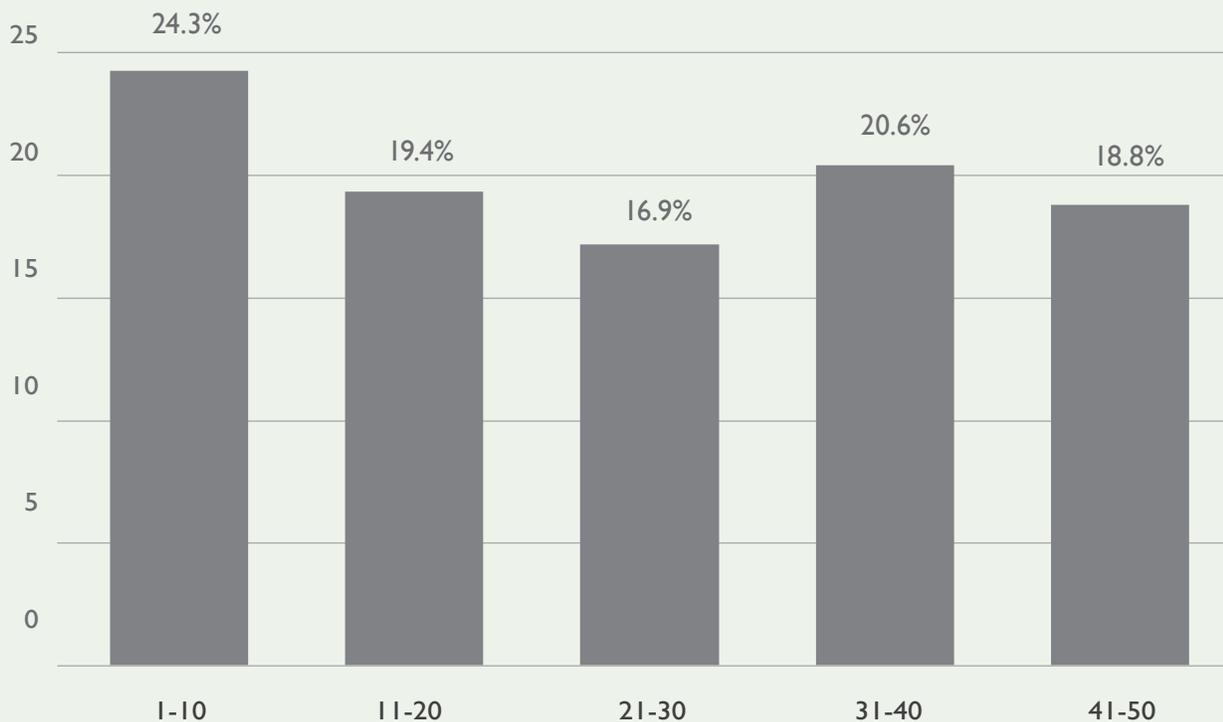
A basic histogram of the Americana charts from 2018-2021, without accounting for diversity, revealed something interesting and different from what has been observed in mainstream Country music:

- There was relatively even distribution across the 10-position bins of the chart.
- 24% of songs that charted climbed and peaked in the top 10 positions, with relatively even distribution across the 2nd, 4th and 5th bins, with the fewest songs peaking between 21-30.

These findings suggest a kind of equilibrium in programming, one that is not centered on pushing singles up a chart (like mainstream Country music). Instead, these findings seem to correspond to the understanding of the industry as one that is album/artist-centered, wherein program directors foster a culture that prioritizes artist and industry-development over movement and churn of singles.



## WHAT WE ARE SEEING IN AMERICANA RADIO

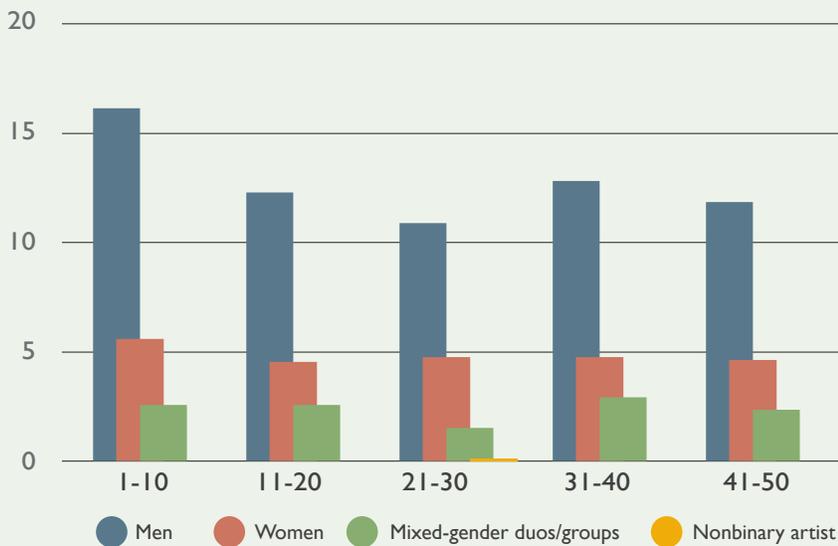


*Distribution of singles by their peak position on Americana Radio Singles Chart. Much more even distribution across the 10-position bins than other formats, but the trend holds true that the highest percentage peaks in the top 10 (24.3%) and drilling deeper shows the 4.5 songs peak at No. 1 (the highest of the 50 positions).*

## So what happens when we drill into this data to consider the identity of artists?

A histogram that visualizes this same data by gender identity and by race and ethnicity of artists reveals nearly equal distribution of songs by women (around 5%) peaking within each bin. Songs by men have the highest representation in the Top 10 (like women) but they have about 10% (100) more songs in the top 10 than women. When looking at race/ethnicity, dips were observed in the same bins as in gender identity, but songs by Black artists hover at around 1.5% of each bin (except for positions 21-30, at 0.6%).

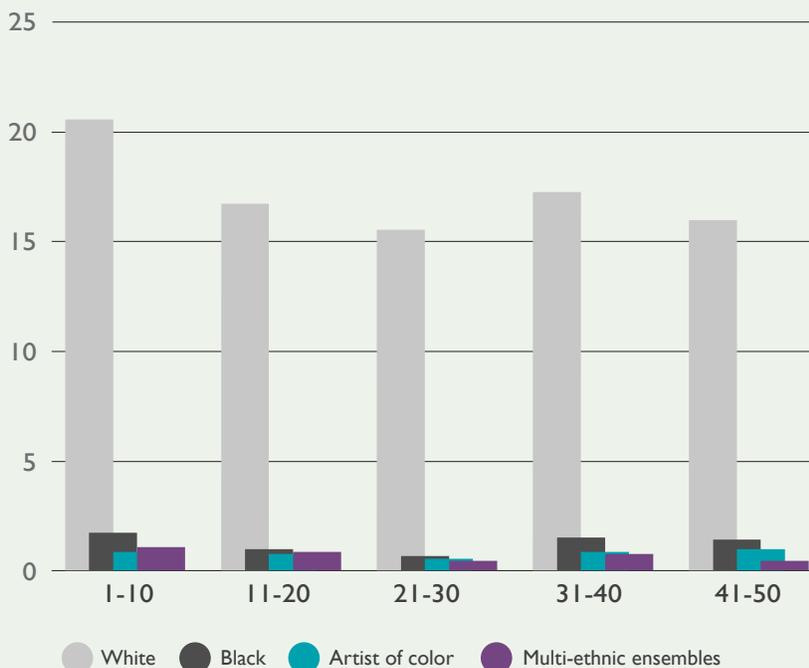
## REPRESENTATION BY PEAK POSITIONS ON AMERICANA SINGLES CHART (2018-2021)



226 singles peaked in the Top 10 (24.3% of the charting songs), 42 of which (4.5%) peaked at #1

52 singles by women peaked in the Top 10 (41 by white women, 11 by Black women)

16 singles by Black artists peaked in the Top 10 (11 by women, 3 by men, 2 by a mixed-gender duo).



To summarize the results of evaluating the chart by peak position, the following can be observed:

**42 Songs peaked at #1**

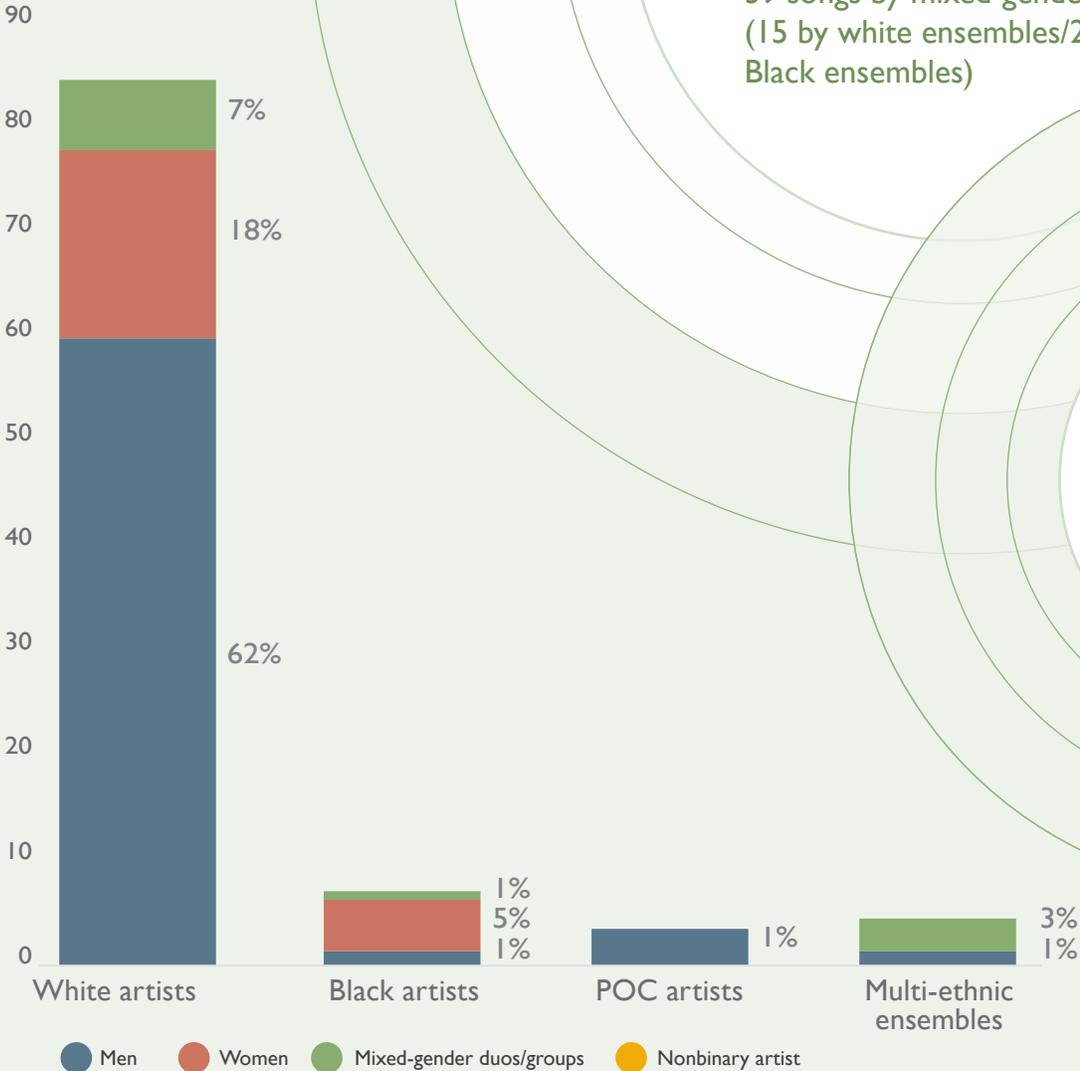
- 26 songs by white men
- 8 songs by women (5 white women/3 Black women)
- 8 songs by mixed-gender ensembles (5 by white ensembles/3 by multiethnic ensembles)

**226 songs peaked in the Top 10 (of 526 total that charted)**

- 150 songs by men (140 by white men/3 by Black men)
- 52 songs by women (41 by white women/11 by Black women)
- 39 songs by mixed-gender ensembles (15 by white ensembles/2 by Black ensembles)

**Only 16 songs by Black artists peaked in the Top 10**

- 3 songs peaked at #1, all women



## Labels in the Americana radio landscape

The weekly chart reports include the names of record labels responsible for releasing the albums and tracks on the chart, offering the opportunity to evaluate representation beyond airplay and chart positions to consider the label, distributor and promotional ecosystem at large. While this information is not always reported in a uniform way, the data was manually cleaned for analysis.

It is worth noting that sometimes distributors or parent companies appear in the Label field of data. For example, Concord and Thirty Tigers appear in many instances of other labels appearing on the chart, either as parent company or distribution/label services partner.

Effort was made to maintain an ability to look at labels individually and collectively within their label groups, recognizing that each company has a different approach to radio servicing and promotion. This is important because sometimes labels within label groups have individual radio promoters or promotion teams, and sometimes the same promotion team serves the whole label group.

### Labels in the Top 50

- 290 record labels had at least 1 track appear in the weekly Top 50 Americana Radio Singles Chart from 2018 thru 2021
- 18 labels (6.2%) had more than ten tracks hit the Top 50 representing 41.5% of all tracks in the Top 50
- 5 labels (1.7%) accounted for 20% of charting songs in the Top 50
- 160 labels (55.2%) had only 1 track hit the Top 50 in that time period

### Labels with >10 Tracks in the Top 50:

45 New West	21 Concord (Concord)	11 Loma Vista (Concord)
36 Yep Roc	19 Anti-	11 Oh Boy (Thirty Tigers)
34 Rounder (Concord)	19 Compass	10 Columbia
32 Fantasy (Concord)	15 Thirty Tigers	10 Glassnote
25 Dualtone	13 Nonesuch	14 Soundly
22 ATO	12 Legacy (Sony)	10 Southeastern (Thirty Tigers)

### Labels in the Top 10

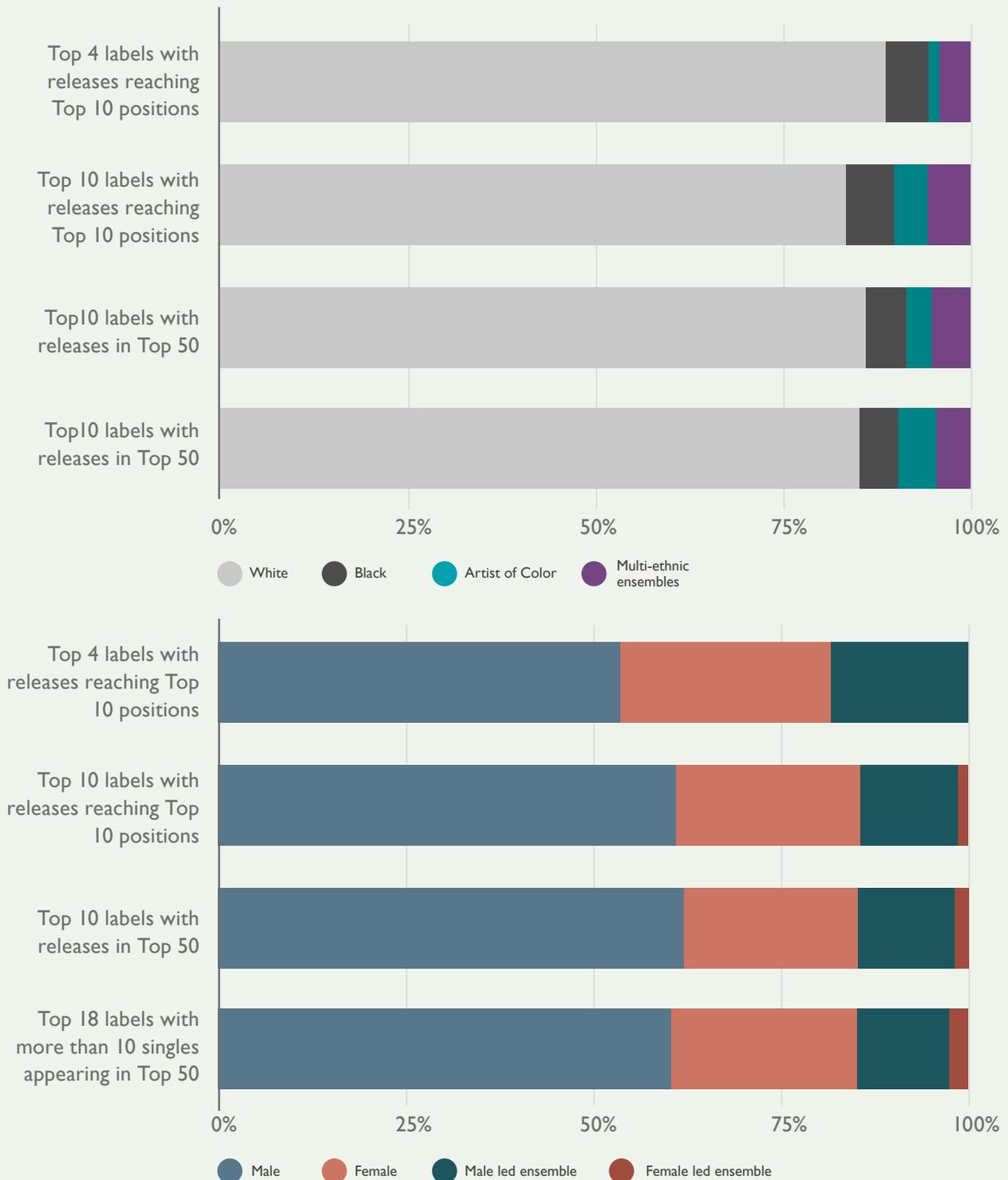
- 84 unique labels had at least 1 track appear in the Top 10 of the Americana Radio Singles Chart
- 10 labels had more than ten tracks hitting the Top 10
- 4 labels accounted for 25.7% of Top 10 charting songs
- 49 labels had only 1 track hit the Top 10 in that time period

### Labels with >10 Tracks in the Top 10:

16 Dualtone
14 Fantasy (Concord)
16 New West
10 Rounder (Concord)

The data again shows relatively consistent trends from multiple vantage points. Whether looking at the top labels in the Top 10 positions or the top labels in the Top 50 positions, artists were predominantly white (ranging from 83.3%-88.7%) and predominantly male (71.8%-74.7%).

## RACE/ETHNICITY REPRESENTATION OF TOP LABELS



# Discussion

Reviewing the data from various perspectives, it is clear that a racial and gender hierarchy exists — wherein most of the charting songs are by white men, followed by white women and white mixed-gender ensembles and collaborations, followed then by Black artists, artists of color from other ethnic backgrounds, and multi-ethnic ensembles.

Results observed in this study are very similar to trends that have been observed in mainstream Country music,<sup>17</sup> with one major difference. While Black artists also make up 4-5% of the Country airplay reports, Black women are nearly absent from the format. In Americana radio, however, Black women are nearly equal to or have greater representation than Black men. In some ways, this begs the question “What is different in Americana?” though one might also wonder if Black women are more likely to pursue careers in Americana having been blocked entirely out of Country music. Conclusions about this cannot be drawn from the data in this study, but they are worthy of further inquiry.

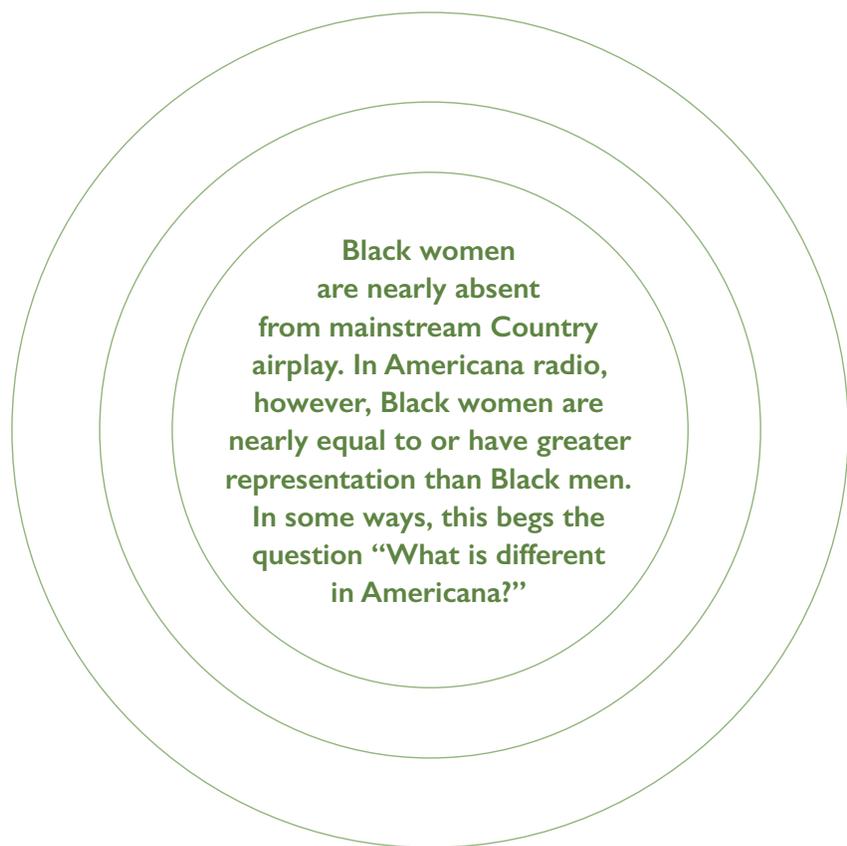
Perhaps the most important takeaway, is how very low the percentages of representation are - and that there is a lot more work to be done to improve representation of Black artists - male, female and nonbinary alike - in Americana radio.

Other observations:

- BIPOC acts charting on Americana radio were almost always solo acts.

When people of color appeared in bands, they were usually in multi-ethnic ensembles, not in bands made up entirely of BIPOC artists and musicians.

Looking at the data other ways reveals and provides more visualization of the racial and gender hierarchy observed in Americana radio 2018-2021.



<sup>17</sup> Jada Watson, “Redlining in Country Music: Representation in the Country Music Industry,” *SongData Reports* (March 2021). <https://bit.ly/SongData-RedliningCM-Mar2021>.

## Pandemic Impact on Releases

For the sake of analysis, March 2020 thru December 2021 was considered the “pandemic period” when analyzing the data to determine the pandemic’s impact on albums released. It was natural, when observing the fluctuation in representation of women on the chart, to ask if that was due to women faring better at radio, or if women were releasing more or fewer albums each year.

Questions that arose included:

- Were more female artists than male choosing to hold back albums?
- Were they planning to but ultimately unable to record in the timeline envisioned?
- Were record labels more or less likely to encourage artists to release based on their gender, race/ethnicity, or other facets of identity, versus holding albums for release after the pandemic?

Other research has shown that within this period women – especially women of color – were made responsible for caregiving and had to leave jobs and plans and so what impact does the pandemic have on women within the industry in this period.<sup>18</sup> Could that have had an impact on the number of albums and singles released by female artists and artists of color?

While it was not possible to answer all of these questions within the data collected for this study, it was possible to look at how many singles were tracked as being released in the timeframe, compared with how many charted.

From 2018-2021, the Americana Music Association tracked 29,537 tracks being released. Of those, 3.09% of tracks appeared on the Top 50 Singles Chart. Over the four year period, the number of tracks appearing on the chart ranged from 3.01% to 4.3%. While this figure might seem low, it is important to note that when an artist releases a new album, all tracks of the album are included as new tracks being released in Americana Music Association’s database — not just singles promoted individually at radio, which is customary in other singles-oriented genres.

# Looking to the future

## Additional study about radio

For further understanding of radio as a key cog in the system of the Americana music industry, it will also be imperative to study the Year End Albums Charts to offer more historic perspective than was possible in this data set. Doing so will allow analysis for a longer period of time, which will help contextualize the four years of singles airplay evaluated in this study against the landscape of Americana’s nearly 30 years of existence.

Given the unique album/artist-oriented nature of Americana, it would be helpful to develop a method and process to study both the singles and albums charts on an ongoing basis — to measure if efforts made to increase inclusion are having impact at radio.

It is important to remember this study only looks at radio airplay charts, just one piece of the Americana promotional puzzle. Other data sets would be needed to offer a more holistic view of what is happening in this industry. Notably, it would be beneficial to consider the following areas of study:

- Logs counting the volume of album and single releases from the same period would enable us to consider the label-to-radio-to-charts pipeline
- Sales and streaming data would allow us to observe correlations between radio and commercial impact, as well as hypothesize economic impact - both for record companies and artists
- Festival and concert booking data might be a whole other area of potential study
- Deeper dives into specific radio stations and record labels would help shed light on the impact of differences in the way these key players are making decisions and investments

8 PwC, “COVID-19 is reversing the important gains made over the last decade for women in the workforce,” *Women in Work Index* (2021), <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/news-room/press-releases/2021/women-in-work-index-2021.html>.

## The bigger picture - in radio and beyond

The data brings up many questions about how Americana music business systems are structured and operate. In order to unearth active steps that Americana music industry professionals can take to make a more evident difference than has been observed thus far, community dialogue will be needed.

### QUESTIONS ARISE ABOUT TOPICS INCLUDING:

The practices of charting labels, and what they do to successfully gain chart positions

The criteria radio programmers use to determine what music gets added, spun, and what is spun in heavy rotation

How labels choose which artists they sign

How radio music directors track representation, and how they go about conversations about representation with DJs, producers and other radio staff

What factors influence how frequently artists release new music, and whether some artists are more resourced financially to record and release new material more frequently

How chart results are impacted by inclusion of Triple A radio reporting (ie stations that have significant “crossover” reach, but do not program 100% Americana music)

Which releases labels dedicate radio promotion resources to

How many singles are serviced per album for artists on a label’s roster

How chart results are impacted by specialty programming (ie shows that might have smaller, niche loyal listening audiences but only program Americana music in 1-3 hour time blocks once or twice per week)

The reliance of radio station programmers (programming directors, music directors, producers and DJs) and radio trackers (CDX and Americana Music Association staff) on radio promoters and publicists for information about new releases

Hopefully this report will help members of the music industry community reflect on current practices and policies in place in radio, and share ideas for next steps that can be taken in pursuit of equity and representation.

# Gratitude for cooperation

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The researchers would like to thank the administrators and faculty at University of Ottawa and Middle Tennessee State University who have supported this project, and express hope that our students will engage in follow up research to this study.

While this study was conducted by independent researchers of their own volition, and it was not commissioned by, conducted by, or paid for by the Americana Music Association, it is important to note that the experience of working with Americana Music Association on this study was very positive. The organization was patient with the timeline of volunteer research, and was genuinely curious, engaged and receptive to hearing results. The AMA provided access to data and reports whenever they were requested, and showed a great deal of trust as we carried out conversations with their members, board members, committee members and partners. The researchers were also given an opportunity to meet

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All of this support from the Americana Music Association, their volunteers, partners and members added a sense that this research was welcome in the Americana Music community, and that there appears to be a genuine interest in and level of concern about the state of diversity and equity, and ways to improve it.

For this genuine cooperation, the researchers are grateful - and we hope other music genre organizations will become mutually invested in research like this, and actively work with researchers to find new insights.

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