

**Poor Man's Copyright: Intellectual Property and Cultural Depictions  
of the White Working-Class in American Popular Music**

Jason Lee Guthrie, Clayton State University

The growing literature on cultural depictions of the White working-class in American popular music has touched on issues of copyright, compensation, and residual ownership of song rights. This study expands upon existing work by conducting case studies on three influential figures in American music history: Stephen Foster, Woody Guthrie, and Phil Walden. Though each of these figures produced popular music in different historical and cultural contexts, the music they produced depicted, and was marketed to, the White working-class.

Interestingly, each of these figures also struggled to effectively assert and manage the copyrights in their respective works, both within formal music industry structures and to their audiences. By situating White, working-class musicians as simultaneously less privileged than industry elites and more privileged than other marginalized groups, this study may help to illuminate a greater understanding of the ways that race, gender, and class intersect in American popular culture.