

The 'Okie from Muskogee,' 50 Years Later

I have been asked many times what my favorite Merle Haggard song is. For me, that's a lot like asking a mother to name a favorite among her children. But if I had to answer (with gun to my head) I'd have to pick the "Okie from Muskogee," first recorded in July of 1969.

Haggard got the idea for the song when he saw a sign: "19 miles to Muskogee." He woke up his drummer. Gesturing to the sign, Haggard said, "They don't smoke marijuana in Muskogee." The drummer chuckled and responded with another activity in which they likely do not partake. The two men went back-and-forth in like manner for about 20 minutes....

We don't smoke marijuana in Muskogee
We don't take our trips on LSD
We don't burn our draft cards down on Main Street
We like livin' right, and bein' free

We don't make a party out of lovin'
We like holdin' hands and pitchin' woo
We don't let our hair grow long and shaggy
Like the hippies out in San Francisco do

And the song "Okie from Muskogee" was thus written. Haggard had grown up in nearby Checotah, Oklahoma and was fairly familiar with Muskogee.

Although the song was composed in a tongue-in-cheek, light-hearted, comical moment, many fans saw it as an inspiring answer to the hippie movement (a counter-counter-cultural anthem). Once when Haggard was performing for US troops overseas, several servicemen ran up on the stage upon the song's conclusion and asked Haggard to play it again. Haggard wound up playing it four times for the men, who cheered each

time Haggard sang, "We don't burn our draft cards out on Main Street."

If the late Merle Haggard could rise from the grave to write an updated version of the Okie from Muskogee, what would that be like? Consider the activities he mentioned in the original, in which the good people of Muskogee never did partake: smoking marijuana, "taking trips" on LSD, burning draft cards, growing one's hair long and shaggy, disrespecting the college dean, and "making a party out of loving." Merle was describing the average campus radical in 1969.

In 2019, Haggard might point out that, in Muskogee, "We don't shut down guest speakers like the Antifa out at U.C. Berkley do." Of course, nothing like this was in the original because any (and I mean ANY) nut-job could speak on a college campus in the '60s. Students today get whipped up and call Ben Shapiro a Nazi when he sets foot on campus. But in the '60's, George Lincoln Rockwell (a literal neo-Nazi) would speak on campus in uniform.

Haggard might exclaim, "We don't like open borders in Muskogee." This is a big issue today as more radical political figures seek to decriminalize undocumented entry into the U.S. Democrat presidential candidate Cory Booker recently escorted some undocumented immigrants across the border himself.

Of course, nothing like this was in the original song because nobody liked open borders in 1969. Just a few months after Haggard initially recorded the song the great Ralph Abernathy, Cesar Chavez, and Walter Mondale led a march along the southern border to protest the hiring of illegal immigrants. In 1969, the left hated illegal immigration; environmental groups opposed it, civil rights groups opposed it, unions opposed it, and Democrat politicians opposed it.

Haggard might add, "We don't throw quick dry cement at reporters." Just recently, Mr. Andrew Ngo, a reporter covering

a protest in Portland [had milkshakes supplemented with quick-dry hurled at him](#) by Antifa agitators. According to some reports, this is becoming an in-vogue thing.

Back in late '60s and early '70s, it was the conformists who plotted violence against reporters, not the radicals. G. Gordon Liddy, of Watergate fame, drew up plans for murdering Jack Anderson of *The New York Times*. The radicals who *did* plot violence (the Weathermen, Black Panthers, etc.) had just enough sense to avoid reporters.

Granted, the definition of “reporter” seems to have evolved since 1969. “We don’t have reporters like Brian Karem in Muskogee,” might be another line for the updated version. Karem, who covers the Whitehouse for *Playboy*, had a viral moment last week when [he yelled insults at the President](#) during a press conference in the Rose Garden.

This is not the first time he’s become a part of the story. Karem excels at grabbing the spotlight. In 1969, reporters were *not* showmen. Those who made themselves the subject of the story did not long remain employed.

I’d like to see someone write an updated version of this Merle Haggard Classic. But at the rate we are currently progressing, it would be quickly outdated.

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