



Florida Georgia Line

"Cruise"

Here's to the Good Times

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Republic Nashville

# Windows Down, Radio Up

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I'm not a country girl.

Brackish water, the near-Atlantic, Floridian conservatism, skateboards: that's my soil. A teenagehood in the dreadful space where grunge had given way to nu-metal, never even as cool as the pop-punk girls with bleached chunks of hair and Atticus patches on their messenger bags. Plenty of disdain to go around, though: unappreciative of sterling pop music as it appeared in real-time, uninterested in the twangy strains of ballads beloved by the teen DJs ruling Mormon church dances. The latter blared out of jacked-up trucks in the high school parking lot, F-150s and Rams owned by boys who wore camouflage like they'd ever even seen a deer in coastal suburbia, let alone shot one and turned it into venison.

*Florida isn't the South*, my sister used to sneer. She had a film-snobby name for boys like that and their girlfriends, blondes who invariably lived either very far south on our island-in-name-only, or very far north. Either direction meant money. *Nouvelle Redneck*.

When "Cruise" dropped in 2012, I loved it immediately—probably because the first version I heard was the inarguably superior "Remix," featuring Nelly. The Florida Georgia Line original is so bad as to be nearly unlistenable; its music video suggests that neither Florida nor Georgia knows how to play a guitar, their strumming and bobbing not emphatic enough to jar moussed chin-length haircuts or dislodge post-post-post-ironic trucker hats. They look about as authentic as musicians as Bill Nighy's backup band in *Love Actually*. There is nothing in the lyrics or music to compel me, a daughter of fragmented cities and little genuine cultural identity, to do anything but switch the radio station when the song comes on.

I never do.

Instead I roll my windows down, as commanded. It's a foreign country, this land of summer romance, Marshall Tucker karaoke, wholesome American heterosexuality. It looks nothing like the space between Cleveland and Bowling Green—my favorite in Ohio for speeding—rows of corn and glimmering water on the horizon, flat flat flat. The border driving north from my part of America's wang is a nondescript one; I flip off the sign that says *Governor Rick Scott* and sing *whipping 'cross the border, Florida into Georgia* even if there's something else playing on the radio, something less embarrassing and more me.

I've only run a stop sign once, on accident. *I totally paused!* Nineteen years old, lost in east Tampa at night. Scrabbling for license and registration in a goddamn Nine Inch Nails t-shirt. The cop didn't give me a ticket.

Nelly has always been a comforting presence. Misplaced Band-Aids, awkward middle school innocence and the knowing giggles of girls who understand what "Country Grammar" is about, part of the contingent of pre-9/11 hip-hop that now feels like a warm blanket. On "Cruise" he's a miracle worker, turning hellish Autotune and cookie-cutter lyrical imagery into a true bop. From the jump, the mere promise of Nelly as the song progresses sews a skip and wink into the verses. They shift from lazy and hackneyed to earnest, uncomplicated. Nothing serious, not even anything to write home about, the way

the romance depicted won't last past Labor Day... but for now all you can think of is that country girl's legs on the dashboard.

Conspiracy theory: Daveed Diggs is calling to Nelly's lines when he sings *but she got her legs up on the dash*.

Once I tried to reference the muddin' lyric in "Cruise" to my friend K, an inveterate Clevelander and true music fan. *Fire it up, let's go get this thing stuck*. I'm maybe too harsh on the unadorned FGL original edit; if it didn't exist, there would be nothing for Nelly to fix. *Ex nihilo nihil fit*. Thus, every piece of art has some pearl of truth in it, however buried, obscured, or defaced—otherwise no space would exist for the listener, no plain where creator and consumer meet to do battle. Those boys in high schools with their trucks, their girlfriends in their trucks, their tires streaked with dried gray mud as badges of badassitude and down-home masculinity. Mudding. Mud-bogging, sometimes. Muddin'. There was a lot I didn't understand about those boys—their fashion taste, their inherited jingoist regressivism—and this was a big one. How much did a Chevy Silverado cost in 2004? Why would you then go and attempt to lose your dad's investment in a marsh, or at least not bother to hit the car-wash on the way home? I didn't understand status symbols then. I watched my stepfather carefully wash his 10-year-old Saturn in the driveway. I went to those marshes too, to conduct science projects for AP classes—no shrieking or admiring or kissing required—avoided the worst of the water-filled potholes with my Honda's bald tires.

"Cruise" is a checklist of things I've never done, never wanted, never been. Maybe our purest relationships are to those pieces of art which bear no resemblance to our reality.