

MAPPING AFRICAN AMERICAN ENTERTAINMENT VENUES
IN RUTHERFORD COUNTY, TENNESSEE FROM THE 1860S TO THE 1960S:
THE HISTORY OF BLACK MUSICAL GEOGRAPHY
AND THE ROAD TO POPULAR MUSIC

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DEDICATION

To Raymond Summerour, whose music and friendship inspired this project.
Thank you for your company, wisdom and help along the way.

And to Brittany, who helped me across the finish line.
Thank you for the love and support.
I hope we get to do this seven (or seventy) more times, again.

Finally, to my mother Elaine who taught me to appreciate music and showed me that it is never
too late to start your life anew.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a case study of African American entertainment venues and vernacular music culture in Rutherford County, Tennessee from the 1860s to the 1960s. The study utilizes spatial analysis of geolocated maps to understand the social, cultural, and historical contexts of this musical geography locally, regionally, statewide and nationally. These maps are imagined as an ethnic geography, suggesting unique relationships to the history of early road building systems and African American travel during the first half of the twentieth century. Put into a sociohistorical context, the venue maps suggest relationships to the cultivation, development and spread of African American vernacular music forms across a racialized, musical landscape that emerged during the twentieth century called The Chitlin' Circuit.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES.....	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER II: THE EMANCIPATION AND RECONSTRUCTION ERA (1860s – 1900s)....	35
CHAPTER III: JIM CROW AND THE PROGRESSIVE ERA (1900s – 1920s).....	48
CHAPTER IV: SEGREGATION AND THE INTERWAR ERA (1920s – 1940s).....	59
CHAPTER V: DESEGREGATION AND THE POSTWAR ERA (1940s – 1960s).....	78
CONCLUSION.....	92
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	96

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1	<i>Map of Rutherford County, Tenn.</i> 6
2	<i>Geospatial Re-creation of The Dixie Highway Map using 1920s Motor Guides and U.S.G.S. Overlay Maps.</i> 8
3	<i>Map of Dixie Highway from Nashville to Chattanooga</i> 8
4	<i>Chitlin’ Circuit Locations Throughout the U.S.</i> 16
5	<i>African American Entertainment Venues Murfreesboro’s Cedars/Cemetery Community Rutherford County, Tennessee 1860s – 1960s</i> 30
6	<i>African American Entertainment Venues Murfreesboro’s Black Business District Rutherford County, Tennessee 1860s – 1960s</i> 31
7	<i>African American Entertainment Venues Murfreesboro’s Bottoms Community Rutherford County, Tennessee 1860s – 1960s</i> 32
8	<i>African American Entertainment Venues Murfreesboro’s East Sixth Ward Rutherford County, Tennessee 1860s – 1960s</i> 33
9	<i>African American Entertainment Venues Murfreesboro’s Sixth Ward Rutherford County, Tennessee 1860s – 1960s</i> 34
10	<i>Battle of Stone River</i> 37
11	<i>Emancipation Day Celebration</i> 43
12	<i>Shufflin’ Sam from Alabam’</i> 62
13.1	<i>Artists and Models</i> 66
13.2	<i>“Public Melody No. 1”</i> 66
14	<i>Sidewalk Scene in Selma, Alabama</i> 67
15.1	<i>Exterior recreation of The Moonlight Inn</i> 73
15.2	<i>Exterior recreation of The Moonlight Inn</i> 73

15.3	Interior recreation of The Moonlight Inn.....	74
15.4	Interior recreation of The Moonlight Inn.....	75
16	1945 Sanborn Map.....	75
17.1	Hatch Show Prints.....	88
17.2	Hatch Show Prints.....	88
17.3	Hatch Show Prints.....	89
17.4	Hatch Show Prints.....	89

LIST OF TABLES

Page

Map Metadata..... 27

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Segregation—whether by custom (de facto) or by law (de jure)—was a fact of life in the South during the first seventy years of the twentieth century. In a culture defined by Jim Crow, psychological and bodily harm against people of color was sanctioned and standardized across the whole of society. The threat was both real and implied. Psychologically, the violence of racism took the form of constant humiliation, eroding the core of African American’s human dignity. Physically, the violence was brutal, often to the point of death.¹

Yet, at times and at places, whites and Blacks intentionally and unintentionally intermingled. It cannot be overstated that this experience of togetherness was always more dangerous for Black and brown people. Music venues, or places where music was part of the experience, were one of those places where racial mixing was possible. This pattern of comingling around music making culture has been noted and analyzed by many scholars, including Michael Bertrand, Brian Ward, Karl Hagstrom Miller, Jack Hamilton, Charles Hughes, and more.²

African American music, its content and history, is diasporic and continuous in that it is the cultural product of three intersecting histories: African, African American, and United States history. Lawrence Levine describes Black culture as the product of a conditional process in African Americans to communicate with the past and present, by reacting creatively and

¹ Gretchen Sullivan Sorin, *Driving While Black: African American Travel and the Road to Civil Rights*, First edition (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W.W. Norton & Company, 2020), 94.

² Michael T. Bertrand, “Elvis Presley and the Politics of Popular Memory,” *Southern Cultures* 13, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 62–86; Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations*. (University of California Press, 1998); Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Duke University Press, 2010); Jack Hamilton, *Just Around Midnight: Rock and Roll and the Racial Imagination* (Harvard University Press, 2016); Charles L. Hughes, *Country Soul: Making Music and Making Race in the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

responsively to ever-changing realities.³ In these ways, Black music in America can be described as both distinct and local, as well as collaboratively regional and even global.

Joyce Marie Jackson observes that “there is a ‘continuity of consciousness’ that flows through various aspects of African American culture... resulting [in the] development of dynamic performance styles illustrated over decades.”⁴ The unique experience of being African American has informed many parts of American culture and society, particularly vernacular music traditions. What scholars of popular music would call codified genres (Folk Spiritual, Gospel, Ragtime, Jazz, Blues, Country, Rhythm and Blues, Soul, and Rock and Roll) can be considered cultural products of this continuation of Black consciousness and history.

African American music making can be understood as part of a literal, physical landscape, as well as a figurative, mental landscape. The development of African American vernacular music culture converges around a literal and figurative network of African American identities and localities across space-time. The Chitlin’ Circuit symbolizes such a Black map and that circuit travels from the past into the present along real road systems – the skeleton of America’s first highways – built and utilized by African Americans to support Black music and influencing the totality of vernacular music making and culture in the United States.

African American travel along America’s early highway systems created an open marketplace (both sanctioned and unsanctioned) for the exchange of goods and services, locally, regionally and nationally. African American’s utilized early highway systems, such as the Dixie Highway, to create, foster and spread early vernacular musical traditions. Travel between the

³ Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*, 30th anniversary edition (Oxford New York Auckland Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴ Joyce Marie Jackson, “Continuity of Consciousness: Spirituals and Gospel,” in *Rivers of Rhythm: African Americans and the Making of American Music* (Nashville, TN: National Museum of African American History, 2020), 15.

North and South along the Dixie Highway connected communities of African Americans, facilitating cultural topographies during and after the completion of the highway system. Because of the mobility introduced by roadway travel, African American locals, tourists and musicians were able to transport goods (vernacular music traditions and culture) and services (creative enterprise) to the market (the cultural spaces defined by both de jure and de facto segregation).⁵

Chitlin' Circuit entertainment venues encompassed space, place, and performance. For navigating the Chitlin' Circuit, African Americans created both a literal, mappable geography as well as a figurative, projected geography of the mind. As a literal geography, many kinds of venues supplying or operating in support of Black musical entertainment defined the Circuit. There were event spaces on private (e.g. juke joints, theatres and dance halls) and public property (e.g. segregated parks, street corners and fairgrounds); places of hospitality (e.g. tourist homes and tippling houses), where traveling artists and patrons could eat, sleep, bathe, and generally be leant a helping hand; civic organizations (e.g. benevolent societies), radio stations and individuals who booked and promoted events (e.g. venue proprietors and artist managers); and gaming spots and still rooms where patrons and hustlers (e.g. bookies, bootleggers, and dancers) supplied the pleasures of the world; and so much more. As a racialized spatial imaginary, Circuit stops were doorways to thriving communities that were the center of Black cultural life: Black-owned businesses, Black artists, Black schools, Black churches, and Black civic organizations. Thus, the Chitlin' Circuit was theoretically a local, regional and national loci that Black folks referenced as a place that they either controlled or dominated, providing a source of joy, affirmation, safety, rest and togetherness in Black communities in an oppressive Jim Crow

⁵ Sorin, *Driving While Black*, 9.

system. The Circuit provided a physical space for their creativity, politics, beliefs, family and social structures.⁶

Scholar J. H. Kwabena Nketia argues that African American music must be understood within its communal and national context.⁷ This thesis shares Nketia's position and is both reflective of itself, as well as the whole of American society. It is a thesis evidenced by the temporal and spatial; corporal and cultural. It is a thesis containing multiple systems of thinking about history within the humanities. The following describes the order of subjects and ideas defended herein:

Chapter Two, "Emancipation and the Long Reconstruction Era (1862 to 1900)," examines the post-Emancipation and late nineteenth century in Rutherford County through the lens of free Black communities, and how these places gave birth to early entertainment venues (primarily churches and schools), resulting in the development of the musical forms Gospel, Old Time and Ragtime. The story of Walter Greer, a Black fiddle player and string band musician born in a rural part of Rutherford County during this era, contextualizes this music and locality.

Chapter Three, "Jim Crow and The Progressive Era (1900 to 1920)," looks at the beginning of the twentieth century when African Americans began to leave rural geographies, creating the first urban enclaves that we think of as historically Black neighborhoods in cities. A discussion of the urban Black neighborhoods of The Bottoms and area South of Vine Street will show how Blacks developed a unique, segregated downtown in Murfreesboro. A discussion of how Black vaudeville and traveling tent shows gave birth to Jazz, The Blues, and helped

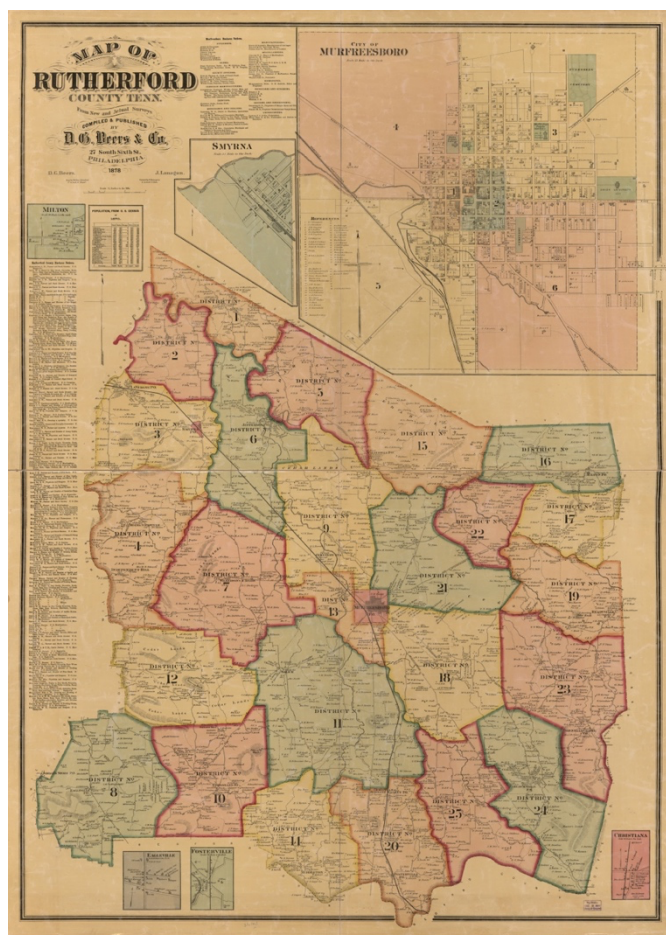
⁶ Note that the term "Chitlin' Circuit" was at first a word-of-mouth phenomenon describing locality and culture. The name eventually appeared in black press on December 23, 1972, indicating its status as a universally understood and accepted term. See: Preston Lauterbach, *The Chitlin' Circuit: And the Road to Rock "n" Roll* (New York, N.Y. : W.W. Norton, 2011), 714-715.

⁷ J. H. Kwabena Nketia. "The Study of African and Afro-American Music." *The Black Perspective in Music* 1, no. 1 (1973): 13.

popularize Folk spirituals. The story of musician and educator Madame E. Azalia Hackley, born in this area of Murfreesboro, and who came to prominence during this time, puts the development of these musical forms into context.

Chapter Four, “The Interwar Era (1920 to 1945),” assesses the cultural turbulence of prohibition, the technological changes of radio and records and how it all shaped the emergent Chitlin’ Circuit, the first thriving chapter of the Black music business. The story of Rutherford county’s famed folk spiritual singing groups will contextualize the revival of the forms during the era.

Chapter Five, “Desegregation and the Postwar Era (1946-1970),” is a discussion of the most thriving era of the Chitlin’ Circuit under Rhythm and Blues music, shake dancing, and the emergence of Soul. The subsequent decline of the Chitlin’ Circuit due to urban renewal, integration, and changing musical culture will be addressed. Murfreesboro’s infamous juke joints, dance halls will be analyzed for context.



[Figure 1. *Map of Rutherford County, Tenn.: from actual surveys* by D.G. Beers & Co, D. G Beers, J Lanagan, and Worley & Bracher, 1878. Image downloaded from the Library of Congress <https://www.loc.gov/item/2012586255/>.]

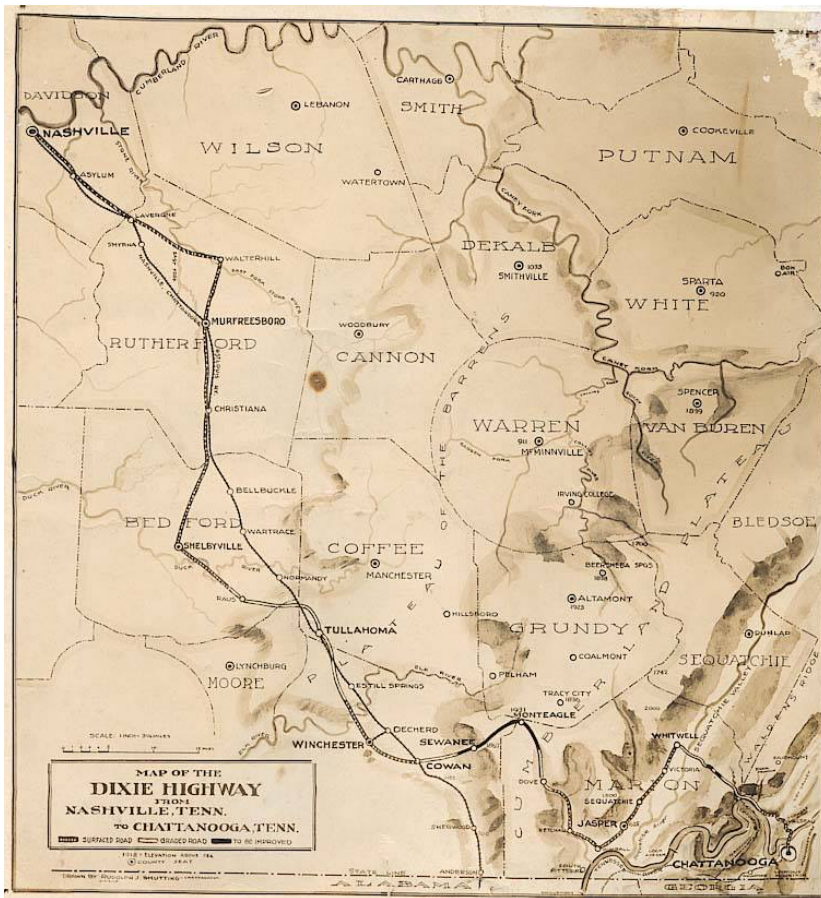
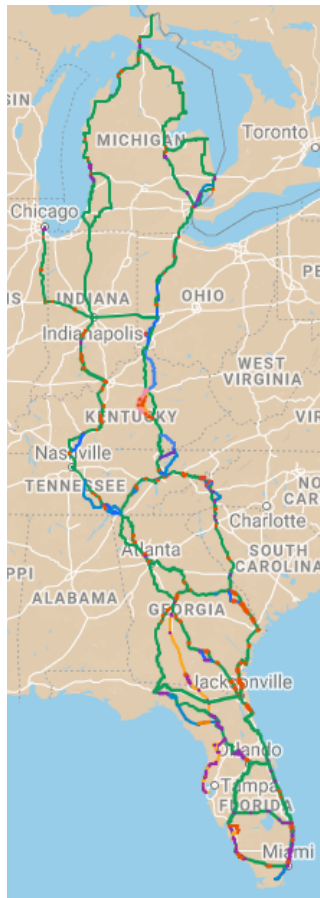
This thesis relies on a wide range of sources and prior scholarship. Understanding road systems, for instance, is important. Prior to the Civil War, most roadways in Tennessee were irregular dirt roads that had emerged from the game trails and the pathways forged by Native Americans and early European settlers. These unimproved roads were accessible by foot, horse, and in some cases carriage.⁸ Turnpikes—improved and maintained roads—became popular in

⁸ Martha Carver, “Tennessee’s Survey Report for Historic Highway Bridges” (Nashville, TN: Tennessee Department of Transportation, 2008), 22.

the late 1830s. A major Nashville east-west turnpike passed through Rutherford County and into Murfreesboro in 1838, and soon thereafter detachments of the Cherokee Removal (better known today as the Cherokee Trail of Tears) used the turnpike on their way west. A generation later, the Nashville Turnpike was, a crucial roadway moving troops and supplies in and out of the area during the Civil War Battles of Stones River and Murfreesboro. Together with the tracks of the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad, which paralleled the turnpike, the road served as the community's primary link to the outside world.

In the 1910s planners for the privately directed but often publicly funded Dixie Highway transformed the old turnpike into a major modern highway. Today, the remnants of The Trail of Tears, Nashville Pike and The Dixie Highway are called Old Nashville Highway and College Street. The latter marks the stretch of road from the countryside running parallel to Stones River Battlefield into the heart of the city.⁹

⁹ Megan Michelle Akerstrom, "Dixie Highway in Murfreesboro: Transportation and Change in an Early Twentieth-Century Southern Town" (2010), (MTSU Theses - Special Collections - Walker Library - 4th Floor 370 M58t, no.3518).



[Figure 2. Left, *Geospatial Re-creation of The Dixie Highway Map using 1920s Motor Guides and U.S.G.S. Overlay Maps*. Designed by 2LaneTraveler, 2021. Image downloaded from <http://2LaneTraveler.com>.]

[Figure 3. Right, *Map of Dixie Highway from Nashville to Chattanooga* by Will H. Sokes, 1918. Image downloaded from Library Collection, Drawer 6, Folder 137, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN. <https://tnsos.org/tsla/imagesearch/citation.php?ImageID=1233>.]

Constructed between 1915 and 1927, the Dixie Highway consisted of 5,706 miles of road system connecting Ontario, Canada, from the north, to Miami, Florida in the south.¹⁰ Advocates worked with state and local government officials to build it to meet demand from the growing number of motorists in the early decades of the twentieth century. Tennessee towns benefited

¹⁰ Leslie N. Sharp, "Dixie Highway Association," in *Tennessee Encyclopedia* (Tennessee Historical Society, October 8, 2017), <https://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entries/dixie-highway-association/>.

significantly from the Dixie Highway since the eastern and western sections met at Chattanooga, which served as home to the national headquarters of the Dixie Highway Association. No other state has as many miles of Dixie Highway within its borders than Tennessee, making it perhaps the most important thoroughfare for travelers. At the time of its completion in 1927, the Dixie Highway was the second most traveled highway in the South.¹¹

Besides academic thesis work that contextualizes the Dixie Highway into local historiographies, such as *The Dixie Highway's formation in Middle Tennessee*, there are only a handful of books written about it more broadly.¹² Tammy Ingram's work focusing on the political history of early highway building through the Progressive Era Good Roads Movement is the most contemporary and complete work to capture its history.¹³

Ingram argues that the Dixie Highway was the impetus for modernizing The South during the first quarter of the twentieth century, helping the region secure economic, social and political successes that altered infrastructure and politics.¹⁴ The success of the highway in modernizing the South influenced both rural and urban, white and non-white Americans. However, the builders and supporters of the Dixie Highway rarely, if ever, considered the specific interests of African Americans. The accommodations and services along the highways would be segregated, both north and south. The system spawned a defining landscape of material

¹¹ Martha Carver, "Historic Highways," in *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, ed. Carroll Van West (Nashville, TN: Rutledge Hill Press, 1998), 425.

¹² Megan Michelle Akerstrom, "Dixie Highway in Murfreesboro: Transportation and Change in an Early Twentieth-Century Southern Town" (2010), (MTSU Theses - Special Collections - Walker Library - 4th Floor 370 M58t, no.3518); Howard L. Preston, *Dirt Roads to Dixie: Accessibility and Modernization in the South, 1885-1935*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991); Leslie N. Sharp, "Down South to Dixie: The Development of the Dixie Highway from Nashville to Chattanooga, 1915-1940" (1993), (MTSU Theses - Special Collections - Walker Library - 4th Floor 370 M58t, no.1754); Leslie N. Sharp, *Tennessee's Dixie Highway: Springfield to Chattanooga*, Images of America (Arcadia, 2011); Claudette Stager and Martha Carver, *Looking Beyond the Highway: Dixie Roads and Culture*, (University of Tennessee Press, 2006).

¹³ Tammy Ingram, *Dixie Highway: Road Building and the Making of the Modern South, 1900-1930* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

¹⁴ Tammy Ingram, *Dixie Highway*.

culture centering the needs and desires of northern tourism into the southern interior.¹⁵ white supremacist politics influenced how the highway was constructed and where it would be located. Tammy Ingram argues that the mass incarceration of African Americans under Jim Crow created the system of free, exploitable labor used to construct major portions of the Dixie Highway. She further argues that this system served as a template for Progressive Era infrastructure projects and was replicated throughout the South.

Additionally, politicians created a system of payola along the route of the Dixie Highway. This illegal and prejudicial system leveraged bribes to influence decisions around where portions of the highway system would be routed. This system favored the personal and local economic interests of other white politicians and communities. For example, Suzanne Fischer argues that transportation access to a mineral spring resort owned by a white, state politician determined portions of Indiana's highway route, reflecting a direct favoring of white, middle-class interests in tourism.¹⁶ Because of these kinds of systemic political and social biases, facilities such as restaurants, gas stations, and bathrooms for African American travelers were more scarce along the highway, in that they did not exist or were only known to Blacks through a word-of-mouth system that was somewhat exclusionary to those who did not have strong social ties across the country.¹⁷

In response, African Americans adapted to the presence of the highway and segregation and created their own spaces. The improved highway heading north to Chicago enabled more to consider joining the Great Migration that reshaped southern and northern urban demographics in

¹⁵ Claudette Stager and Martha Carver, *Looking Beyond the Highway: Dixie Roads and Culture*, 1st ed. (University of Tennessee Press, 2006).

¹⁶ Suzanne Fischer, "The Best Road South: The Failure of the Dixie Highway in Indiana," *Looking Beyond the Highway: Dixie Roads and Culture*, 1-15.

¹⁷ See Sorin, "Chapter 6: Travel Guides for Everyone," in *Driving While Black*.

the 1920s and 1930s. More famously, African American entrepreneurs created travel guides organized by city, listing businesses owned and operated by other Blacks, with the best known being *The Green Book*, published by Victor H. Green from the 1930s to the 1960s. These guides were particularly helpful to African Americans born and raised in the North, who traveled South and may have been less familiar with the first-hand experience of the social and geographic landscapes of Jim Crow.¹⁸

Improved federal roads came in the wake of the Dixie Highway. The Good Roads Movement emerged in the late nineteenth century as a national movement to improve roads in the United States. At first, the Good Roads Movement did not advocate for the federal government to be the lead agency to supply planning and funding. However, in 1916, the federal government began to assume responsibility of the nation's highways, passing the Federal-Aid Highway Act. By the mid-twentieth century, federal road development became synonymous with an updated form of urban development called "renewal," as highway systems were expanded into the larger, interstate systems across America. In 1945, the Tennessee General Assembly passed the Slum Clearance and Urban Redevelopment Act. This legislation authorized local housing authorities to condemn neighborhoods as "slums" and raze them through eminent domain. The Acts bore no single definition for the term "slum," leaving its subjectivity up to the discretion of local authorities.

As a continuation of segregationist Jim Crow policies, historically African American neighborhoods were prioritized for these slum clearance projects. As a result, many African Americans were relocated into improved structures called housing projects. These housing projects perpetuated segregation and resulted in the increased concentration of communities by

¹⁸ See Sorin, "Chapter 7: Victor and Alma Green's the Negro Motorist Green Book."

race. At the time, these projects were structurally safer and cleaner than many prior housing conditions. However, many Blacks had been homeowners before removal, making this policy distinctly hurtful to them. African Americans were often excluded from owning their new project units, which were either cost prohibitive or designed to be leased. In Rutherford County, officials targeted an African American neighborhood near the segregated Black high school in Murfreesboro for Black public housing and a white working-class neighborhood in the town's declining mill district for white public housing, and the projects were completed by the early 1950s.

The Federal Housing Act of 1949 exacerbated the discriminatory practices of housing displacement for African Americans through the process of “redlining.” Historian Richard Rothstein defines redlining as the process of banks “refusing to give mortgages to African Americans or extracting unusually severe terms from them with subprime loans.”¹⁹ In 1956, the Federal Highway Aid Act authorized the construction of a national interstate highway system. The interstate system revolutionized the landscape of automobile travel in America. Interstate expansion encouraged the continued increase in car ownership and travel that resulted from the post-war economic boom. Construction through the cities trended towards the displacement of African Americans in the same way the Urban Redevelopment Act had. In Tennessee, the urban planning efforts routed interstates through African American neighborhoods. These interstate projects either bisected the landscapes in such a way as to divide the major neighborhood thoroughfares, or completely razed those that had not already been taken just after 1945. Many of these historically Black neighborhoods have legacies extending to the first Black communities

¹⁹ Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, First edition (New York London: Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W. W. Norton & Company, 2017), vii.

that developed in those municipalities at the end of the Civil War. This decade of urban renewal often resulted in the complete disappearance of or major displacement of these historically Black neighborhoods throughout Tennessee.²⁰

Housing authorities uprooted and attempted to destroy the community identities associated with historically Black neighborhoods. Additionally, interstates routed through Black communities and around white ones. The result of which is a legacy of state and federal efforts to divide land across lines of race to create isolated, racialized geographies. Highway expansion as urban renewal has been argued as one of the major causes for the demise of the Chitlin' Circuit. Preston Lauterbach states that, "the idea was to replace blight with vibrancy, but urban renewal in practice often replaced functioning minority neighborhoods, initially with high-rise public housing and then, after the 1956 Federal Aid Highway Act, with interstate highways."²¹

Cultural scholar of the Dixie Highway, Katherine Fuller, has demonstrated through her research that the highway can be used to understand the spread of vernacular music culture. Her research also demonstrates how vernacular music culture can become racialized, leaving an ethnographic footprint over space-time. Fuller argues that the cultural legacy of the Dixie Highway in the state of Tennessee extends far beyond the system of the highway itself. Fuller argues that tourism along the highway branched beyond the initial geography of the highway into the interior of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. This evolution helped support the development of an underground and localized African American music scene there called "Shag." African Americans developed both a distinct musical style and dance culture around Shag. Many white DJs refused to play Shag artists on the radio, deeming it too sexual for radio. This blacklisting

²⁰ Carroll Van West, *Tennessee's Historical Landscapes* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 49-129.

²¹ Preston Lauterbach, *The Chitlin' Circuit: And the Road to Rock "n" Roll* (New York, N.Y.: W.W. Norton, 2011), 272.

drove the music and culture into the “underground” and perpetuated a racialized image of the music, its culture and community as distinctly Black music, specific to a particular geography. During the 1950s, Shag music became one of the Myrtle Beach’s major draws, and the musical legacy persists today.²²

Freedom to travel—a right assumed as fundamental to white Americans—was never that simple for African Americans. Millions of enslaved African Americans had little to no freedom of travel; without “papers” from their owners or badges like those issued in Charleston Blacks would be imprisoned, sold, or meet worse fates from roving slave patrols. Emancipation and Reconstruction opened some new pathways to freedom (literally and figuratively), and many fled into cities or to the north to have a greater sense of freedom of mobility. Railroads were open before interstate travel, but by the 1880s most southern lines were segregated and gave Blacks a decidedly inferior travel experience. This led to the Supreme Court case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* that gave the cover of federal law to the practice of segregation, the concept of separate but equal, in interstate transportation.²³

By the second decade of the twentieth century, African Americans became increasingly mobile through automobile ownership. Automobiles allowed Black people access to travel, which meant more personal and economic freedom. During the 1940s, the Black middle class grew significantly and so did their interests in owning cars. However, the threats of Jim Crow and segregation attempted to limit where, when and how Black people could be mobile in the years before desegregation.²⁴

²² Katherine Fuller, "Myrtle Beach: Music and Hotels," *Looking Beyond the Highway: Dixie Roads and Culture*, 153-166.

²³ see Sorin, "Chapter 1: The Journey," *Driving While Black*.

²⁴ This overview is a summation of Sorin’s thesis in *Traveling While Black*.

The Negro Motorists Green Book, a Black travel guide written by Victor H. Green, was a powerful tool of resistance providing Black people a sense of agency in spite of these social restrictions. The Green Book functioned “like a Yellow Pages for Black-owned businesses.”²⁵ It instructed African Americans on where they could sleep, eat, use the facilities and be entertained, safely. It serves today as an important source for the public accommodations and services found along the Chitlin’ Circuit of the South in the mid-twentieth century.

The Chitlin’ Circuit describes a geography born of the necessity for Blacks to persist before the state and municipal laws requiring segregation were officially overturned by the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The word “chitlin’” is the shortening of the word “chitterlings,” which is a culinary delicacy created by enslaved African Americans using the scrap meat of pig intestines.²⁶ Chitlin’s have been understood as a metaphor referring to the ability of African Americans to create and thrive in spite of necessity. Legendary blues musician Sax Kari describes the circuit, capturing nearly every scholarly detail:

In the '40s, there were about twenty-two Black promoters... Before you go out onto the road your whole tour was booked. Black promoters worked only with Black acts, and Ferguson was the only Black booking agent at that time... You could go to one place and buy supper, drinks, and see an orchestra perform. Back then you had big bands, anywhere from ten-to twenty-piece bands that had to squeeze themselves into a corner if there was no bandstand. There were no inside toilets at many of the places; you had to use privies. Now, when you got into a place that had running water inside, why you were fortunate. They sold ice water. They didn't have air conditioners... These were wooden buildings on the outside of town; there were very few concrete buildings or places in town. It was seldom you'd find a place for Blacks that would hold more than six hundred... Four-hour gigs... Radio was just being born and they had all the big white bands on there. This is what Blacks were listening to. If you couldn't get up to that standard, they didn't come to see you. You had to be dynamite. I had eighteen pieces. My lowest salary a night would be \$300 to \$350 [for the band]. But the circuit was never about making big money—it was about making constant money... In the South

²⁵ Candacy Taylor, *Overground Railroad: The Green Book & Roots of Black Travel in USA* (New York, NY: Abrams Books, 2020), 14.

²⁶ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “The Chitlin Circuit,” *The New Yorker*, February 3, 1997, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1997/02/03/the-chitlin-circuit>.

there was nothing but farming: tobacco fields, rice fields, sugar cane, cotton fields. [Black people] worked all week, and Saturday night was their night to howl, get drunk, and fornicate. They just wanted to know when the next dance was gonna be.²⁷

Chitlin' Circuit locations throughout the U.S.



[Figure 4. Designed by Stacy Rector, Fluid Graphic Design, LLC, Sarasota, Florida, 2016. Image from, *From the Scrub to The Twist, Perry Harvey, Sr. Park: A Journey into Tampa's History* by Rodney Kite Powell, Nancy Dalence, Robin Nigh, Jodi Pushkin (Tampa Bay Times Newspaper in Education, 2016), 15. Image downloaded from <http://tampabay.com/nie>.]

The Chitlin' Circuit is both real and imagined. It describes an ethnic geography defined by race and the racialized experience of African Americans during segregation, as well as a

²⁷ Preston Lauterbach, *The Chitlin' Circuit*, 37–41.

physical space; a geography of places linked together across cities, regions, states and a nation. Circuit venues were both informal and discrete, visible and established. The Circuit helped spread early American vernacular musical forms, particularly in Rutherford County, Tennessee, but also in other locations across the country, like Atlanta, Memphis, Nashville and Chicago.

Ethnography teaches that human beings understand their reality in relationship to three things: time, space, and place.²⁸ Place and landscape play a dominant role in how communities are built and how people in those communities shape their personal and collective identities in relation to their geography. Bobby Wilson argues that the American landscape, currently and historically, is defined by its relationship to the legacy of slavery.²⁹ De jure (or, legalized) and de facto (or, practiced) segregation largely defined American society during the first hundred years after the Civil War. These social and systemic systems of oppression put many limitations on Black life and culture.³⁰ The equal opportunity that historically evaded African Americans across social, mental and actual physical landscapes forced Blacks to cultivate “innovative ways of augmenting the use values of the spaces they inhabited.”³¹

Similarly, Hunter and Robinson propose that “The South” was brought to the country as a whole through the spread of Black cultural complexities during the mass migrations of African Americans between rural and urban centers in the twentieth century. This map of the South across America highlights the failed promises of freedom and liberation that were expected to come to African Americans who migrated in mass during the twentieth century. That is to say, institutionalized racism in the form of Jim Crow, housing discrimination, mass incarceration,

²⁸ Setha M. Low, *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016).

²⁹ Bobby M. Wilson, “The Historical Spaces of African Americans,” in *Contemporary Ethnic Geographies In America* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 71–92.

³⁰ George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2011), 10-23, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/mtsu/detail.action?docID=660533>.

³¹ George Lipsitz, “The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race: Theorizing the Hidden Architecture of Landscape,” *Landscape Journal* 26, no. 1 (March 2007): 14.

income inequality and racialized violence existed everywhere. Thus, a traditional idea of “The South” is just an abstraction of total American history, where a replicable reality of institutionalized racism has and continues to exist across the country, the newly imagined South.³²

Hunter and Robinson also argue that adopting an intellectual framework that centers Black experience through geography can reveal cultural densities disguised by the political functions of white supremacy; and that Black culture making, and place-making are intentional acts of Black resistance and identity formation that result in the creation of economic and cultural power structures influencing not just Black life, but the whole of America.³³ Hunter and Robinson call this geography a “chocolate city.”³⁴ This understanding of American geography, particularly the South, as not only spatial and temporal, but ethnically defined, can help historians understand how particular landscapes have come to be defined by the unique experiences of African Americans.³⁵

I propose that African American communities in Rutherford County, as well as those traveling the Chitlin’ Circuit can be imagined with the same subjectivity. African American entertainment venues are a “racially marked, spatial imaginary.”³⁶ The Chitlin’ Circuit is a twentieth century African American musical geography that is part of the continuum of Black consciousness and musical experience. One way to explain the development of “chocolate cities” is to examine them from the “bottom up.”³⁷ That is to look beyond oppressive social systems to

³² For a larger discussion of this theory, see the book Marcus Anthony Hunter and Zandria F. Robinson, *Chocolate Cities: The Black Map of American Life* (University of California Press, 2018).

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ An important early statement of African American place making is Angel Nieves and Leslie Alexander, eds., *“We Shall Independent Be”: African American Place Making* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2007).

³⁶ George Lipsitz, “The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race,” 10.

³⁷ Staughton Lynd, *Doing History from the Bottom up: On E. P. Thompson, Howard Zinn, and Rebuilding the Labor Movement from Below* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2014).

see how African Americans responded to those systems with agency to create renewable, personal and shared freedoms, and identities. African American placemaking is one way to understand how literal and imagined geographies influenced the production of vernacular music culture during the twentieth century. Access to musical performance and expression was critical to the development of the Chitlin' Circuit over the first half of the twentieth century, spreading African American vernacular music traditions through major urban hubs like Chicago, Nashville, and the in-between, smaller cities like Murfreesboro in Rutherford County. This created both an imagined and physical landscape of Black musical culture. This geography of entertainment venues, situated in historically Black neighborhoods supported and facilitated the spread of African American vernacular music culture. Everything from Negro spirituals, to ragtime, to blues, jazz, rhythm and blues and soul passed through The Chitlin' Circuit over the twentieth century before the de-segregation years of the 1960s.

These various contexts and strands of scholarship shape this thesis. I argue that African Americans in Rutherford County, Tennessee played a significant role in the historical development and spread of Black vernacular music culture in the first hundred years following the Civil War. These Black citizens created, fostered and exchanged this musical culture across a network of interconnected Black entertainment venues in the region, state and nation which by the early twentieth century was known as the Chitlin' Circuit. The Chitlin' Circuit is both an idea about the self (a spatial imaginary) and a literal geography (a map). The development and decline of the Chitlin' Circuit correlate with national road building efforts during the twentieth century, like the Dixie Highway.

Highway building as urban renewal helped musical Black communities establish where their venues would be located, creating a physical landscape that reflected a musical identity.

However, the continuation of these same projects ultimately contributed to the disappearance of these venues and the decline of the circuit, not just in Rutherford county, but the region and country at-large. If the initial, bonded labor of African Americans helped construct these highway systems in service of white supremacy — Jim Crow and the militarization of America — then the extended use of them by the emancipated, musical labor of African Americans, was a repurposing of the geographic landscape as both a physical and imagined cultural landscape, in service of their own interests. This repurposing of the geographic landscape by Black people influenced social, cultural, and historical landscapes as a result.

Lauterbach’s research on how African American music making is best understood in its cultural context led me to a key national source: the coverage of music in pages of the African American newspaper the *Chicago Defender*, which helped give birth to and fostered the development of the Chitlin’ Circuit.³⁸ The *Murfreesboro Union*, an African American newspaper published between 1920 and 1953 by Mary Ellen Vaughn, has similar local potential but as of 2020 only a dozen issues have been preserved. The earlier mention *Green Book* lists accommodations and services, but commonly does not list musical venues. The relative lack of primary sources reflects the disappearance or recorded silence of sources related to African American life in Rutherford County. Thus, reading against the grain became my mantra. Susan London-Sherer’s study of the prohibition era “dance cave,” Black Cat Cave in Murfreesboro, used exclusively by white, argues that sanctioned and unsanctioned entertainment venues provided music, dance, and alcohol.³⁹ This understanding that Rutherford County contained other musical geographies suggested to me that elements of the Chitlin’ Circuit might still exist

³⁸ Preston Lauterbach.

³⁹ Sara Camp Milam, “The South’s Secret Speakeasy Caves,” *The Daily Beast*, October 27, 2017; Susan Lynne London-Sherer. “Spirits Of The Black Cat Tavern: Historical Archaeology At A Tennessee Cave Under The Influence Of Prohibition,” 2017. MTSU Theses.

in the landscape, and I reached out to local residents for guidance and help in locating these places.

Luckily, the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum work on post-WWII era rhythm and blues in Nashville suggested further engagement to me given the close proximity of the cities.⁴⁰ There, I was able to locate nineteen different Hatch Show Prints related to 1940s era venues in Rutherford, giving a huge initial boost to my research. Once I turned to place-based evidence, I discovered multiple layers of sources, described below.

Very little history has been written about the historical relationships between African Americans, their communities and popular music in Rutherford County. Of pre-existing interpretations, most public facing efforts center white, male historical figures such as bluegrass pioneer Uncle Dave Macon, Spongebath records label heads, and nineteen seventies guitarist, producer and engineer Chip Young.⁴¹ Because of the chronological reach (one hundred years of African American music making) and the scope of historical interpretation involved in the data presented (forty-seven music venues), I thought it best to base my argument around a series of geospatially located maps. To accomplish the latter, I employed the use of ArcGIS technology. Arc is geographic information systems software maintained by the Environmental Systems Research Institute. Besides providing a technological infrastructure for making and presenting a map of entertainment venues in Rutherford county, Arc also allowed me to compile seemingly

⁴⁰ Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, *Night Train to Nashville: Music City Rhythm & Blues, 1945-1970* (Country Music Foundation Press, 2004). Note: While researching this thesis in the CMHOF archives, I found Hatch Show Prints naming Murfreesboro music venues. To my knowledge, these materials have not been publicly interpreted prior to this thesis and now have a chance to be discussed in a fuller context.

⁴¹ Charlie Dahan, Matthew Whitten, and Lane Tillner, "Murfreesboro Music," Digital Exhibit, Murfreesboro Music, April 20, 2017, <https://boromusic.wordpress.com/home/about/>; "Murfreesboro Music Legacy on Display at Heritage Center," *The Murfreesboro Pulse* (blog), April 3, 2017, <https://boropulse.com/2017/04/murfreesboro-music-legacy-display-heritage-center/>, <https://boropulse.com/2017/04/murfreesboro-music-legacy-display-heritage-center/>Dahan, Whitten, and Tillner, "Murfreesboro Music"; "Murfreesboro Music Legacy on Display at Heritage Center."

disparate geographic data in order to analyze that information against a set of historical questions. GIS also allows this research to be shared and discovered by other researchers, as well as the public writ large who may use the maps to visualize the historical relationships present in geographies.

Locating and mapping African American entertainment venues in Rutherford County is a perfect case study for understanding how African American communities organized themselves around vernacular music traditions. The physical geography of where these venues were located tells a story about why they were there, what function they served, and who the culture makers were. The maps also tell a story about how Rutherford Count's Black communities were connected to other Black communities in the region and country. By zooming out (both literally and figuratively) these maps show how smaller towns are linked to nearby and far away cities across road systems, demonstrating how local Black histories are shared with other regional and national Black histories.

The first method employed to locate African American entertainment venues was to define what an entertainment venue is. I chose to define entertainment venues as: 1) those places where the primary business or activity is the provision of musical entertainment to members of or by the African American public in that 2) the person on the premises providing the entertainment is an entertainer or host for an African American audience or are themselves Black. In most cases, African Americans owned and operated the venues. Due to the intersecting social and economic conditions of lawful and perceived segregation, some Black proprietors were unable to own the properties where they served entertainment or appeared in spaces owned and operated by white proprietors. For example, some Black proprietors would have rented from white persons. Similarly, white proprietors hosted segregated events with Black performers as

the main or featured entertainment, which would then either be offered to separate audiences based on race category, or patrons of all races would be allowed in the same event with just the event space itself being segregated. When possible, to determine specifically, these exceptions are noted to spare confusion about the truest meaning of what an African American entertainment venue is in this research.

I chose to define musical entertainment as an event at which a person (or, persons) is/are employed (as performers) or engaged (as patrons or witnesses) to play (live or pre-recorded), listen to, or otherwise witness and engage with music, at which the performers are present in person, or in support of the event as cultural product (as in recorded audio or broadcast radio). Entertainment venues were also identified by the entertainment they provided, in direct service or product, as advertised, or otherwise described by a historical source. These places include properties where African Americans worked, communed, and were entertained (e.g. juke joints, theatres, clubs, and other venues); made musical products that could be bought and heard in places where they congregated (e.g. small record labels, radio stations, or juke boxes); places where they ate and drank (e.g. taverns or bars, restaurants, tippling houses, etc.); places that brokered or aided in the advertisement of artists (e.g. promoters, printing houses, etc.); and places where they sought services pertaining to traveling as entertainers or as patrons (e.g. motor courts, tourist homes, gas stations, etc.).

In order to locate coordinate data points for venues mapped here, many different sources were used. I queried modern and historical newspapers, primarily *The Nashville Globe*, *The Tennessean*, *The Daily News Journal* and *Rutherford Courier*, using the online database www.newspapers.com. I utilized the Rutherford County archives to source maps of the twentieth century interstate expansion project known as “the Broad Street Development,” as well as to

consult court records describing the arrests of Black patrons and proprietor's arrests for crimes such as vagrancy, public drunkenness, or bootlegging occurred to ascertain the social and spatial relationships of venues. Late nineteenth and twentieth century Sanborn Maps of Murfreesboro were sourced from the Library of Congress, [better copies are available from Walker library] as well as a historic plat map drawn just after the Civil War in order to understand the development of historically Black neighborhoods. I searched through the digital archives at the Country Music Hall of Fame to find era-specific ephemera, like digitized concert posters. I discovered many. These posters offer the names of venue locations and entertainers, both local and national. They also contain the relative dates of performances. I also generated original sources by doing interviews with prominent African Americans in the county who are musicians or were venue patrons. Articles published by the Rutherford County Tennessee Historical Society, as well as cross-referenced data from Ancestry.com about individual persons named in newspapers helped me understand more about the qualitative data of African American personhood and culture. These queries also provided key spatial understanding of where people were located in time and space as these musical communities developed over the decades.

Quantitative GIS mapping data was acquired from sources such as the official Rutherford County GIS department, a Historic Property Survey conducted by the county archives, and property descriptions from the county Property Assessor and Register of Deeds. Other GIS data came from the Walker Library's Ken Middleton who created a GIS story map called *Cemetery, a Freedmen's Community, Rutherford County, Tennessee* for their Digital Collections and the articles by Rebecca Conard and Zada Law that informed it. Other Digital Collections that were referenced for qualitative evidence of venues include *the Rutherford County Historical Society Publications*, and *The Freedmen's Bureau Collection*. GIS data recreating the Dixie Highway in

the county came from an unnamed historian using the title *2LaneTraveler* who referenced historic Automobile Blue Books, Motor Guides, and USGS map overlays to create a publicly available map. A georeferenced map of Civil War activity in Stones River before the founding of Murfreesboro was acquired from David Rumsey's online Historical Maps Collection.

Venue locations are mapped both precisely and more generally as indicated by The World Geodetic System (1984) and verified by using Google Maps' coordinate data. Because most venue locations no longer remain, are being utilized for different purposes or have switched ownership, a venue data point's precision was determined by locating the venue's historic address and then imposing that location onto a modern map. Therefore, the map point data reflects where the venue *would* be located, relatively speaking, if it were still standing today. In this circumstance, coordinate location was selected in as close a proximity as could be ascertained from the historical record. For example, the Mid-State Negro Fairgrounds was located where the modern-day Patterson Park is currently. In this case, the address for Patterson Park was selected without determining from historical sources where on said current property the historical Negro Fairgrounds were in relationship to historic or current land-size, parcel or building footprint. To use this map, one must assume they are within the general historic property boundary, knowing that often the building has been demolished or has been remodeled.

In order to most accurately ascertain the footprint, and thus plot a polygon onto these maps, further research is needed from Rutherford County Deed Records about the historic land surveys of those areas. In rare cases, the venue moved locations or the organization representing the venue did. Such is the case for the E.A. Davis Elks Lodge 1138, which had no formalized brick-and-mortar in its beginnings (known as the E.A. Davis Elks Lodge 1138 "First"), then found a permanent address for years (known as E.A. Davis Elks Lodge 1138 "Last") which then

burned down and was replaced by the current venue (known as E.A. Davis Elks Lodge 1138 “New”). In some circumstances where the venue is still standing (e.g., Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church), the most exact coordinates were selected. They include street maps of venues are original to this research. They were designed created by me using ArcMap GIS technology and formatted by geographic sections. An accompanying metadata chart explains how and where each location was determined.

RESULTS

Map Metadata

Start	End	Venue	Proprietors or Managers	Entertainment	Latitude (Y)	Longitude (X)	Historic Address	Status
1956	unknown	McClain Residence	Alf McClain and Callie Tillage McClain	promotion, alcohol, gaming	35.8393	-86.3766	812 E Castle	Standing
1957	unknown	McClain Residence	Alf McClain	promotion, alcohol, gaming	35.84238	-86.38187	317 S University St	Demolished
1962	unknown	McClain Residence	Alf McClain	promotion, alcohol, gaming	35.84617	-86.381291	812 E College	Demolished
1889	current	Allen Chapel AME Church	unknown	promotion, music	35.84376	-86.38728	224 S Maney Ave	Standing
1858	1884	Allen Chapel AME Church (1st)	unknown	promotion, music	35.842933	-86.390637	corner of State and Spring St	Demolished
1947	1960s	AM 1450 WGNS Radio	Cecil Elrod	promotion, music	35.847339	-86.392181	118 N Church St	Standing
1917	1931	Benevolent Society No 11	unknown	promotion	35.842318	-86.387851	E State St	Demolished
1811	1917	Bradley Academy	unknown	music	35.84221	-86.38907	411 S Academy St	Standing
1918	1960s	Bradley Academy High School	unknown	promotion, music	35.83858	-86.3832	511 Mercury Blvd	Standing
1942	unknown	Buster Bedford American Legion Post 177	unknown	promotion, music, food, dance	35.838517	-86.384733	Holloway High School property	Standing
1890s	unknown	Negro Campbellite Church	unknown	music	35.842933	-86.390637	corner of State and Spring St	Demolished
1920s	unknown	Dave Anderson's Restaurant	unknown	promotion, food	35.844438	-86.386783	S Maney Ave just off Vine St	Demolished
1950s	1960s	EA Davis Elks Lodge No 1138 (1st)	unknown	promotion, music, dance	35.8423029794	-86.3815475256	323 S University St	Demolished
1960s	1981	EA Davis Elks Lodge No 1138 (2nd)	unknown	promotion, music, dance	35.888984	-86.43929	off Old Nashville Hwy	Demolished
1935	unknown	East Side Cafe at Turner Hall	Ramsey "Ram" and Clara Owen	food	35.8430	-86.381974	corner of E Sevier St and S University St	Demolished
1954	1967	Eastside Pool Room	Alf McClain	gaming	35.842570	-86.381990	312 S University St	Demolished
1932	current	Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church	unknown	promotion, music	35.8895125775	-86.4414814180	Cemetery / Cedars Community	Standing
1800s	1932	Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church (1st)	unknown	promotion, music	35.8645226532	-86.4337970602	Cemetery / Cedars Community	Demolished
1960	unknown	Gaines Residence	Elmo Gaines Jr	promotion, alcohol, gaming	35.841202	-86.377779	828 State St	Demolished
1961	unknown	Gaines Residence	Elmo Gaines Jr	promotion, alcohol, gaming	35.841741	-86.381005	620 E State St	unknown
1939	1960	Fannie Hoover Tourist Home	Fannie Hoover	promotion, food, lodging	35.842316	-86.385737	432 E State St	unknown
1853	1953	First Baptist Missionary Church	unknown	promotion, music	35.843734	-86.391159	114 or 115 E Sevier St	Demolished
1902	1923	Fox's Opera House	unknown	music, theatre	35.847124	-86.392478	corner of 132 W College and Maple St	Demolished
1929	1968	Holloway High School	unknown	promotion, music	35.838543	-86.38473	S Highland St	Standing
1890s	unknown	IOOF Hall (1st)	unknown	promotion	35.848025	-86.391242	corner of Lytle and Church St	Demolished

1924	unknown	IOOF Hall (2nd)	unknown	promotion	35.848045	-86.391717	101 W Lytle St	Demolished
1879	1967	Keys Chapel	unknown	promotion, music	35.8466	-86.384	459 E College St	Demolished
1924	unknown	Negro Lodge Hall	unknown	promotion	35.842821	-86.39324	410 S Maple St	Demolished
1947	1960	ME Howland Tourist Home	ME Howland	promotion, food, lodging	35.84242	-86.385289	439 E State St	unknown
1960	1963	MH Benford Amoco Service Station	MH Benford	promotion, travel	35.84133	-86.386966	429 S Maney	Standing
1938	1950s	Mid-State Negro Fair	Joe Alexander	music, food	35.838995	-86.382365	unknown	Demolished
1960s	1980s	Miss Ann's Place	Lillie Ann McClellan	music, food, alcohol, lodging	35.838711	-86.380456	535 S Hancock St	unknown
1924	unknown	Mt Gilett Church	unknown	promotion, music	35.842053	-86.393824	210 E Sevier	Demolished
1844	1929	Mt Olivet Missionary Baptist Church	unknown	promotion, music	35.8647053686	-86.4329148737	Cemetery Community	Demolished
1884	current	Mt Zion Missionary Baptist Church	unknown	promotion, music	35.848043	-86.39209	226 N Maple	Standing
1920s	unknown	Primitive Baptist Church	unknown	promotion, music	35.842875	-86.391285	115 E State	Demolished
1940s	unknown	Rebecca Carney Temple No 798	unknown	promotion	35.838517	-86.384733	Holloway High School	Standing
1938	1964	Roxie Moore Tourist Home	Roxie Moore	food, lodging	35.841715	-86.382283	548 E State St	Demolished
1935	unknown	Sam Keeble's Café	Sam Keeble	food	35.843313	-86.393508	corner of S Maple and W State St	Demolished
1941	1971	Sewart Air Force Base	unknown	promotion, music	36.005106	-86.525847	unknown	unknown
1930s	unknown	Sindy Ransoms Restaurant	unknown	food	35.843952	-86.381855	551 E Vine St	Demolished
1860s	unknown	Smith Residence	Corilla and Henry Smith; Madame E. Azalia Hackley	music	35.844193	-86.394176	corner of Sevier and Walnut St	Demolished
1917	1931	Sons and Daughters of Cyrene	unknown	promotion	35.842318	-86.387851	E State St	Demolished
1939	1970	The Armory	unknown	music, dance	35.86016	-86.40956	1220 W College St	Standing
1950s	1978	The Eldorado Club	Alf McClain, Elmore Gaines Jr	music, dance, food, alcohol	35.8839	-86.4411	off Old Nashville Hwy	Standing
1944	unknown	The Moonlight Inn and Cafe	Will "Skipper" and Victoria Taylor	music, dance, food	35.842705	-86.382025	548 E Sevier St	Demolished
1900	unknown	The Palms	A.J. Anderson	music, food	35.8455891248	-86.3928756392	corner of S Maple and S Main St	Standing
1936	1972	The Princess Theatre (2nd)	Tony Sudekum, Crescent Amusement Company, Oscar Altman	music, film, theatre	35.847339	-86.392181	corner of 132 W College and Maple St	Demolished
1914	1936	The Princess Theatre (1st)	unknown	music, film, theatre	35.84654	-86.390842	118 N Church St	Demolished
1960s	1980s	The Riverside Club	John Henry Beard, Charles T Smitty	music, gaming	35.868700	-86.4193	1528 Old Nashville Hwy	Demolished
1939	1956	The Roxy Theatre	Tony Sudekum, Crescent Amusement Company	film	35.84541	-86.391932	7 S Public Sq	Demolished
1930s	unknown	The Smoky Mountain Restaurant	unknown	music, dance, food	35.843635	-86.39557	S Front St near the freight depot	Demolished
1966	1980s	The Weeping Willow Motel	Robert W Scales	promotion, music, dance, food, lodging	35.856892	-86.405422	932 W College St	Standing

1953	1968	Tiger Den	unknown	music, dance	35.845466	-86.378433	701 E Main St	Standing
1930s	1940s	Turner Hall (1st and 2nd)	Ed Turner, Will H. "Wilhoit" Jetton, Reverend Batey Wade	music, dance, food, gaming	35.842772	-86.381779	corner of E Sevier and S University St	Demolished
1960	unknown	Twilight Cafe	unknown	food	35.842041	-86.3864630	416 E State St	Demolished

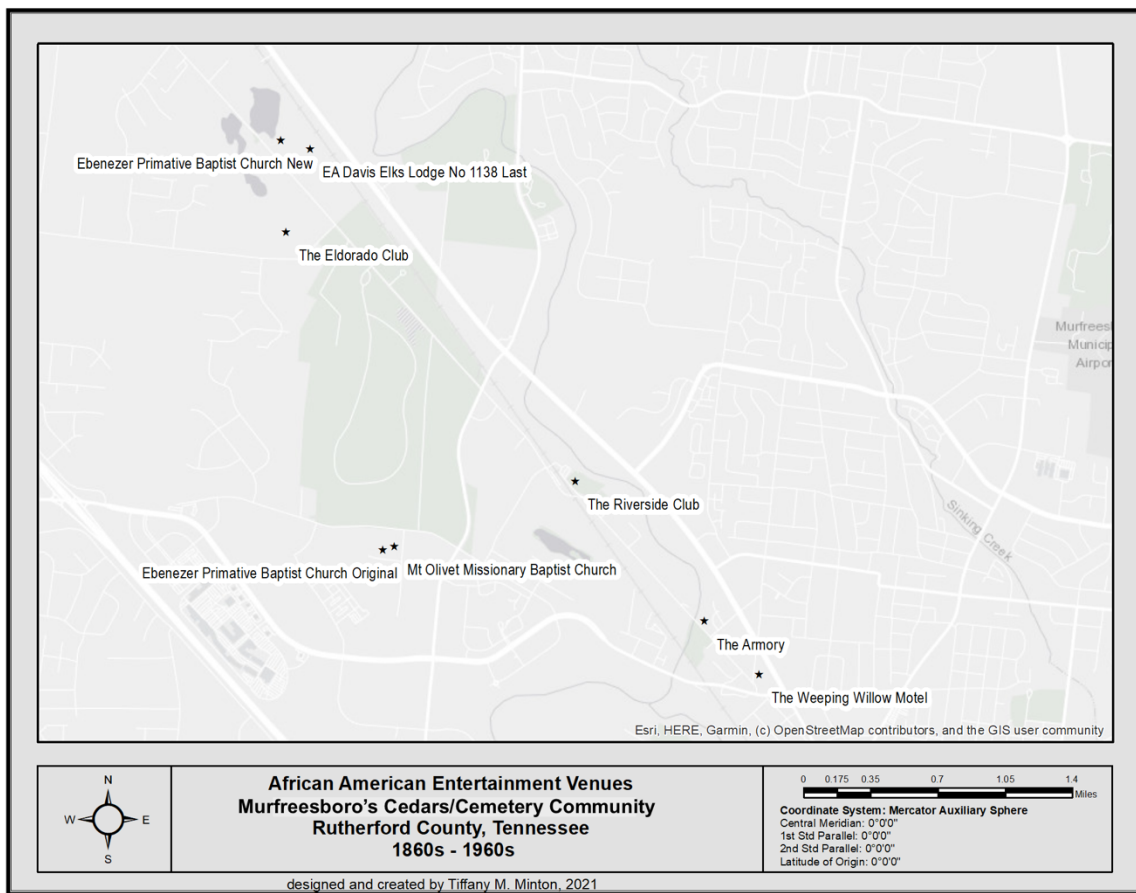


Figure 5

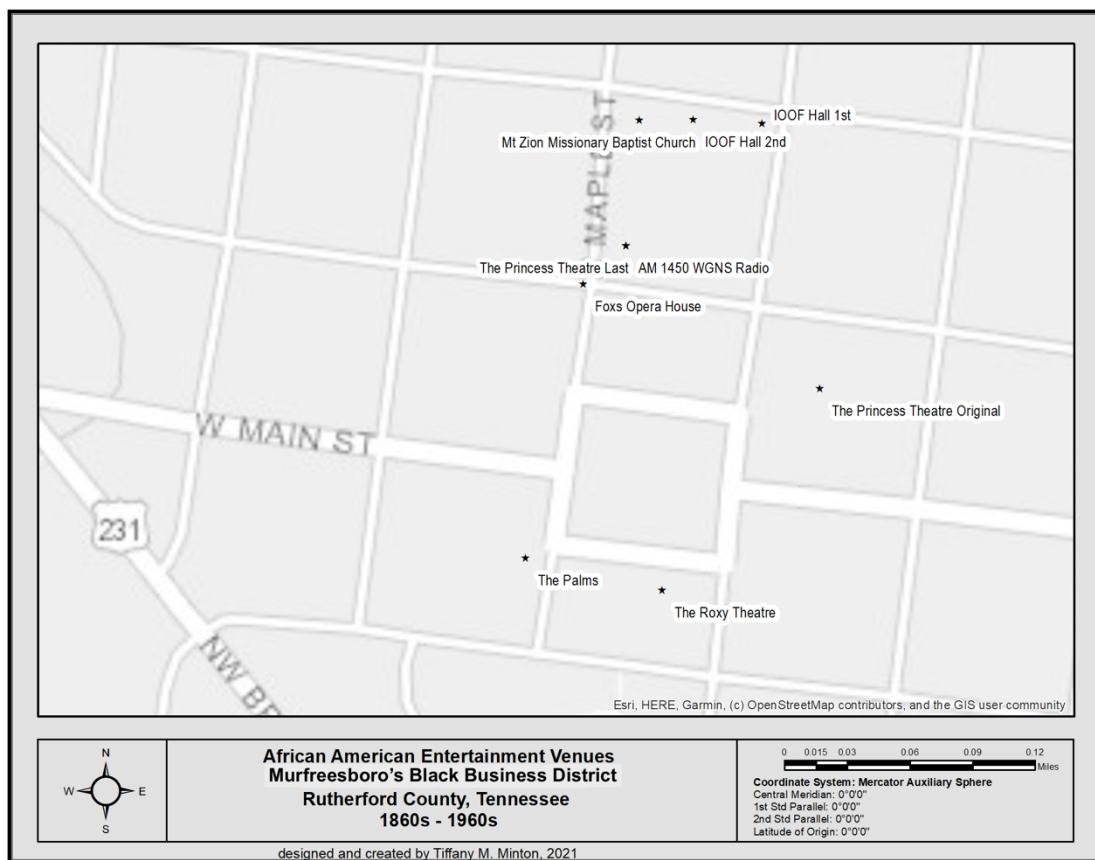


Figure 6

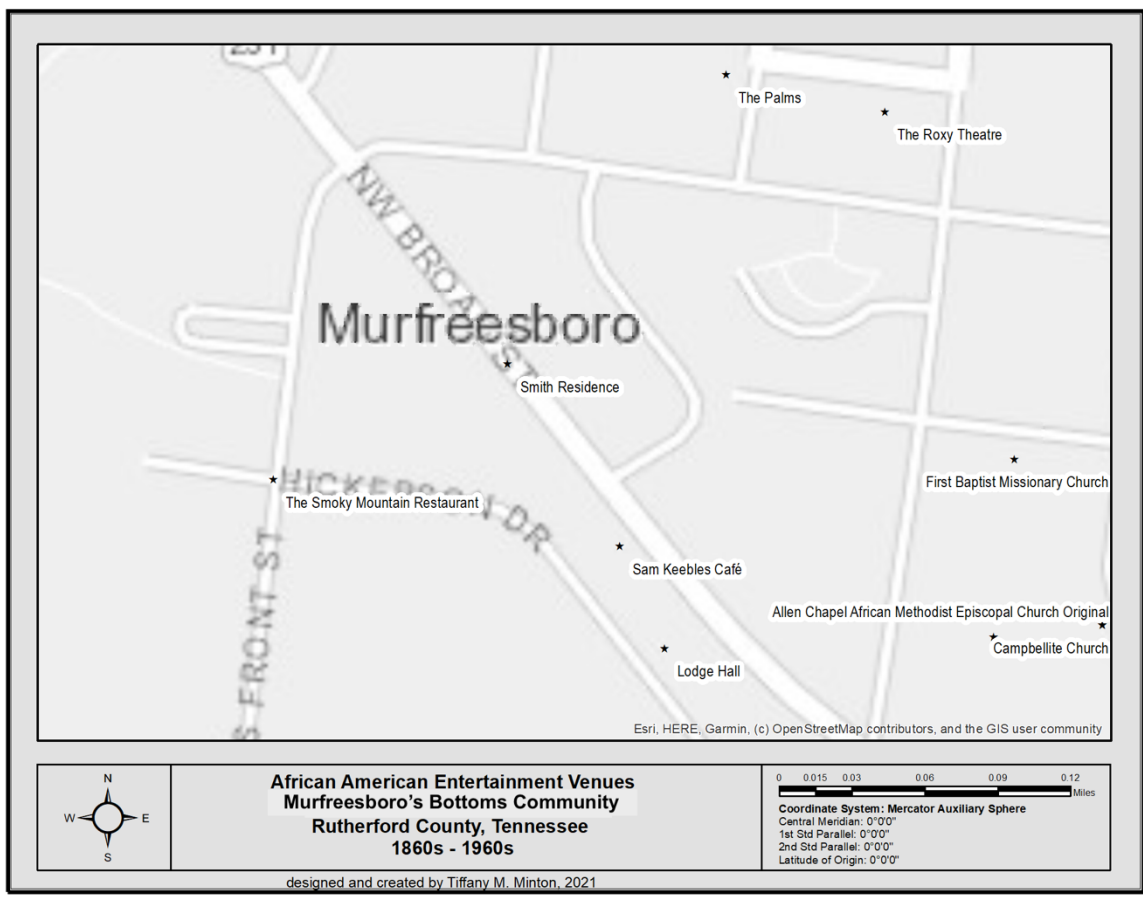


Figure 7

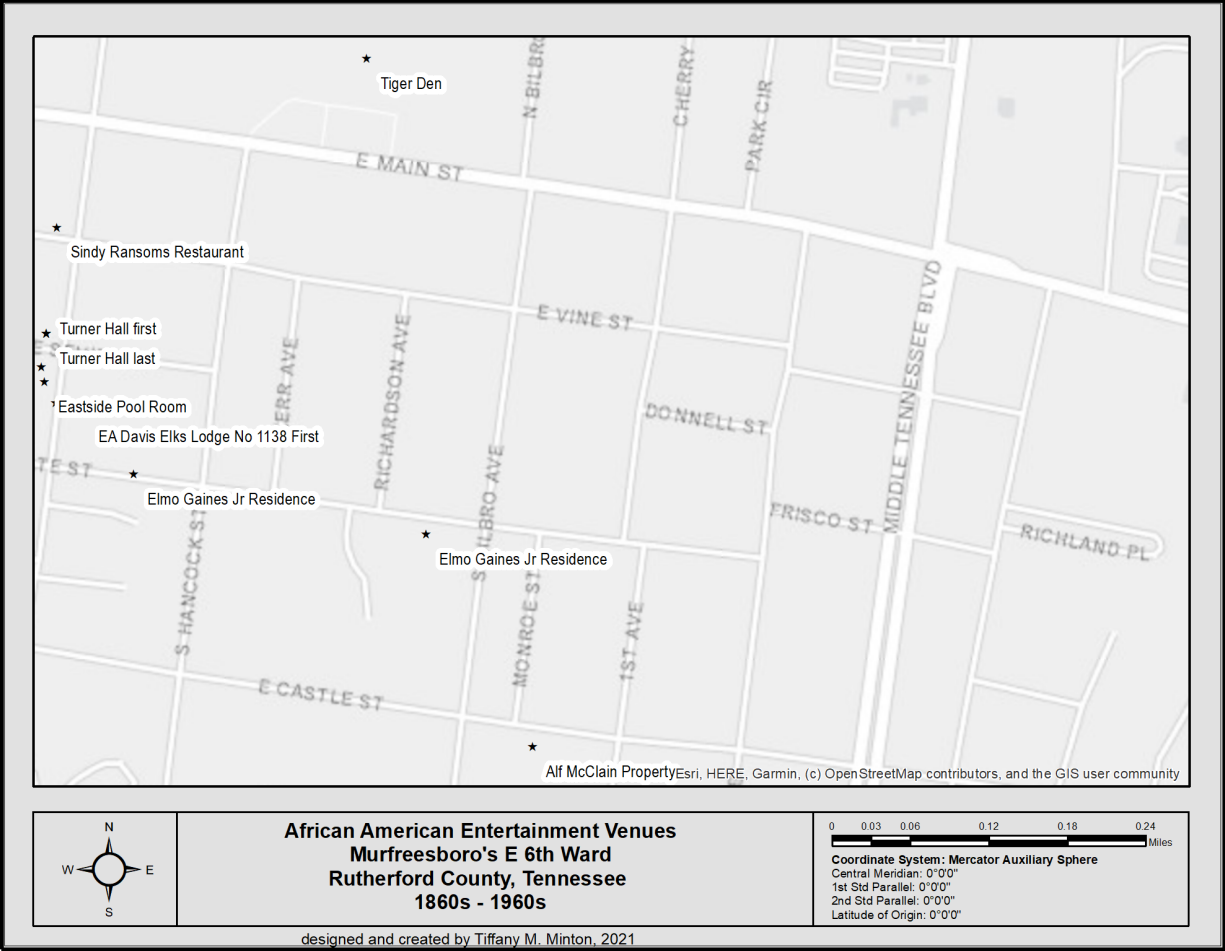


Figure 8

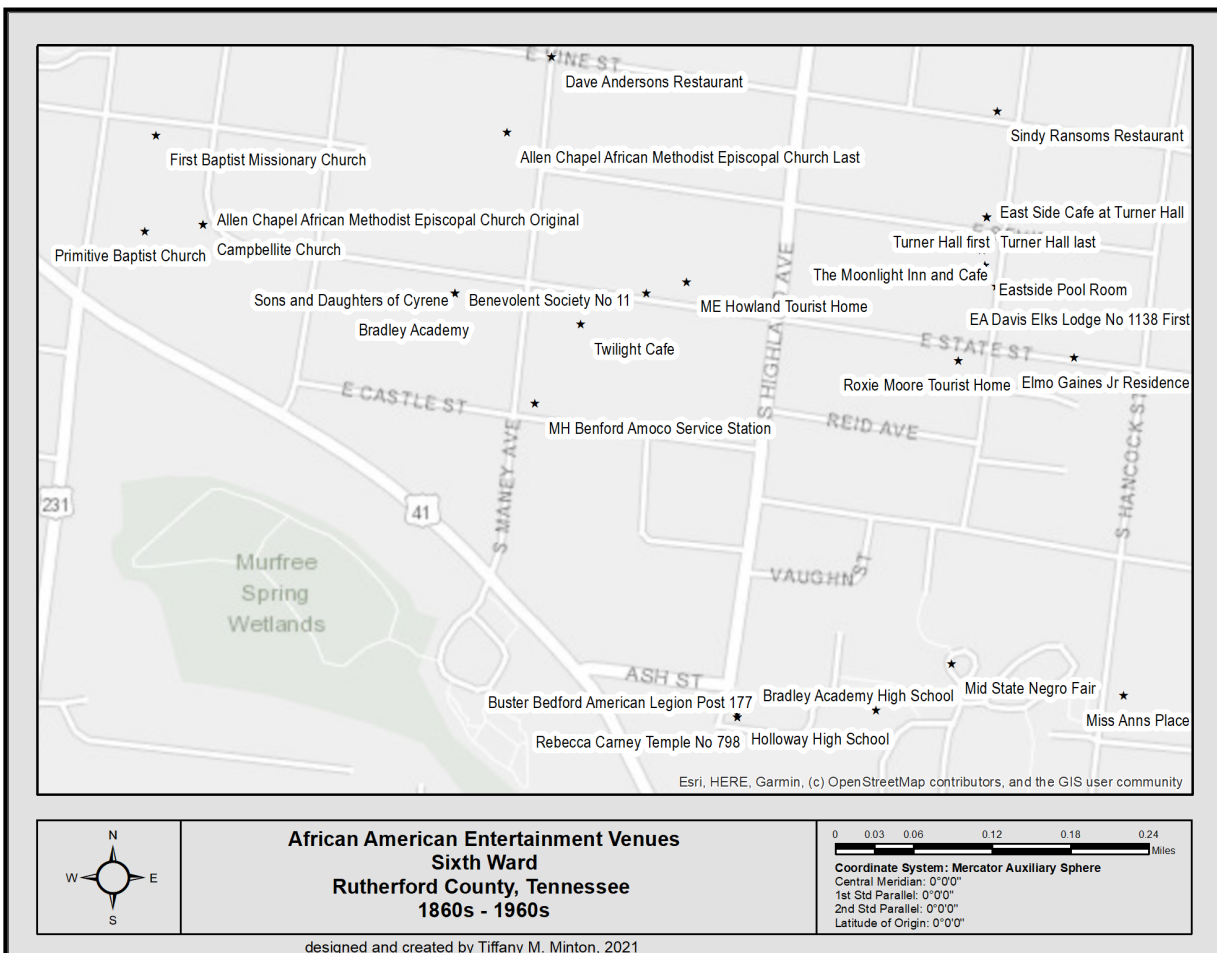


Figure 9

CHAPTER II: EMANCIPATION AND THE LONG RECONSTRUCTION ERA (1863 – 1900)

The 1860 census listed the population of Rutherford County, Tennessee as 27,918 with 1,316 white slaveholders enslaving 12,984 African Americans.⁴² One hundred and ninety African Americans were living as free people in the county. In February 1862, federal troops occupied Murfreesboro. A Confederate raid in the summer lifted that occupation until early 1863, when Union troops reoccupied the town following the Battle of Stones River. The town and county remained occupied until 1867, a period of four years during which once enslaved African Americans became freed people.

The first federal contraband camp, where escaped enslaved people found safety behind Union lines, developed around Fortress Rosecrans and the railroad in 1863. Residents at the Fortress Rosecrans contraband camp heard the news when Major General William Rosecrans released Order Number 6 later that year.⁴³ This order declared that enslaved people could join the Union army to serve as laborers and soldiers. From the occupied town grew two initial African American neighborhoods. One focused on federal offices—such as the Freedman’s Bureau—on the west side of the town square and stretched to the railroad tracks below the square. In time this neighborhood was known as The Bottoms. A second settlement grew out of Fortress Rosecrans. This contraband camp of 891 or more grew the first free community of African Americans known as the Cedars. The Cedars is part of the larger Cemetery Community, named after the national cemetery, established following the Battle of Stones River.⁴⁴

⁴² Shirley Farris Jones and Michael R. Bradley, *Murfreesboro in the Civil War* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2012), 12.

⁴³ No Author, “Negro Labor in the Army,” *The Nashville Daily Union*, February 13, 1863, 3.

⁴⁴ Rebecca Conard, “Historic Cemetery Community: The Cedars Stones River National Battlefield Rutherford County, Tennessee,” *Final Report: Stones River National Battlefield, Ethnographic Overview and Assessment* (Murfreesboro, TN: Department of History, Middle Tennessee State University, May 2016), 3.

African Americans filled these contraband and emerging free communities with music, just as they had filled the fields of the plantation, their homes and houses of worship before. “They used instruments like fiddles guitars, fifes, drums and bones (a rhythm instrument made from animal rib and leg bones).”⁴⁵ African Americans traded songs on paper, exchanging lyric books of popular songs called songsters. Songster lyrics ranged from poetic expressions of love and everyday life, to patriotic recollections about specific war battles. These songs were collaborative and evolving in that there were many different versions of how to play them and sing them. Renditions varied widely by person, region, and regiment. Each songster and performance reflected the needs of the person or group’s need to cope with the social conditions of war and slavery.⁴⁶ Members of Company E, 74th Regiment, Ohio Volunteer Infantry engaged in the Battle of Stones River. During Reconstruction, the term songster evolved to mean an African American who made their living as a traveling musician.

⁴⁵ “Music of the Civil War,” accessed April 1, 2021, <https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/resources-for-educators/classroom-resources/media-and-interactives/media/music/music-of-the-civil-war/>.

⁴⁶ “Music of the Civil War.”

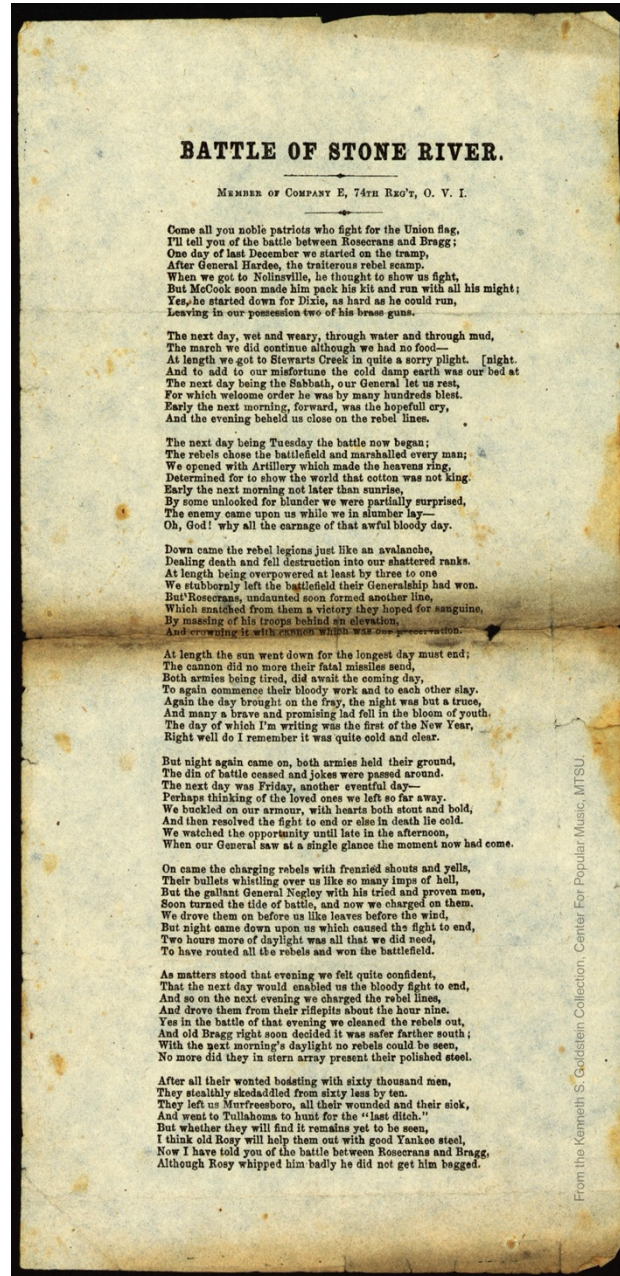


Figure 10. Member of Company E, 74th Reg't, O.V.I., *Battle of Stone River* by, 1863, from The Center for Popular Music, Song Broadside, binder 15, item 6, downloaded from <http://musicman.mtsu.edu/broadside/Binder15/JPEGmed/2876brom.jpg>.

Emancipation freed Blacks to prioritize their need to continue to create, express, self-determine and protect themselves outside of the watchful eye of plantation life and war. In the words of historian Stephen Ash, newly emancipated Blacks “lived in a Black world within a world,” building “discrete Black communities.”⁴⁷ When the Civil War ended and the era known as Reconstruction began, many African Americans remained in The Cedars/Cemetery area. They worked in agriculture as sharecroppers, subsistence farmers, and manual laborers. As African American families continued to inhabit the area around Cedars, their privately owned land became the backbone of the community. One of the first pillars of the Cemetery Community was the Tennessee Manual Labor University, established in 1867 by Peter and Samuel Lowery and Daniel Wadkins, African American community advocates and educators.⁴⁸ Those that moved into the city, worked in The Bottoms, Murfreesboro’s industrial center between the town square and railroad tracks. These pioneers of Black life began to shape new ways to be and live as free people, in spite of the terror that surrounded them. In Rutherford County, this new Black world contained social organizations, schools, churches, and [future] urban and rural communities.⁴⁹

Perhaps there exists no cornerstone during the Reconstruction era more important to the growth of African American spiritual and musical culture than the development of Black churches and schools. Within Cedars/Cemetery, there were Stones River Methodist Church, started by the federal Chaplin who oversaw the building of the national cemetery, Mt Olivet Missionary Baptist Church, and Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church. The Bottoms was the larger neighborhood and in and around the downtown from the 1860s to early 1880s African

⁴⁷ Stephen V. Ash, *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 1860-1870: War and Peace in the Upper South*, 1st ed (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 215.

⁴⁸ Bobby L. Lovett, “Tennessee Manual Labor University,” in *Tennessee Encyclopedia* (Tennessee Historical Society, October 8, 2017), <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/tennessee-manual-labor-university/>.

⁴⁹ John H. Lodl, “Building Viable Black Communities: The Transition from Slavery to Freedom in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, 1860-1880.” (Murfreesboro, TN, Middle Tennessee State University, 2004), 8, Walker Library Special Collections (4th Floor).

Americans established Allen Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) Church, First Baptist Church, Key Chapel Methodist Church, and Mt. Zion Baptist Church. In 1870, newly empowered town officials decided to take steps to curb African American influence in local politics by dividing Murfreesboro into six wards.⁵⁰ By this time the Fifth, Sixth and Fourth Wards near the square contained the highest population of African Americans in the city.⁵¹

Allen Chapel AME Church historian Lois Carr dates the church's founding to 1858 when the first members met inside each other's homes. The African Methodist Episcopal Church aggressively established new churches among free people communities in Tennessee starting in the mid-1860s. According to the property's National Register nomination, "The congregation proved immediately popular with local Blacks and in 1870, the church proudly hosted the third annual A.M.E. conference in Tennessee."⁵² The neighborhood continued to expand. As documented in the National Register nomination,

During this first generation of freedom, Murfreesboro Blacks had also gained the financial resources necessary to build a new church which would reflect their gains since Reconstruction as well as providing adequate worship space to meet the needs of a growing community. Trustees George Hester, Henry McMurray, Maryland Hoover, A. Pampambles, and Dr. J. S. Bass purchased a town lot on South Maney Avenue immediately east of the old City Cemetery. By so doing, they connected the church to the area where Murfreesboro free Blacks had once worked and lived during the antebellum era. Construction by congregation members began at an unknown time in 1889. Dave Hyde, Sr., dug the foundation and basement while John Scruggs and his sons Oliver and Horace made the bricks and supposedly raised the building. Rev. T.W. Thorne was reverend at the time of construction.⁵³

⁵⁰ John H. Lodi, "Building Viable Black Communities: The Transition from Slavery to Freedom in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, 1860-1880." (Murfreesboro, TN, Middle Tennessee State University, 2004), 33, Walker Library Special Collections (4th Floor).

⁵¹ John H. Lodi, "Building Viable Black Communities."

⁵² Carroll Van West, "National Register of Historic Places Registration: Allen Chapel A.M.E. Church, September 15, 1993," National Park Service National Register of Historic Places Digital Archive.

⁵³ Carroll Van West, "National Register of Historic Places Registration."

The congregation dedicated its present building adjacent to the City Cemetery at 224 South Maney in 1889.⁵⁴

1887 Sanborn Maps of Murfreesboro describe the Church Street block as having three separate wallpaper, stationery and printing businesses.⁵⁵ It isn't clear from these maps who the proprietors were or what was printed, exactly. However, an 1860 advertisement in *Murfreesboro News* describes "R.D. Reed, & Co. Booksellers, Stationers and Dealers in Wall Papers" as purveyors of "books, stationary, wallpaper, music and musical instruments."⁵⁶ Specifically, Reed advertised itself as a place to purchase banjos and sheet music, or what historians typically call "broadsides."

When Africans were brought to America as enslaved people, they brought with them their many, varied African musical traditions. Two examples are the banjo and syncopation. Over time, these traditions evolved into an emerging and distinctly African American form known as the negro or folk spiritual. By the eighteenth century this religiously inspired music was emanating from every plantation field, slave dwelling, and sanctuary. Sanborn Maps also indicate a "Negro Campbellite Church" at the corner of State Street and Spring Street. Campbellite, now an antiquated term, is most likely a reference to Churches of Christ, whose worship services are centered around the profundity of their pastors.⁵⁷

Thus looms the figure of Marshall Keeble, Jr. Born in Rutherford County in 1879, Marshall Keeble, Jr. was an acclaimed civil rights preacher who became the most famous Black

⁵⁴ Nancy De Gennaro, "Allen Chapel AME Church: 'A Legacy of Service,'" *The Daily News-Journal*, July 24, 2015.

⁵⁵ *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Murfreesboro, Rutherford County, Tennessee*. Sanborn Map Company, Jul, 1887. Map. https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn08355_001/.

⁵⁶ No Author, "R.D. Reed, & Co. Booksellers, Stationers and Dealers in Wall Papers," *Murfreesboro News*, October 17, 1860, Vol. 10, No. 14.

⁵⁷ See this article describing the history of Independent Baptists in Alabama: Edward R. Crowther, "Independent Black Baptist Congregations in Antebellum Alabama." *The Journal of Negro History* 72, no. 3/4 (1987): 66-75. Accessed March 26, 2021. doi:10.2307/3031509.

leader in the Churches of Christ in the early to mid-twentieth century. Keeble, Jr.'s career spanned over five decades, and in that time, he founded most branches of the Churches of Christ throughout the state of Tennessee.⁵⁸ Keeble, Jr. descended from Marshall Keeble, Sr. who had once been enslaved at the Stoney Lonesome Plantation run by Walter "Blackhead" Keeble.⁵⁹ Upon Walter's death, he willed Marshall, Sr. and his brother, Sampson to his son Horace under the stipulation that they be freed when it became legal. Sampson was also a prominent Rutherfordian. He became the first African American elected to the Tennessee General Assembly from 1873 to 1875.⁶⁰ Curiously, he was also at the helm of the service industry culture and worked as a barber. Marshall Keeble, Jr. was proclaimed the country-wide for his gospel oratory.

In the history of Black vernacular music traditions, you cannot parse the member of the clergy from the congregation, or the choir. The nature of a Black sermon is both a spiritual and musical act, whether or not it is supported by instrumental accompaniment. The structural form, practice, and performance style has parallel origins to the development of the Negro Spiritual in that preaching requires group participation, spontaneous improvisation of the text, and the complex rhythms and tonalities of West African music. Similarly, the text of sermons are also direct, ironic and symbolic.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Carroll Van West, "Keeble, Marshall," in *Tennessee Encyclopedia*, accessed March 26, 2021, <https://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entries/marshall-keeble/>.

⁵⁹ Admin, "Sampson Keeble, Old Jefferson- Part of Smyrna's Rich History," *The Tennessee Ledger Newspaper Local News, Latest Business, Investigative and Political News & Headlines* (blog), August 19, 2019, <http://tennesseledger.com/elementor-3072/>; 1880 United States Federal Census for Robert Keeble, District 18, Rutherford, Tennessee; Roll: 1276; Page: 314C; Enumeration District: 204.

⁶⁰ Linda T. Wynn, "Keeble, Sampson W.," in *Tennessee Encyclopedia*, accessed March 26, 2021, <https://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entries/sampson-w-keeble/>.

⁶¹ Joyce Marie Jackson, "Continuity of Consciousness: Spirituals and Gospel," in *Rivers of Rhythm: African Americans and the Making of American Music* (Nashville, TN: National Museum of African American History, 2020), 16–17.

Slave owners understood the power of Black worship and preaching, and prior to emancipation, they went to great lengths to try and silence the musical and spiritual traditions of the enslaved. Enslavers held joint church services and forced the enslaved to convert to their practices of Christianity as a way to monitor their spiritual practices and beliefs. Historian Jerry H. Brookshire noted that racially mixed Methodist services were common throughout Murfreesboro during the 1800s.⁶² Long before this, the enslaved had managed to develop their own musical ideas and worship styles separate from white people's control in the fields of the plantation.⁶³

This style, often called "Old Time," was a blend of African traditions, like syncopation, with negro spirituals, and string band music considered the vernacular precursor to modern country music. String band music is played on anything with strings, meaning guitar, banjo and fiddle. But it also signifies instrumentation on more homemade folk instruments such as the washboard, washtub bass, and the one-stringed diddly bow. The diddly bow is one wire string pulled across a board utilizing a glass bottle or piece of metal as the bridge apparatus. It is an instrument that when played resonates like a guitar playing the blues. It is also akin to the cigar box guitar, which could be bowed (like a fiddle) or plucked (like a guitar). The cigar box is considered a repertoire instrument of ragtime music. Methodist clergyman and Tennessee Reconstruction Governor William G. "Parson" Brownlow, an editor, reporter and publisher for *The Whig*, observed this early style of music making. Brownlow reported in 1865 that, "thousands of free colored persons are congregating in and around the large towns in Tennessee. . . they fiddle and dance at night."⁶⁴

⁶² Jerry H. Brookshire, "Methodists and Murfreesboro in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Rutherford County Historical Society*, Winter 1978, 66.

⁶³ Joyce Marie Jackson, "Continuity of Consciousness: Spirituals and Gospel," 16.

⁶⁴ No Author, "The Negro Question," *The Murfreesboro Monitor*, August 7, 1865, 2.



Figure 11. Stephenson, Mrs. Charles (Grace Murray), *Emancipation Day Celebration band*, June 19, 1900, photograph, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library.

African Americans were not just musical for themselves during this period. They performed for both Black and white audiences at picnics, fairs and theatres. Jordan McGowan, a Black string band leader, is listed in the 1873 *Nashville, Tennessee City Directory* as a musician living at the address of 167 North Front Street in downtown.⁶⁵ From his home in the “bottoms” of Nashville, McGowan had accessibility to Rutherford County via the Murfreesboro Turnpike, which intersected with Market Street, approximately six blocks from North Front Street. Another option for McGowan might have been the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad, which entered the city at the southeastern point of downtown.⁶⁶ Murfreesboro journalist and historian C.C.

⁶⁵ *Nashville, Tennessee, City Directory, 1873*, March (Nashville, TN: Wheeler, Marshall & Bruce, Publishers, 1873), 178.

⁶⁶ *Nashville, Tennessee, City Directory, 1873*, images 4-6.

Henderson recalls the importance of McGowan and his string band to the city in “A Historical Story” written for the *News Banner*:

The picnic was one and probably one of the greatest sources of pleasure. A picnic on a grand scale was indeed an event. . . Domestic animals for barbecuing were solicited and freely donated. . . A circular space about 60 in diameter would be cleared off and sawdust strewn thereon. A bandstand erected for the negro musicians. This was generally furnished by the famous stringed band of Jordan McGowan, colored. . . the dances practiced were almost entirely confined to the quadrille, or ‘square dance’ and the later custom of men and women dancing together.⁶⁷

Walter Greer was another significant string band musician to the area. Unlike McGowan, Greer was born in Rutherford County where he also learned to play. On July 22, 1975, folklorist Robert Cogswell recorded an hour and twenty-eight minutes’ worth of fiddle tunes and oral history in the living room of 17 Decatur Street in Nashville. Cogswell used a Bell and Howell quarter inch reel-to-reel and provided accompaniment on guitar during the recording session. A colleague working at the Veteran’s Hospital in Nashville who knew of Cogswell’s interest in turn of the century string band music had recommended the fiddle player.⁶⁸ According to a World War I and II draft cards, this Black fiddle player was born on November 12, 1889.⁶⁹ He was born roughly eight miles from Murfreesboro, in the Walter Hill section of Rutherford County.⁷⁰ His name was Walter Greer.

⁶⁷ C.C. Henderson, “Murfreesboro and Rutherford County, A Historical Story By C.C. Henderson,” *Newspapers.Com*, August 26, 1929, 4.

⁶⁸ Walter Greer and Robert Cogswell, *Walter Grier: African-American Fiddler*, 1/4" analog tape, TFA-0237 A/B (Nashville, TN, 1975), Center for Popular Music, Middle Tennessee State University.

⁶⁹ “U.S., World War II Draft Cards Young Men, 1940-1947 for Walter Greer,” Record Group: Records of the Selective Service System, 147; Box: 114, The National Archives: St. Louis, Missouri, accessed March 26, 2021, https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/imageviewer/collections/2238/images/44039_05_00018-02217?treeid=&personid=&usePUB=true&_phsrc=cAm348&_phstart=successSource&pId=201480510.

⁷⁰ United States, Selective Service System, “U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918 for Walter Greer,” M1509, 4,582, National Archives: Washington, DC, accessed March 26, 2021, https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/imageviewer/collections/6482/images/005152490_04262?pId=22394192.

Listening to the recordings almost a half a century later is mesmerizing. The fiddle is tuned two semitones down and to the trained ear, you can tell Greer did not use rosin. According to Cogswell, Greer preferred to use coal, though it is unclear if he used it that day or not. Greer's playing style is distinct, his repertoire of songs is lengthy, and the tones he captures are unique. In this hour, Greer runs down a setlist of about thirty-five songs. There is barely a downbeat taken or full conversation to be heard between songs. It is the sort of pace that suggests he is experienced, he knows a lot of material, and he knows how to keep the energy constant. It is no surprise when Greer recalls to Cogswell that he cut his teeth early on playing square dances in Rutherford County in places like Snail Shell Cave.⁷¹

Another Rutherford County native began his career in the Kittrell community. Born in 1870, his name is Uncle Dave Macon, "The Grandfather of Country Music."⁷² Macon, white, was a banjo player by trade, a skill he learned as a child from traveling vaudeville performers who took respite in his home while on tour.⁷³ Macon also ran a hauling company, transporting freight, produce and bootleg liquor between Murfreesboro and Woodbury, Tennessee.⁷⁴ As he traveled along the roadways, he would perform for and play music with the people of his community, both white and Black.

In 1924 he recorded five songs for Vocalion Records, including one he is credited for writing called "Keep My Skillet Good and Greasy."⁷⁵ In the official 1980 documentary by Blaine Dunlap and Sol Korine about Macon's life, friends of Macon recall his musical style and the history of his songs. American folk singer and activist Pete Seeger refers to him as "one of the

⁷¹ Greer and Cogswell, *Walter Grier: African-American Fiddler*.

⁷² "Sharing the 'Dixie Dewdrop' Story," *Rutherford County Tennessee Historical Society* (blog), December 27, 2018, http://rutherfordtnhistory.org/__trashed-4/.

⁷³ Randal Rust, "Macon, David Harrison 'Uncle Dave,'" in *Tennessee Encyclopedia*, accessed March 26, 2021, <https://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entries/david-harrison-macon/>.

⁷⁴ Randal Rust.

⁷⁵ "Sharing the 'Dixie Dewdrop' Story."

most important people in the history of American music” and the kind of great musician that was “able to synthesize” diverse vernacular styles. Banjoist Kirk McGee postulates that he “probably learned from slaves.” Fiddler Sid Harkreader says, “he learned an awful lot from the Black people.” Harkreader continues, confirming that he learned his first hit song, “Keep My Skillet Good and Greasy,” from “a colored man.”⁷⁶

Did Walter Greer know Uncle Dave Macon? It is uncertain. But what we can know is that African Americans making Old-time string band music in Rutherford County played a major role in the development of the vernacular music styles that we now call country music. Macon may get the credit for establishing country music’s beginnings, but he certainly did not invent it. Walter Greer did not invent it either. But what he did do was play the same kind of music and gigs as Macon did, he just never got the same recognition.

A 1935 Honolulu, Hawaii ship manifest for the Australian vessel *Mariposa* lists Walter Greer at the correct race and age. The *Mariposa* was a luxury ocean liner before it was commissioned into World War II as a transport vessel for troops and supplies in the Pacific. Assuming this is Walter Hill’s Walter, Greer would have been the abled bodied crew member with fifteen years of service at sea.⁷⁷ The *Mariposa* began service in 1932, which means Greer earned his fifteen years of work at sea elsewhere. Maybe some of that time was spent during the war, but that leaves about five years of his career unaccounted for. For now, we can only imagine what these details could mean. Was Greer serving as an “able bodied” musician, or did he just bring his fiddle along while he was away at sea?

⁷⁶ Blaine Dunlap and Sol Korine, *Uncle Dave Macon* (Corporation for Public Broadcasting, 1980), <https://www.folkstreams.net/film-detail.php?id=324>.

⁷⁷ *Honolulu, Hawaii, Passenger and Crew Lists, 1900-1959*, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., National Archives Microfilm Publication: A3569, Roll: 096, Record Group Title: Records of the Immigration. Accessed from Ancestry.com.

At some point Greer began playing in a Black string band scene in Nashville, Tennessee near Shelby Avenue, East of the Cumberland River downtown. Other bands in this scene included the Nashville String Band, who frequented the Chitlin' Circuit neighborhood of Jefferson Street. Greer kept the legacy of string band and Old-time music alive for almost a hundred years. Greer died a year after his recordings were captured in Nashville at the age of eighty-six.

CHAPTER III: JIM CROW AND THE PROGRESSIVE ERA (1900s – 1920s)

“Clothes on the wash line never look new
 Smokey air turns them gray
 Sun can't pass through the dirty window
 But I kinda like it that way...
 In my tenement this poor boy is a king”

—lyrics from “In My Tenement” by Jackie Shane

Between 1915 and 1927, state and local governments worked in tandem to produce the Dixie Highway, which stretched 5,706 miles of paved roads from Ontario, Canada to Miami, Florida beginning in and terminating in Miami, Florida. A rough mid-point for this travel along the highway’s primary route was Rutherford County, Tennessee. Because of its location, the county has always benefitted greatly from the evolution of travel in America. The expansion of the Dixie Highway during the first part of twentieth century made Rutherford all the more unique when it came to accessibility from multiple directions in the state, as well as outside Tennessee’s borders.

The Dixie Highway, whose primary section later became U.S. 41, traveled through Middle Tennessee directly into the heart of the city of Murfreesboro. Within the county, the highway lines cut through outlaying the towns of La Vergne and Smyrna before passing by directly the Cemetery/Cedars neighborhood and the adjacent Stones River National Battlefield, established in 1927. The highway persisted into the city limits via College Street, hooked around the town square, and exited down South Church Street and into the Bottoms neighborhood.

The highway linked white and Black sections of town at a time of Jim Crow segregation when there were few places where white people lived alongside African Americans in Rutherford County. For example, in the countryside it was not unheard of for both Black and

white to work as sharecroppers in the same or nearby fields but rarely were their residences close. Such was the case in The Cedars. By 1929, Black ownership eclipsed white ownership in the area. Of the forty-nine plots that surrounded the site of Stones River Battlefield, just seven were owned by whites. Forty-five parcels of land were owned by African Americans, including two properties housing churches right on the highway. African American G.H. Minter, born and raised in Cemetery, also owned property there.⁷⁸ Two generations after Minter, his descendant, Percy Minter, Jr., took ownership of a different parcel of land housing the venue The Eldorado Club (see Chapter V).

The Bottoms of Murfreesboro was mostly an African American neighborhood, but some working-class whites lived adjacent. 1907 Sanborn Maps from indicate two “Negro Pool Halls,” a “Negro Restaurant,” and a grouping of “Negro Dwellings” near the intersection of South Maple and West Vine Street at the point that the Bottoms neighborhood touched the town square.⁷⁹ In addition, these maps indicate the locations of multiple negro duplexes in the area.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, African Americans in Murfreesboro expanded both businesses and institutions. On May 13, 1910, *The Nashville Globe*, reported on the city’s “hustling negro citizens,” noting their “prospering and growing wealth.”⁸⁰ The article documents stores, pool halls, a boarding house, a shoe repair shop, as well as three physicians, multiple contractors, and a plumber.⁸¹ The Black business section was mostly located in and around “the

⁷⁸ Rebecca Conard, “The Changing Face of the Country: Environmental History and the Legacy of the Civil War at Stones River Battlefield,” *The George Wright Forum* 28, no. 2 (2011): 3; Rowena Minter et al. to USA, Decree Deed, Rutherford County Register of Deeds, Book 78, 259–260, executed February 24, 1932 and recorded July 8, 1933; Ancestry.com. *1930 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com, Operations Inc, 2002

⁷⁹ *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Murfreesboro, Rutherford County, Tennessee*. Sanborn Map Company, Jun, 1907. Map. https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn08355_005/

⁸⁰ Miss Johnnie Leek, “Murfreesboro: Her Hustling Negro Citizens/The Copeland Hotel,” *Nashville Globe*, May 13, 1910.

⁸¹ Leek, “Murfreesboro: Her Hustling Negro Citizens.”

southwest corner of the square down to the intersection of Vine and South Maple.”⁸² It then continued down Vine to the intersections of Church, Spring, and Maney Avenues where to the south were additional Black businesses and institutions. Vine Street, rising from the Bottoms, became the physical connection between neighborhood and town for African Americans. West Main Street—one block to the north—was the connector for whites between the railroad depot and the town square.⁸³

The name of the Bottoms reflected Black urban development across America. The term “bottoms” is connected to a larger history of African American settlement in flood-prone areas as well as music making about those communities. According to folklorist David Evans, Bessie Smith’s 1927 song “Back-Water Blues” is a musical interpretation of the flooding of the Cumberland River in Nashville, Tennessee on Christmas Day, 1926.⁸⁴ The term also signifies a dance called “The Black Bottom.” Chicago-based artist Blind Lemon Jefferson referenced the dance in his 1927 song “Hot Dogs” which he recorded for Paramount.⁸⁵

Fraternal and benevolent lodges have been part of the African American community in Rutherford County since the late 1800s.⁸⁶ Serving as a network of like-mindedness, community members provided safety net social services such as life insurance, burial, and charity.⁸⁷ These societies offer African Americans social cohesion, support and shared identity. One of the earliest societies, the Prince Hall Free Masons, resided at 130 South

⁸² No Author, “On and Off The Square,” *The Daily News-Journal*, May 11, 1932, Vol II No 61 edition.

⁸³ Deborah Wagnon and Christian Hidalgo, *Murfreesboro*, Images of America (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Pub, 2007), 13.

⁸⁴ Chris Lamb, “America’s First Post-World War II Race Riot Led to the near-Lynching of Thurgood Marshall,” *Washington Post*, accessed March 26, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2021/02/25/columbia-race-riot-wwii-thurgood-marshall/>.

⁸⁵ George Perkins, “Hot Dogs,” performed by Blind Lemon Jefferson and His Feet, recorded August 1927, from Paramount, New York Recording Laboratories, Inc., 10” 78RPM, 12493-A.

⁸⁶ C.C. Henderson, *The Story of Murfreesboro* (Murfreesboro: *The News-Banner Publishing Co.*, 1929), 118, 121.

⁸⁷ Lee Ann Gardner, “To Care for the Sick and Bury the Dead”: Murfreesboro’s African American Benevolent Groups,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 32–51.

Maple Street.⁸⁸ Like churches, these were places central to the promotion of the community and its happenings. Members of these societies were the word-of-mouth bullhorn promoting Black talent coming through the city.

The city was a major hub in the region for local and traveling talent. All styles of traveling revue came through Rutherford County: medicine shows, circus-style tent shows, minstrel performances, busking, live theatre, and string band orchestras. Newspapers began advertising vaudeville performances in Murfreesboro as early as 1900.⁸⁹ The 1909 *Julius Cahn-Gus Hill Theatrical Guide and Moving Picture Directory* describes Murfreesboro's Citizens Theater as having eight-hundred capacity seating in a six-thousand-person city.⁹⁰ Given the social conditions of racism and segregation, the Citizen's Theater would have most likely been owned and operated by whites. However, it was common enough that theatres in the South created segregated performances of white performers for Blacks only, and vice versa. These performances were often in the form of minstrel shows. Minstrel shows were racist and derogatory in performance style and artistic tone. Yet some historians argue that "Blackface entertainers introduced segregated white audiences to the gift of African American music."⁹¹

In 1914, The Princess Theatre opened at its original location, 118 North Church Street, on Murfreesboro's public square. There was also Fox's Opera House, operating at the corner of West College and Maple Street. The Princess housed an auditorium and balcony, two film projectors, a small stage and dressing rooms for performers, and had a capacity large enough for

⁸⁸ "Explore Historic Murfreesboro, A Walking Tour," 2008, 6.

⁸⁹ E. L. Tobias, "Murfreesboro, Tenn." *The Billboard* (Archive: 1894-1960), Nov 29, 1902: 11.

⁹⁰ *The Julius Cahn-Gus Hill Theatrical Guide and Moving Picture Directory, 1909. Vol. XIV*. New York: Empire Theatre Building, 1921. Digitized by The Internet Archive in 2015. <https://archive.org/details/juliuscahngushil1219hill>, 712.

⁹¹ Michael D. Doubler, *Dixie Dewdrop: The Uncle Dave Macon Story*, Music in American Life (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 21.

620 patrons.⁹² The Princess was owned and operated by white proprietors. During this era the theatre served primarily as a nickelodeon, or movie house, as well as a venue for local and traveling vaudeville productions. It is unclear if Black vaudeville productions specifically appeared before white or Black audiences at The Princess. Yet, it cannot be overstated how important Black artistry was to both forms of theatre.

From its advent, early Black vaudeville on the Chitlin' Circuit established itself on providing safety during a time of almost constant terror for Black people all over America. Many white people continued to mourn the loss of the Civil War, festering their resentment about the evolving prosperity and acceptance of Black life in the South. Their response was the systemic murder of thousands of Black people, lynching on a grand scale. Lynching was so prevalent during the teens that the NAACP sent Walter white into the deep south to investigate it in 1918. While in Tennessee, Walter assessed the murder of Jesse McIlherron from Estill Springs, a small town on the Dixie Highway, south of Tullahoma (see figure 3).⁹³

The investigation uncovered that on February 8, McIlherron got into a spat with three young white men who had openly insulted and threatened him. In self-defense, McIlherron fired six shots at the men, killing two and then fleeing to a clergyman's home. From a fifty-mile radius, a white mob of men, women and even children formed and captured him. McIlherron was chained to a hickory tree, tortured and burned for public amusement.⁹⁴ Estill Springs, though seemingly far in geography from Rutherford County, would not have been far in the imagination of African Americans traveling the highway. The perceived and actual threat surrounding the

⁹² Gloria Shacklett-Christy, "The Princess Theatre," *The Murfreesboro Post*, Jun 2, 2014, 22.

⁹³ Note: this account was originally published in the 1918 issue of the NAACP magazine *The Crisis*, and is republished here. "NAACP | History of Lynchings," NAACP, accessed March 26, 2021, <https://www.naacp.org/history-of-lynchings/>.

⁹⁴ "NAACP | History of Lynchings."

terror of lynching defined the spaces that African Americans could occupy and motivated them to continue to foster and create safe spaces for themselves as entertainers, such as all-Black vaudeville productions.

Like white-vaudeville, all-Black productions mixed song, dance, and comedy. However, they were a culture all their own. It was on this circuit that the music of ragtime, string band performance, old-time and gospel converged to develop the music of the Blues. For Black folks touring the developing Chitlin' Circuit, the experience signified more than just being surrounded by a landscape of racialized terror. It also meant freedom, particularly for those touring in all-Black productions. The liberation and personal safety allowed by these unified groups helped African Americans achieve higher levels of intellectual, personal and creative liberty. They wrote, directed, performed and traveled these productions and their communities showed up for them in droves. This level of independence set them apart from the world of white vaudeville production, which centered the racist stereotyping of Black-face minstrelsy.

Madame Emma Azalia Hackley, one of the most important figures in twentieth century Black music history, is from Rutherford County. This singer was much more than a performer. She was an artist, teacher, author, and activist, a pioneer of African American musical culture, and it matters. It matters that other cities she called home including Denver, Colorado, and Detroit, Michigan have made claim to her importance, yet little has been said by historians on her relationship to Middle Tennessee.

Born on June 29, 1867, just two years after the end of the Civil War, Miss Emma Azalia Smith was born in Murfreesboro, Tennessee to Henry and Corilla Smith. Henry met Corilla while traveling as a free man to Detroit around 1865. They married and moved back to Henry's

hometown of Murfreesboro, where they shared a home with Henry's parents at the corner of Sevier and Walnut Streets in the area of The Bottoms.⁹⁵

Corilla was an educated woman, with the heart of a teacher. She was also a highly proficient musician, classically trained and steeped in Black tradition. Soon after moving to Murfreesboro, she was encouraged by a friend named Mrs. Harper to open one of the first schools for Black children in the county.⁹⁶ Because the first Black schools were the educational arm of the first Black churches, they were places where African American children inherited an understanding about music and its cultural context in the Black community. At the time, schools were one-room, which meant that children of all ages and levels of education learned together. Because of this tight-knit, collaborative environment it was required for teachers to possess a high-level of knowledge about many subjects. In particular, music was considered an essential part of a child's intellectual, spiritual and social development, and so it was a necessary part of curriculum. Black schools became a site where the musical traditions of the past were remembered, practiced, and innovated by new generations.

Originally established in 1811 for white children, Bradley Academy became the first school in Murfreesboro for Black children when it was re-established as such in the 1880s.⁹⁷ Though it is unclear from this story what the name of the school was that Corilla started and ran during her short tenure in Murfreesboro, it seems to be that her school predates Bradley's re-establishment. Being an educational pioneer came at a cost for Corilla. Like much of the state and country, Rutherford County continued to be highly unsafe for African Americans during the

⁹⁵ M. Marguerite Davenport, *Azalia, the Life of Madame E. Azalia Hackley* (Boston, Mass: Chapman & Grimes, Inc., 1947), 26, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b3247480>.

⁹⁶ Davenport, 27.

⁹⁷ Caneta Skelley Hankins, "Bradley Academy," in *Tennessee Encyclopedia*, accessed March 19, 2021, <https://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entries/bradley-academy/>.

Reconstruction era. In 1868, *Freedom's Watchmen* reported three active KKK chapters in the immediate Nashville area.⁹⁸ Another report that year implicated Maury, Giles and Marshall as other active sites for the Klan.⁹⁹ Rutherford County was no exception with hundreds of Klan members. Confederate veteran, Murfreesboro citizen, and “proud member” of the later twentieth century Klan, Sam Mitchell, publicly admitted so. In a 1940 interview recalling the days of Reconstruction, Mitchell stated that, “Negroes were loose around Murfreesboro. . . the six shooter was just as much a part of a man’s dress as his coat. . . the KKK straightened the negroes [out].”¹⁰⁰ Corilla recalled stories of routine harassment by white people in Rutherford County who resented her educational efforts. She reported that on one occasion, a brick was thrown into her schoolhouse.¹⁰¹ Unable to accept the racism and terror of Murfreesboro, Henry and Corilla Smith eventually moved the family back to Detroit, Michigan in 1870.¹⁰²

According to her biography, Corilla often sang and played the piano to Azalia when she was an infant living in Murfreesboro. Corilla nurtured her daughter with music and as a result, “without any formal instruction she could play the piano at the age of three.”¹⁰³ Azalea’s first years in Murfreesboro were extremely formidable for her. This mix of genetics and early socialization by her music educator mother and the surrounding Black community greatly influenced Azalia. Not only did it help her become a musical prodigy by three, but it also set her on a path to radically change popular music culture in the post-Reconstruction era, to become the greatest vocalist of her time.

⁹⁸ No Author, “Three Circles of the Kuklux Klan Have Been Organized,” *Freedom's Watchmen*, February 26, 1868, Vol. 1, No. 20, 1.

⁹⁹ No Author, “The Kuklux Klan,” *Freedom's Watchmen*, February 26, 1868, Vol. 1 No. 20, 1.

¹⁰⁰ Lady Houston, “Sam Mitchell Recalls Reconstruction Days,” *The Daily News Journal*, May 9, 1940, Vol. 92, No. 69, 4.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 28.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 28.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 35.

By the time Smith had reached her twenties in the 1890s, she was going by the professional moniker “Madame E. Azalia Hackley,” and had become one of Detroit’s most prominent concert soloists.¹⁰⁴ Smith toured America and the world as a classical pianist and vocalist.¹⁰⁵ Yet, she was always drawn back to the South. In an interview in 1912, Smith declared the South “the best concert field. Colored artists could not live if it were not for the southern cities and schools.”¹⁰⁶ The next year, Smith had somewhat of a homecoming when in 1913 she made stops in two nearby cities. On Monday, December 8th she played at the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, Tennessee. A few days later, on Friday, December 12th she gave another performance at St. John Baptist Church in Clarksville, Tennessee.¹⁰⁷

Madame Hackley had thousands of African American pupils over the years due to the many free, public concerts she gave which served as educational demonstrations of negro spirituals, classical and original works. Two notable students were R. Nathaniel Dett and Marian Anderson. In 1913, Dett premiered his work titled “In the Bottoms Suite, a characteristic suite for the piano.” Scholar Debra A. Miles describes Dett’s intention to “depict scenes and moods in the lives of Black Americans along the river bottoms of the Southern United States. . . [in] five movements.”¹⁰⁸

Hackley popularly referred to the music she performed and taught as “negro folk.” She is even credited as being the initiator of the first major festivals promoting negro folk as a codified

¹⁰⁴ Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, *Out of Sight : The Rise of African American Popular Music, 1889-1895*, American Made Music Series (University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 59.

¹⁰⁵ M. Marguerite Davenport, 203–5.

¹⁰⁶ Elizabeth Jones, “What Madame E. Azalia Hackley Accomplished,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, June 14, 1912, Vol. 3 No. 26.

¹⁰⁷ No Author, “Recital By Madame E. Azalia Hackley for the Benefit of Domestic Science Department of the Colored School,” *The Leaf-Chronicle*, December 11, 1913.

¹⁰⁸ Debra A. Miles, “An Analysis of Robert Nathaniel Dett’s ‘In The Bottoms’” (Denton, Texas, North Texas State University, 1983), 1, https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc504233/m2/1/high_res_d/1002775618-Miles.pdf.

genre. Aptly named the “Negro Folk Festival,” these concerts took place across many states over the South. All of them were funded, produced and performed by thousands of different African American soloists, singing groups, instrumental performers and composers for thousands of people in mixed-race audiences who attended. These festivals combined negro spirituals with classical, operatic and original composition during a time when minstrelsy was the most popular music with white audiences, at the same time ragtime was emerging for Blacks.

Though Madame Hackley did not make her career in Rutherford County her origin story can teach us how to think broader about the ethnic geographies and how they were shaped by African American music making culture. Her story and relationship to music is a story about the South in that it is part of the continuum of the African diaspora, not just in its time, but also today and in the future. Her story embodies the history of how musical relationships were formed between African Americans, how those ideas were shared, and spread across a racialized landscape during the first decades of the 1900s. Her relationship with pupils like R. Nathaniel Dett illuminates the continuity of consciousness about what it means for Black music to be racialized.

Though she was exceptional in many ways, her life represents an idea of what autonomy and success meant for those African Americans. She demonstrated that travel could be an instrument of freedom, that one’s identity could be art, and that art could be a legacy reflecting the collective past, present and future. She instilled this integrated sense of what music was in her thousands of proteges. Together they innovated African American music making during the early 1900s. Madame E. Azalia Hackley’s life was intense, full, purposeful and revolutionary. She passed away in 1922 at just fifty-five years old. Her body was interred in Historic Elmwood Cemetery in Detroit next to her beloved mother, perhaps her greatest personal

and musical influence. Her connection to Murfreesboro's musical history deserves proper recognition.

CHAPTER IV: SEGREGATION AND THE INTERWAR ERA (1920s – 1940s)

“All through the week, it's quiet as a mouse
 But on Saturday night, they go from house to house...
 We knocked on the door and it opened up with ease
 And a lush little miss said, "Come in, please"
 And before we could even bat an eye
 We were right in the middle of a big fish fry
 It was rockin', it was rockin'
 You never seen such scufflin'
 And shufflin' 'til the break of dawn”

—lyrics from “Saturday Night Fish Fry” by Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five

The Chitlin’ Circuit was slow to form in Rutherford County largely because it was a “dry” county and prohibition was a reality long before national prohibition. According to historian Homer Pittard, Rutherford County ended a hundred-year-old statute on the selling of spirits in 1903 by “exercising the provisions of a local option act passed by the Legislature in 1899.”¹⁰⁹ This ordinance did not deter both Black and white from imbibing. After all, entertainment has always been in close relationship with alcohol for centuries, no matter what prohibitions have existed. Bootlegging was everywhere by the 1910s, and then with national prohibition, the influence of gangsters and mob activity spread from the cities to the towns. Mobsters often helped finance the business behind the Chitlin’ Circuit, through the creation, sale, and distribution of untaxed liquor. In many cases, they also owned and operated the venues that sold the drinks.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Homer Pittard, ed., “Last Stage from Jefferson: The Development of Rutherford County,” in *Griffith! A Bicentennial Publication* (Rutherford County Bicentennial Commission, 1976), reprinted by Rutherford County Historical Society, <http://rutherfordnhistory.org/a-history-of-rutherford-county/>.

¹¹⁰ Preston Lauterbach, 84.

Thus, by the 1920s the Chitlin' Circuit both as a place and as an experience had arrived in Rutherford County. That was not the only thing new. The development and spread of early blues music along the Chitlin' Circuit marked a clear paradigmatic shift in Black culture and American popular music. Black vaudeville companies owned, operated and featuring all-Black casts were at the helm of a cultural turn in music during the "Roaring Twenties." In 1921 Washington D.C. Black vaudeville entrepreneur and theatre owner, Sherman H. Dudley teamed up with Milton Starr, the proprietor of The Bijou Theatre in Nashville, and Sam Reevin of Chattanooga to run a talent agency for Black artists called the Theatre Owners Booking Association (T.O.B.A.).¹¹¹ The agency sent Black artists along a circuit of Black venues across the country, but particularly and often along Dixie Highway stops in cities like Detroit, Atlanta, Macon, Savannah, Jacksonville, Louisville, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, and neighboring Nashville.¹¹² Artists like Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith became very wealthy and famous from this circuit, but it was a grind.

Bessie Smith arguably became the most notable blues musician to emerge from Black vaudeville. Bessie Smith, was the highest paid and best-selling blues recording artist of the 1920s. Born in Chattanooga, Tennessee on April 15, 1894, Smith emerged as a professional musician and dancer around 1909. By the end of her recording career in 1933, Smith had earned the moniker 'The Empress of The Blues,' a consequence of her enormous success building a career on the touring Black vaudeville circuit.¹¹³ Smith, along with other Circuit performers such as Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Ida Cox, Bessie Smith, Butterbeans and Susie, Sleepy John Estes, Brownie McGhee, Big Joe Williams, and Louis Jordan, has long been credited for her work

¹¹¹ Lauterbach, 698.

¹¹² Ibid, 699.

¹¹³ Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, "Bessie Smith: the early years," *Blues & Rhythm*, 70 (June, 1992), 8-11; Chris Albertson, Notes to *Bessie Smith, The Complete Recordings*, Vol. 1-4 (1993) Columbia/Legacy C2K 47091, C2K 47471, C2K 47474, C2K 52838.

touring in companies such as the famed Rabbit Foot Minstrels based in Tampa, Florida.¹¹⁴

However, she toured in many groups. It appears as though she probably spent time in the J.C. Lincoln Sunny South Minstrel company based in Alabama. She would have been touring in a large group with other women performers billed as “brown skin models” and a man by the name of “Shufflin’ Sam from Alabam” around 1926. (see figure). Though it is unclear if the show made it to Murfreesboro for a performance, it was advertised in newspapers throughout other Dixie Highway and Chitlin’ Circuit waysides like Nashville, Chattanooga, and Atlanta between 1926 and 1927.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Greg Johnson, “Wolcott, F. S. and His Rabbit Foot Minstrels,” in *Mississippi Encyclopedia*, July 11, 2017, <https://mississippiencyclopedia.org/entries/fs-wolcott-and-his-rabbit-foot-minstrels/>.

¹¹⁵ “81 Theater,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 16, 2926; ““Sam from Alabam’ Here This Week,” *Chattanooga Daily Times*, December 4, 1927; “Shufflin Sam from Alabam,” *The Tennessean*, December 14, 1926.

Shufflin' Sam FROM Alabam'
Special lyrics by Earl King, Harold Lloyd, and Bertie
 A MUSICAL COMEDY WITH A STRONG PLOT
 IN TWO ACTS AND TEN SCENES
 Faster and Sweeter Than Double Lightning
 FAR AHEAD OF THE REST—BETTER THAN THE REST



THE YA YUM YUM GIRLS WITH "SHUFFLIN' SAM"
 THE MEMPHIS JAZZ BLEE BOBONS OR BOSTRA
 Direction of LEON BENNETSON
 A Selected Number of Colored Musical Artists Play the Musical Score.

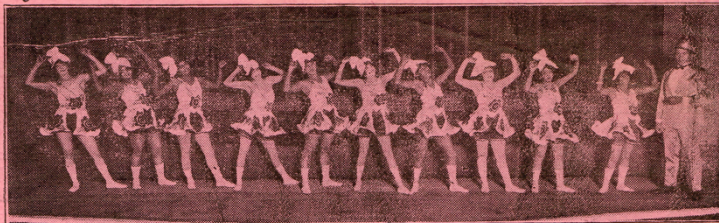
What The Press Says
 "SHUFFLIN' SAM FROM ALABAMA" is a...
 A fitting attraction for the show of the season at...
 HARRY NAY AND BOB JENKINS
 America's Premier Colored Comedians
 A GOLDEN BROWN CHORUS OF EIGHTEEN SO FAST THEIR ANKLES GET RED HOT
 RED HOT BABIES WITH A PALM BEACH TAN THAT JUST SIZZLES

YA YUM YETTERS—BROWN SKIN BEAUTIES

LANDO THEATRE Center & Green Sts. **PITTSBURGH**
 Week Starting Sunday Mid-Night Ramble
Sun. Night Nov. 23
 Special Thanksgiving Attraction



**A GOLDEN BROWN CHORUS OF EIGHTEEN SO FAST THEIR ANKLES GET RED HOT
 RED HOT BABIES WITH A PALM BEACH TAN THAT JUST SIZZLES**



YA YUM YETTERS—BROWN SKIN BEAUTIES

Figure 12. Left, *Shufflin' Sam from Alabam'* artwork; Top right, zoomed in on young Bessie Smith's face; Bottom right, zoomed in on the women "Brown Skin Beauties," undated, poster, from Ohio State University Libraries Special Collections at the Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute, Curtiss Show Print Records, Series 2: Performers and Companies, circa 1910s-1973, Box 2.6, Folder 26.

New technology—radio, the proliferation of sound recordings, and “talkie” movies—spread the sounds of blues, ragtime, and the rhythm and blues in small towns along the Dixie Highway. Motion pictures left a distinct mark on the developing Chitlin’ Circuit. “Talkies” drew audiences away from live vaudeville productions and taking over their facilities as well.¹¹⁶ As moving pictures replaced tent shows locally and nationally, African American musicians who had made their living in these traveling shows, began to move toward the silver screen.

In 1927, in Murfreesboro, the Princess Theatre moved to its second and final location on the former Sam Davis Opera House property at the corner of College and North Maple Street, the corner fronting the Dixie Highway, until its demise in 1972.¹¹⁷ The building was segregated with white’s downstairs and Blacks in the balcony. By 1929, The Princess primarily functioned as a movie house, but occasionally still hosting local and touring vaudeville productions. The theatre was state-of-the art and extremely popular with fans who came from the Nashville area and out-of-town to see shows.¹¹⁸ It is unclear if Black people appeared on the stage of The Princess as live performers. Newspaper listings in Rutherford County are historically silent about the presence of Black performers almost entirely. Yet, Black people and their lives were depicted in many of the plays and films that were seen there both Blacks and whites.

Hattie McDaniel, the daughter of formerly enslaved parents, transitioned from Black vaudeville to film in 1932 due to the economic downturn of the Great Depression, and the touring Circuit of live theatre houses and tent shows. McDaniel’s films played at the Princess Theatre in Murfreesboro. One such film is the now infamous, *Gone with The Wind*, which opened at The Princess in February of 1941. Press to accompany the film’s release in the *Daily*

¹¹⁶ William L. Slout, *Theatre in a Tent: The Development of a Provincial Entertainment* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1972), 49.

¹¹⁷ Gloria Shacklett-Christy, “The Princess Theatre,” *Murfreesboro Post*, June 2, 2014.

¹¹⁸ No Author, “‘Talkies’ Coming Here in 30 Days,” *The News Banner*, June 6, 1929, Vol. 3, No. 52, 1.

News Journal newspaper described McDaniel as the “greatest actress the negro race has ever known.”¹¹⁹ McDaniel played “Mammy” in *Gone with The Wind*, a role for which she became the first African American to win an Academy Award for in 1940.

Another important film played *The Princess* on Thursday and Friday December 16 and 17, 1937 called *Artists and Models*.¹²⁰ Not only was the film debuted in celebration of the theatre’s first anniversary, but also its African American star was vaudeville Chitlin’ Circuit performer Louis Armstrong. In the film, Armstrong plays a Jazz musician alongside white actress, Martha Raye, who also appeared in the film with minstrel-like darkened skin. By this time Armstrong, was well-known to Black and white audiences in the Middle Tennessee. Besides Circuit touring, he regularly appeared with his orchestra on broadcasts as early as 1935 on Nashville’s high-powered radio station WLAC.¹²¹ Armstrong sings and plays trumpet alongside Raye, and a cast of dozens of other African American performers in a controversial musical number for the song titled “Public Melody No. 1.” The appearance of these Black performers alongside a white actress—even in blackface—was disturbing to many white audiences.¹²²

Like many Black-vaudeville-performers-turned-film-actors, McDaniel and Armstrong’s fame was a double-edged sword. Faced with limited choices about the roles she could play in Hollywood, McDaniel was typecast as a “Mammy,” a role she played in *Gone with The Wind*, and for which she became the first African American to win an Academy Award for in 1940. McDaniel’s roles were highly criticized by Black people across the nation as socially and

¹¹⁹ “‘Gone With Wind’ Opens Thursday on Princess Screen,” *The Daily News Journal*, February 9, 1941.

¹²⁰ No Author, “Princess Schedules Stage Show And Two First-Rate Pictures,” *The Rutherford Courier*, December 14, 1937, 1.

¹²¹ No Author, “Radio Programs,” *Nashville Banner*, December 19, 1935, 13.

¹²² Ricky Riccardi, *Heart Full of Rhythm: The Big Band Years of Louis Armstrong* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 209.

politically regressive. Similarly, Armstrong, who became the first African American crossover artist for white audiences, would eventually become the target of similar community backlash during the Civil Rights era of the 1950s.¹²³

Roles for Blacks to play in both film and vaudeville stage were often limited to racist stereotypes. Blacks often appeared as domestic workers, “happy slaves,” and other caricatures that reflected white supremacist ideas. What differentiated Black vaudeville from white, was that “in some cases, it became a showcase where Black performers could not only demonstrate their talents, but in a sense, talk back to the extremely pernicious images created in white minstrel shows.”¹²⁴ Black minstrel performers adopted the tropes introduced by whites to create satirical performances Black audiences could revel in for power, and that white people were completely snowed over by. The legacy of McDaniel, Armstrong, and the many other Black actors made their careers along the black vaudeville Chitlin’ Circuit, cannot be understated. Despite this complicated history, Black performers’ work to subvert the same stereotypes they were forced to play after they transitioned to film was a meaningful boon in the evolution of race relations. This would have been an important encounter for the citizens of Rutherford County in the 1930s. It continued to expand the spaces they occupied in the racialized landscape.

¹²³ “Revisiting Louis Armstrong in the Context of Civil Rights,” *NPR’s News and Notes* (NPR, November 22, 2006), <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6524506>.

¹²⁴ Karina Longworth, “Hattie McDaniel (Six Degrees Of Song Of The South, Episode 2),” *You Must Remember This*. Podcast, audio, October 29, 2019. <http://www.youmustrememberthispodcast.com/episodes/2019/10/23/hattie-mcdaniel-six-degrees-of-song-of-the-south-episode-2>



Figure 13.1. Left, the “New” Princess, celebrates one-year at their second and final location with a showing of *Artists and Models* reprinted from *The Daily News Journal*.

Figure 13.2. Right, Armstrong performing in “Public Melody No. 1” in *Artists and Models*. *The Jack Bradley Collection, Louis Armstrong House Museum*.

The Circuit as Black vaudeville continued to some degree. On September 3, 1933 the all-Black traveling tent show, *Silas Green from New Orleans*, played two nights in Rutherford County at the Mid-State Negro Fair, now the grounds of Patterson Park off of East Castle Street. They played renditions of Ethel Waters’ “Stormy Weather” and W.C. Handy’s “St. Louis Blues.” Reporter Ed Bell in *The Daily News Journal* stated that the “mulatto” woman playing trumpet on “St. Louis Blues” was so talented, that a nearby preacher stopped what he was doing, laid down his Bible and was compelled to watch her instead.¹²⁵ In the early 1900s when Ephraim Williams purchased the vaudeville company from William and Salem Tutt Whitney, he was the

¹²⁵ Ed Bell. “On and Off The Square,” *The Daily News Journal*, September 2, 1933.

only Black “circus” owner in America.¹²⁶ Bessie Smith also made a start on these early Silas Green tours, which by the 1940s was considered the oldest, biggest, and most successful Black vaudeville show up to that time. Williams died in 1921 and willed half of his show to his daughter and the other half of the show over to an interracial couple, Charles (white) and Hortense Collier (Chinese American.) The Colliers were the proprietors when *Silas Green* stopped in Murfreesboro.¹²⁷



Figure 14. Walker Evans, *Sidewalk scene in Selma, Alabama*, Selma, Dallas County, Alabama, December 1935, photograph, downloaded from the Library of Congress at <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017759331/>.

¹²⁶ Henry T. Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface: A Sourcebook on Early Black Musical Shows*, 2nd edition (Lanham, Toronto; Plymouth, UK: The Scarecrow Press, Inc, 2014), 1219.

¹²⁷ "Show-Owner's Wife Airs Views on Tolerance – Says Southern Prejudice is Far Less Dangerous Than Said Northern Tolerance", *Pittsburgh Courier*. Vol. 33, no. 11, March 14, 1942.

The Chitlin' Circuit as a national phenomenon began to fade during the tough times of the Great Depression. The decline, but not erasure, of this era came with the subsequent selling-off of Black-owned business that supported it. T.O.B.A. did this in 1930, selling all of their theatres to a white-owned chain.¹²⁸ Most proprietors outside of T.O.B.A. followed as a way to cash-out of a seemingly failing system. Others turned to a mixture of old and new ways to stay in business to support themselves, their community, and musical culture. Local entrepreneurs responded to the hardship and opportunity of the times to establish businesses that reflect more localized versions of the Circuit. One such person was a man by the name Sam H. J. Keeble, the proprietor of the Sam Keeble's Café at the corner of South Maple and West State Street around 1935. Keeble was a cousin to Marshall, Jr. Keeble, the famous preacher from Murfreesboro and great-nephew to Sampson Keeble, Tennessee's first African American representative.

Turner Hall and The Moonlight were considered to be the most popular venues in Murfreesboro for dancing, eating, and listening to music all under one roof. Both venues stood across from one another at the corner of East Sevier and South University. Both operated soul food cafes on their first floors. Each also had a second-floor room that functioned as a dancehall for music, dancing, and occasionally Black performers. Each dancehall also maintained a jukebox, or "symphonola," as they were called back then. These music machines filled the venues with the hottest tunes of the day. Most people in Rutherford County didn't own radios, let alone a jukebox or the 78rpm records you had to have to play on them. The technology was a cost prohibitive investment for many so, they had to congregate and spend money to hear music. These jukeboxes could hold about twenty 78rpm records. Patrons purchased plays of their favorite songs using nickels and dimes. In April of 1938, reporter Ed Bell, noted that Turner Hall

¹²⁸ Lauterbach, 701.

was stocked with song titles “She Walks Like A Kangaroo”, “Now Don’t Tear My Clothes,” “Low Down Dirty Shame,” and “There’s A Boy in Harlem,” and “Doing the Suzie Q.”¹²⁹ The song “Now Don’t Tear My Clothes” is presumably the blues tune written by Big Bill Broonzy. Washboard Sam, born in Jackson, Tennessee and alleged half-brother of Broonzy, recorded a version in 1936 as “Don’t Tear My Clothes” with the Chicago Four.¹³⁰ Broonzy himself did two versions, one in 1935 under the moniker The State Street Boys, and another in 1937 as The Chicago Black Swans.¹³¹

The song “Doing the Suzie (or, Suzy) Q” was actually a dance believed to have originate in a Chitlin’ Circuit nightclubs in Columbia, South Carolina called “Big Apple Nightclub” in the 1930s.¹³² The dance itself can be performed solo, as a couple or group and is part of the Swing dance cannon like dances such as The Big Apple and Lindy Hop. But its roots belong as much to String Band square dancing and “ring shouts,” a spiritual group dance performed on by enslaved people, as it does to Jazz.¹³³ When performed as a group, the dance is directed by a caller who instructed dancers in a circular formation to either improvise, or perform moves such as the Lindy Hop, Shag, Charleston, and steps imitating farm animals like “tucking” and “pecking.”¹³⁴

An artist named Lil Armstrong and Her Swing Orchestra released “Doin’ the Suzie Q” for the Decca label in 1936, helping to spread the dance craze across the nation.¹³⁵ Lil’s full

¹²⁹ Ed Bell, “Sights and Sounds,” *The Rutherford Courier*, April 19, 1938, 8.

¹³⁰ Willie Broonzy, “Don’t Tear My Clothes,” performed by Washboard Sam and Chicago Four, recorded 1936, on Melotone 6-10-55, 1936, 78rpm.

¹³¹ Willie Broonzy, “Don’t Tear My Clothes,” performed by State Street Boys, recorded 1935, on Vocalion 03002, 1935, 78rpm.

¹³² Jeff Wilkinson, “Teens Started Dance Craze,” *The News and Observer* (Raleigh, North Carolina), September 07, 2003, D3.

¹³³ Katrina Hazzard-Gordon, *Jookin’: The Rise of Social Dance Formations In African-American Culture*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 81.

¹³⁴ *Dancing the Big Apple 1937*, directed by Judy Pritchett, (2009; Dallas, Texas: Dancetime) Publications, 2011), digitally streamed on Amazon Prime Video, accessed April 1, 2021, <https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B07FPP9H1P/>.

¹³⁵ Armstrong, “Doin’ The Suzie Q,” performed by Lil Armstrong and Her Swing Orchestra, recorded 1936, on Decca 1059A, 1936, 78rpm.

name was Lillian Hardin Armstrong, the second wife to Louis Armstrong. She was a jazz pianist, singer and composer originally from Memphis, Tennessee.¹³⁶ The Suzy-Q, Big Apple dance style was so popular it even made its way into films like the 1937 Paramount film *Big Apple*, as well as the 1939 John Clein film *Keep Punching*.¹³⁷ The Suzy-Q dance craze became very popular with African Americans in Murfreesboro. By August 1937 the town paper reported that the patrons of Turner Hall were above the trend, having been doing the dance “for lo these many moons.”¹³⁸

Bell’s 1938 newspaper report also named other important fixtures on this corner of the Sixth Ward. Ram Owen and his wife Clara are named as proprietors of East Side Café in the bottom level of Turner Hall, owned and operated by Ed Turner who worked at the State Teacher’s College. Bell goes on to describe East Side Café as the quintessential Chitlin’ Circuit venue. He cites “chitlins’, cornbread, fish, fried chicken, low-priced hamburgers, and rabbit sandwiches” as notable fare served by the Owens in their restaurant.¹³⁹ The Moonlight Café (or Moonlight Inn) is described as being formerly called “The Blue Heaven” at a former location, and other venues such as Smoky Mountain, The Royal Paradise and a place called Hole-In-The-Wall in Third Ward are also named as prominent venues.¹⁴⁰ Though no local musicians are named in Bell’s 1938 report, a man named Jesse Joe Brown was described as “a member of a well known Negro band that played around Murfreesboro some years ago” in a newspaper article written by Bell in December, 1938.¹⁴¹ In 1933, Bell previously documented a different group from Murfreesboro. Unfortunately, he used the racist descriptor, “The Brown Boys (darktown

¹³⁶ “Lil Hardin,” Discogs, accessed April 2, 2021, <https://www.discogs.com/artist/326808-Lil-Hardin>.

¹³⁷ *Dancing the Big Apple 1937*.

¹³⁸ No Author, “Big Apple,” *The Daily News-Journal*, August 20, 1937, Vol 7 No. 124, 1.

¹³⁹ Ed Bell, “Sights and Sounds.”

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ No Author, “Negro Charged With Attempted Assault,” *The Daily News Journal*, December 14, 1938, 1.

syncopators)” to refer to them, defaming their name and perhaps completely erasing their identity from the historical record.¹⁴²

Another sound coming out of Rutherford County during the Depression era was the sound of folk harmony singing groups inspired by the legacy of Spirituals and Gospel music. Born in Tullahoma, Tennessee on June 15, 1901, John Wesley Work, III was a composer, educator and ethnomusicologist who attended college at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee at the height of the Harlem Renaissance. In 1940, Work famously documented the Holloway High School Quartet, who would go on to become the county’ most noted group. In addition to the Holloway Quartet, The Gospelairens, The Southernaires, and a little-known group to historians, the Harp of Zion, a quartette of young girls.¹⁴³ The Southernaires featured members African American women Eva Jordan, Lela M. Washington, Hattie L. Grisham, Stella Franklin, and Annie F. Hunter, resident of 410 East Castle Street in Murfreesboro.¹⁴⁴

The Moonlight Inn and Turner Hall are venues that no longer exist as structures, yet we can conclude that both provided large dancehalls, most likely able to accommodate at least one hundred patrons on a busy night. Much about their presence as a place can be understood through the extrapolation of specific descriptions from the primary sources that remain and historical conjecture. The following photos are historical renderings created and designed using Computer Assisted Drafting (CAD). They depict The Moonlight Inn in Murfreesboro, Tennessee c. 1930s to 1940s. The images were rendered based on court transcriptions of testimony provided in 1947 by proprietor Victoria Taylor, other patrons, and police officers involved in the investigation of the crime. The documents were obtained from the Rutherford County Archives’ Circuit Court

¹⁴² Ed Bell, “Murfreesboro From Main Street to Mink Slide,” *The Daily News Journal*, December 9, 1933, 1.

¹⁴³ Wall text, “Performance in Murfreesboro: Places and People. Soul, Sermons, and Sing Alongs,” *Home Grown to Nationally Known: The Artistic Legacies of Murfreesboro*, The Center for Historic Preservation, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, April 2017; “Thursday,” *The Daily News Journal*, October 26, 1942, 3.

¹⁴⁴ Wall text, “Performance in Murfreesboro: Places and People. Soul, Sermons, and Sing Alongs.”

Minute Books and Loose Files.¹⁴⁵ The case is titled “State of Tennessee vs. Sam Keeble, October 1947, No. 9836, 1-46” in Murfreesboro. Sanborn Maps were cross-referenced to infer detail about the architectural layout, building design and materials used.

To add additional context to the designs, photos of patrons were imagined into the space using raster graphics editing software. Since it is not known if Rutherford County had a prominent African American photographer documenting the community during the 1930s and 1940s, images of Blacks in this entertainment space were selected from various publicly available images and archival collections such as the Lane Brothers Commercial Photographers Photographic Collection at the Georgia State University Library, and the Farm Security Administration, Office of War Information Photograph Collection at the Library of Congress. The Sanborn maps and court documents are perhaps the only known historical artifacts that exist describing what the building was, where it was located, who owned and operated it, and its contents.

¹⁴⁵ Rutherford County Circuit Court Criminal and Civil Minute Book 36, (59, 60, 61, 306, 377, 391), Rutherford County Archives.



Figure 15.1. Exterior recreation of The Moonlight Inn and the attached Will and Victoria Taylor residence looking from East Sevier Street created by the author and Zach Falor and UZF Design.



Figure 15.2. Exterior recreation of The Moonlight Inn looking from the corner of East Sevier Street and South University Street created by the author and Zach Falor and UZF Design.



Figure 15.3. Interior recreation of The Moonlight Inn walking in through the entrance from East Sevier created by the author and Zach Falor and UZF Design.



Figure 15.4. Interior recreation of The Moonlight Inn walking upstairs through the main entrance from East Sevier created by the author and Zach Falor and UZF Design.

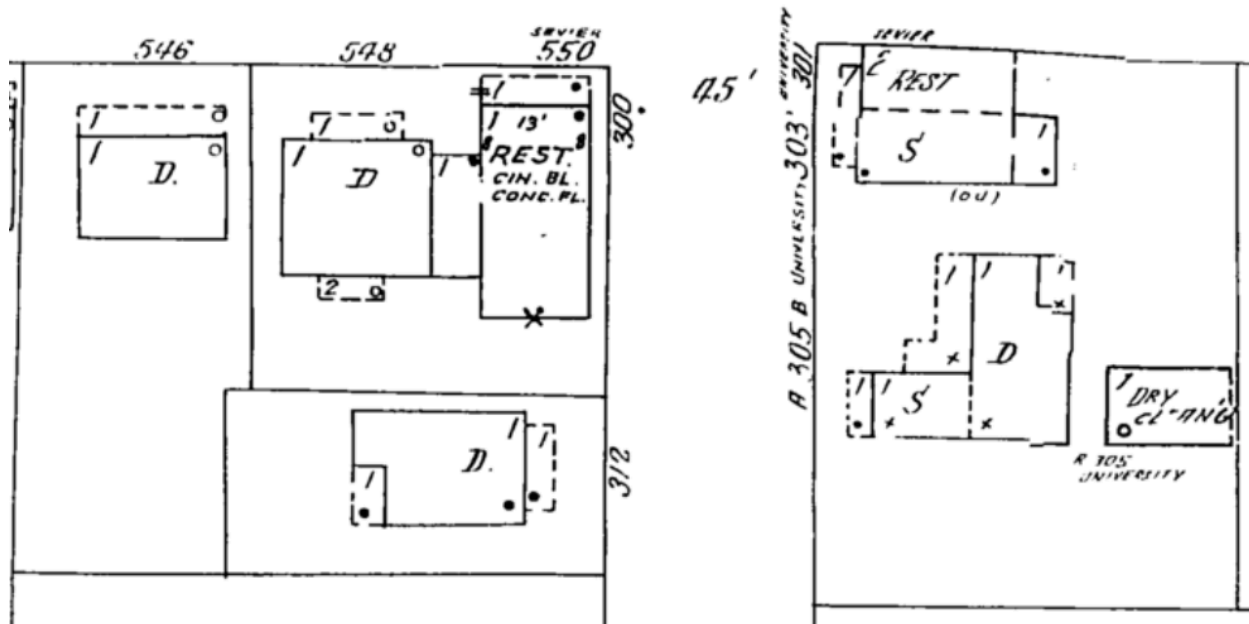


Figure 16. 1945 Sanborn Map of Murfreesboro indicating the property of The Moonlight Inn (left) and Turner Hall (right) at the corner of East Sevier and South University Streets.

Another part of the local Circuit stood within the Cemetery/Cedars community along the Dixie Highway. According to historian Dr. Rebecca Conard, Congress designated to make a Stones River National Military Park in 1927 after the commission determined that “land held by black owners was generally less valuable than land in white ownership.”¹⁴⁶ The military park seemed to serve three purposes. The first purpose was economic. The Park would draw white visitors traveling by car along the Dixie highway, through the county, and directly into the city center of Murfreesboro to engage in commerce. The second purpose was to perpetuate the myth of “The Lost Cause” to white tourists by valiantly commemorating the Civil War battle that had been fought there a half a century before. The third purpose was to weaken the African American Cemetery community that had evolved from the contraband settlement at then turn of the war; the national battlefield displaced Black families and in fact the first visitor center of the park was a repurposed log cabin once owned by a Black family. In summary, the creation of Stones River National Park was the first major act of “urban renewal” under state and federal partnership that Black people experienced in Rutherford County. All of the properties surrounding the battlefield site were taken through eminent domain.¹⁴⁷ Ebenezer Primitive Baptist was relocated further up the highway to where it stands today, and Mt Olivet eventually demolished.

By 1929, thirty-nine African Americans living in the Cedars/Cemetery owned their property. Between 1929 and 1932, landowners in the Cemetery community were forcibly removed from their properties by governmental seizure, through eminent domain, for the purpose of establishing Stones River Military Park. Though white citizens had also owned land in The Cedars, the community was predominantly Black. This governmental seizure through eminent

¹⁴⁶ Rebecca Conard, “Historic Cemetery Community,” 17.

¹⁴⁷ Conard, 18.

domain fulfilled the third unstated purpose of the park, which was an attempt to “erase the Cedars as an African American neighborhood.”¹⁴⁸ Erasure did not come to fruition, as is evidenced by the continued presence of entertainment venues in this area throughout the century, a form of resistance by African Americans (see Figure 5).

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 3.

CHAPTER V: THE POSTWAR ERA AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES (1940s – 1960s)

As the geographic center of the state of Tennessee, Rutherford County's conveniently located motels, restaurants, and juke joints along the Dixie Highway and then the expanded Nashville Highway (U.S. 41) made the area locally and regionally infamous as a convenient stopover and destination.¹⁴⁹ The increased mobility of African Americans traveling by car during the first post-war years along its sections of highway, resulted in the continuation of the area as a musical hotbed for Black performers. African Americans continued to utilize the highway systems in and out of the county order to play its many sanctioned and unsanctioned venues.

The music of African Americans, Rhythm and Blues, arrived in Murfreesboro in the same way it arrived in other small towns and cities across America: through the de-regulated, high-powered signal of post-World War II, clear channel radio, and a growing recording industry marketplace for where consumers - both African American and white - could purchase the latest music. On December 31, 1946 WGNS AM 1450 began broadcasting from a remote location while construction for its permanent location on Murfreesboro Square inside a women's apparel store named The French Shoppe was ongoing.¹⁵⁰ WGNS became the city's first high-powered radio station to play the current hits of the day. However, even more influential was the 50,000-watt station WLAC in Nashville, Tennessee which not only reached inside the homes in Murfreesboro, but went as far and wide as the Mississippi Delta, Chicago and Detroit, Virginia,

¹⁴⁹ Greg Tucker, "Taverns, Bars and Juke Joints," *Rutherford County Tennessee Historical Society* (blog), June 12, 2011, <http://rutherfordtnhistory.org/taverns-bars-and-juke-joints/>.

¹⁵⁰ Bryan Barrett, "The Early Years of WGNS Radio (1940's – 1960's)," *WGNS Radio*. <https://www.wgnsradio.com/article/7767/the-early-years-of-wgns-radio-1940s-1960s>.

Southern Florida and even Jamaica. Nashville's first all-black station, WSOK, also played a pivotal role in shaping Middle Tennesseans love for the earliest sounds of rock 'n' roll.¹⁵¹

As radio airplay filled the airwaves of Middle Tennessee and beyond with "race records," a burgeoning demand also grew in the wider marketplace for music fans who wanted to own the latest singles they heard on air. Recognizing both the promotional and commercial potential of selling the newest black musical styles, Billboard created the Rhythm and Blues chart in 1949. Small-town labels like Excello in Nashville began to crop up across the South and throughout the nation over the next decade.¹⁵² This cultural shift in radio and record sales introduced African American music to European American audiences, helping increase the status and value of the new genre (especially for European American consumers) and offered some limited opportunities outside of touring the Chitlin' Circuit. However, this historical moment should at best be considered one of the softest forms of integration, as African Americans still faced myriad daily threats of living under Jim Crow, both real (acts of violence) and perceived (images of segregation).

Black-owned businesses thrived on supplying the many economic and social needs of African Americans. Entertainment, lodging, as well as less sanctioned, but adjacent businesses to entertainment, like alcohol. Liquor-by-the-drink was against the law in post-war Rutherford County. Being a "dry" county meant that only beer was permitted to be sold with a license. The ability to sell beer in Rutherford county persisted from 1903 to 1945.¹⁵³ However, in 1945 the Murfreesboro City Council voted by referendum to reverse this law. The referendum banned the

¹⁵¹ Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, *Night Train to Nashville: Music City Rhythm & Blues, 1945-1970* (Country Music Foundation Press, 2004), 31–32.

¹⁵² Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, 59.

¹⁵³ Homer Pittard, ed., "Last Stage from Jefferson."

sale of beer within the city limits but made legal exceptions for specialized beer stores that operated under strict regulations.¹⁵⁴ Stores for the sale of liquor remained illegal until 1972.¹⁵⁵

In spite of these complicated, prohibitive laws, demand for liquor was high in Rutherford County, and like their white counterparts, many Black entertainment establishments also traded in the illegal market for whisky, gin and other homemade liquors. However, segregation was still law and practice and not only was it difficult for Black proprietors to obtain and retain the licenses to sell legally, but they were also routinely targeted by police in Rutherford County, whether or not they were known or suspected to be bootleggers.

“Tippling house” is a term used to describe places where alcohol is sold and served in violation of the law.¹⁵⁶ Tippling houses on The Chitlin’ Circuit were common, but they provided more than alcohol and abandon. These venues often served “meat and three” style southern cuisine (or, soul food), alongside libations. Though they were common throughout the century, “Miss Ann’s Place” was perhaps the last true tippling houses in Rutherford County, lasting through the seventies. Mrs. Lillie Ann McClellan was the proprietor of the venue at the address 525 Hancock St. In true Chitlin’ Circuit-style, Miss Ann’s venue was attached to her home and she served food and drink to “cash customers” after hours.¹⁵⁷ At Miss Ann’s you could drop-in after other businesses were closed to eat soul food, commune, listen to the jukebox and dance in the small dining area. Miss Ann also served homemade, untaxed whiskey, giving her restaurant a reputation for being a “tippling house” or “good time house.” A report in *The Daily News*

¹⁵⁴ Pittard, “Last Stage from Jefferson: The Development of Rutherford County.”

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ *A Law Dictionary, Adapted to the Constitution and Laws of the United States. By John Bouvier.* S.v. “Tippling house.” Retrieved March 23 2021 from <https://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Tippling+house>

¹⁵⁷ Greg Tucker, “Remembering Rutherford: Song Tells of Good Food, Hospitality at Miss Ann’s,” *Daily News Journal*, February 7, 2015.

Journal about Miss Ann, recalling that she had a good reputation in both white and Black communities.¹⁵⁸

Rutherford County's historically Black neighborhoods were as safe havens for local and nonlocal African Americans traveling through the Jim Crow South, a legacy of *The Green Book*. Private homes functioned as after-hours restaurants and safe havens for musicians. Boarding Houses, or "Tourist Homes" as they were listed as in *The Green Book*, were private homes that also functioned as a bed and breakfast for Black travelers. There were three prominent Tourist Homes in the county listed: Fannie Hoover, M.E. Howland, and Roxie Moore's. Miss Ann's Place was not considered a boarding house, yet she is rumored to have provided overnight stay for traveling Black musicians like Ike and Tina Turner.¹⁵⁹ Ike and Tina Turner traveled the Circuit heavily on packaged tours called "revues" that featured multiple artists, groups and bands on a single tour. Rutherford County saxophone player, Raymond Summerour, remembers Ike and Tina Turner's Revue touring through Murfreesboro to play either or both Eldorado Club and Elks Lodge.¹⁶⁰ These revues not only demonstrate the comradery shared between African American artists, promoters, venues and fans, but symbolize the artists' sense of individual freedom, economic prosperity, and safety in their communities, all the result of having crafted enormous talent, viable creativity, and innovative skill.

New Deal programs enacted by President Franklin D. Roosevelt came to Tennessee in 1933. Although segregated, New Deal agencies like the Works Progress Administration brought vocational training and paid labor to many African Americans in Tennessee.¹⁶¹ As a result, many

¹⁵⁸ Greg Tucker, "Remembering Rutherford."

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Thomas H. Coode, "Works Progress Administration," in *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Tennessee Historical Society and University of Tennessee Press), accessed April 14, 2020, <https://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entries/works-progress-administration/>.

of Rutherford County's Black citizens greatly benefitted from these projects, such as the WPA constructed National Guard Armory buildings across the state of Tennessee between 1940 and 1942. Armories were originally intended to function as military preparedness and training centers for the state and federal government. Architects Warfield and Keeble designed these Armories in a standardized Art Deco design reflected in each building.¹⁶² These Armory facilities were placed across the state of Tennessee.¹⁶³ Two specific Armories, one in Shelbyville and the other in Murfreesboro, sit on or near the path of former Dixie Highway, reflecting their initial purpose as highway accessible military facilities.

After World War II, armories across Tennessee began to function less as wartime mobility structures and more like part-time, public gathering spaces. They became entertainment venues for dances, parties, and concerts for schools, civic clubs and other private organizations.¹⁶⁴ African Americans in Rutherford County made regular use of their Armory building for these same purposes at 1220 West College Street.¹⁶⁵ Because the West College was once considered the Old Dixie Highway, it was both surface street and highway. This meant many local stars and regional touring musicians had easy access to The Armory facility.

As they had in previous decades, African American benevolent societies continued to serve the community as entertainment promoters. During the 1950s and early 1960s, the E.A. Davis Elks Lodge #1138 of Rutherford County sponsored shows in the Armory building, turning the space into a concert and dance hall for many one-night engagements. Shows there cost a

¹⁶² H. A. Fieser and E. Moore, *US Naval Reserve Training Center Nomination Form for the National Register of Historic Places*, 2011.

¹⁶³ "National Guard Armory (Former) - Columbia TN," *Living New Deal* (blog), accessed April 01, 2020, <https://livingnewdeal.org/projects/old-national-guard-armory-columbia-tn/>.

¹⁶⁴ West, *Tennessee's New Deal Landscape*, 90.

¹⁶⁵ West, 90.

suggested donation of one dollar and twenty-five cents.¹⁶⁶ Patrons saw rhythm and blues artists like Chick Chavis, Gene Allison, Leslie Knight, Kid King's Combo, Larry Birdsong, and Christine Kittrell play there.¹⁶⁷

Besides being great promoters of shows, the E.A. Davis Elks Lodge itself was also a venue for Rhythm and Blues shows during this era. Generally referred to and promoted commonly on show posters in the 1960s as "The 'New' Elks Club located three miles on Old Nashville Highway," it was considered one of the more prominent venues to see Black entertainment in the post-war years.¹⁶⁸

Eldorado Club emerged as a discreetly placed, one-room juke joint behind private property at 2707 Asbury Lane in Murfreesboro, nestled on the outer edges of Cemetery Community. The club was most likely placed there in an effort to be far away from the watchful eye of whites so that African Americans would feel safe to have a good time. Additionally, and conveniently, access to the club came directly from Old Nashville Highway, where Asbury intersects perpendicularly. Eldorado was most active between the mid-late 1950s and early

¹⁶⁶ Hatch Show Print, *Dance with Christine Kittrell and the Kid King Combo at the Murfreesboro Armory*, 1959, Still Image, Posters, Window Cards, 35 cm x 55.5 cm, 1959, 5th Floor Archives, Country Music Hall of Fame, <http://digi.countrymusicshalloffame.org/cdm/ref/collection/hatch3/id/16957>.

¹⁶⁷ Hatch Show Print, *Dance with Chick Chavis at the Murfreesboro Armory*, 1955, Still Image, Posters, Window Cards, 35 cm x 55.5 cm, 1955, 5th Floor Archives, Country Music Hall of Fame, <http://digi.countrymusicshalloffame.org/cdm/ref/collection/hatch3/id/13979>; Hatch Show Print, *Concert and Dance with Gene Allison and Leslie Knight at the Armory*, 1957, Still Image, Posters, Window Cards, 35 cm x 55.5 cm, 1957, 5th Floor Archives, Country Music Hall of Fame, <http://digi.countrymusicshalloffame.org/cdm/ref/collection/hatch3/id/19133>; Hatch Show Print, *Dance with Kid King Combo at the Murfreesboro Armory*, 1958, Still Image, Posters, Window Cards, 35 cm x 55.5 cm, 1958, 5th Floor Archives, Country Music Hall of Fame, <http://digi.countrymusicshalloffame.org/cdm/ref/collection/hatch3/id/15554>; Hatch Show Print, *Dance with Larry Birdsong and His Orchestra at the Murfreesboro Armory*, 1958, Still Image, Posters, Window Cards, 35 cm x 55.5 cm, 1958, 5th Floor Archives, Country Music Hall of Fame, <http://digi.countrymusicshalloffame.org/cdm/ref/collection/hatch3/id/14026>; Hatch Show Print, *Dance with Christine Kittrell and the Kid King Combo*.

¹⁶⁸ Hatch Show Print, *All Day Entertainment at the Elks Club*, 1960, Still Image, Posters, Window Cards, 35 cm x 55.5 cm, 1960, 5th Floor Archives, Country Music Hall of Fame, <http://digi.countrymusicshalloffame.org/cdm/ref/collection/hatch3/id/15288>; Hatch Show Print, *Dance with Beasley and John Green at the Elks Club*, 1960, Still Image, Posters, Window Cards, 35 cm x 55.5 cm, 1960, 5th Floor Archives, Country Music Hall of Fame, <http://digi.countrymusicshalloffame.org/cdm/ref/collection/hatch3/id/16944>.

1960s. Patrons enjoyed music, dancing, and sometimes drinking and gaming. Admission to Eldorado Club was one dollar. During these years, a man named Alf McClain served as the venue's proprietor, running the operations of the club on the night of shows, and helping secure talent for the events.

Saxophone player Raymond Summerour was a member of a band called The Dukes. The Dukes often served as the house band at Eldorado Club. Due to the high-level of proficiency in players along the Circuit, and the shoestring budgets that some tours ran on, it was common practice at the time for a single artist to travel without a band and either formally hire the resident house band to back them up or ask them to informally sit-in with them if they brought their own band. The Dukes, performed regularly behind artists like Earl Gaines, Buford Majors, Hal Hebb, and Jackie Shane. Summerour also remembers Jimi Hendrix sitting in with the band while he was using the area as home base after his military stint at Fort Campbell.¹⁶⁹ The Dukes worked with local entrepreneur, Elmore Gaines, Jr. who represented them as a band manager and booking agent. Gaines sent The Dukes out on the road across the state to places like Tullahoma and Chattanooga, Tennessee. Gaines was also a manager for other local and regional Rhythm and Blues talent like Bubba Suggs Combo from Clarksville, Tennessee.¹⁷⁰ On one fateful day, Gaines took The Dukes with Bubba Suggs to record in Nashville at Tree Publishing

Women were also performers at Eldorado Club. Billed as "exotic" and "shake" dancers, these women were often the show openers or between-act entertainers. Shake dancers almost always went by a stage name performing under titles like "Miss Sando," "Miss Body," and "Miss Sexy Ways" (see Figures 17.1 - 17.1). These monikers separated them from their legal identities offering women a certain level of mystique and the protection of anonymity in a world

¹⁶⁹ Scott Walker, "Empty Places: A Tour Of An Old Club Where Jimi Hendrix Once Played," n.d., 5.

¹⁷⁰ Raymond Summerour, Interview with Raymond Summerour, Interview by author, February 7, 2019.

that put them at risk. The names also gave them the power of notoriety attracting fans to their persona and performance style. Historian Jacqi Malone traces the origins of shake dancing to the years just after the Civil War to a New York City venue run by a black banjo player named Ike Hines. The dance became known as “the Hootchie Kootchie” after it premiered at Chicago’s World Fair in 1893.¹⁷¹ Today the shake dance is popularly known as burlesque.

McClain and Gaines were also proprietors of homemade liquor, which they sometimes sold at Eldorado to patrons. McClain and Gaines were often targeted by Rutherford County sheriffs for their untaxed alcohol. They were pulled over in traffic stops and their properties were raided.¹⁷² These altercations with police were often reported in the city newspaper so that McClain and Gaines would be known and publicly shamed, helping to perpetuate the myth that African American males are particularly dangerous criminals.

As the sixties progressed, McClain extended his entrepreneurial ventures and became the proprietor of a place called East Side Pool Room, a popular place for gaming and billiards at 312 South University Street in Murfreesboro.¹⁷³ Alf McClain died on April 4, 1973 and his body was interred in Stones River National Cemetery, just down the road from Eldorado.¹⁷⁴ McClain’s sons kept Eldorado going after his death, helping it survive in various states of activity until at least 1980.¹⁷⁵

Posters for more prominent shows that happened in Rutherford County’s Black community were often sent to Hatch Show Print in Nashville to be made by letterpress (see

¹⁷¹ Jacqui Malone, *Steppin’ on the Blues: The Visible Rhythms of African American Dance*, Folklore and Society (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 83–84.

¹⁷² Police Make Whisky Grab,” *The Daily News Journal*, August 17, 1958; No Author, “Police Raid Adds Potables,” *The Daily News Journal*, May 13, 1962; No Author, “Whisky Stores,” *The Daily News Journal*, March 16, 1970; No Author, “No Author, “Whisky Ring Blow Struck,” January 24, 1963; No Author, “One More Haul,” *The Daily News Journal*, November 6, 1964.

¹⁷³ No Author, “Eastside Pool Room Advertisement,” *The Daily News Journal*, October 15, 1967, 57.

¹⁷⁴ No Author, “Obituaries, Mr. Alf McClain Sr.,” *The Daily News Journal*, April 6, 1973, 13.

¹⁷⁵ No Author, “Police Investigate Shoot-Out,” *News Journal*, November 14, 1980.

figures 17.1 – 17.4). These posters were circulated in the Black business district downtown, neighborhoods, schools and social organizations, not just locally, but sometimes regionally by booking agents and concert promoters who had connections elsewhere. These posters not only increased presence at the venues, but helped artists sell records in stores.

As of 2021, Eldorado is an oddly shaped, cinder block shell with a collapsed roof, and the sidewalls are covered in deep undergrowth. The ruined structure sits to the far left, behind a private home, owned by Percy Minter, Jr. Minter, Jr. is the direct descendent of G. H. Minter (grandfather) and Percy Minter, Sr. (father), some of the first African American property owners in The Cedars, who became displaced by the creation of the National Park.¹⁷⁶ Though the site of Eldorado does not sit on the original homestead, Minter's ability to re-acquire land decades after his family's displacement is a notable legacy of resistance and resilience within a larger story of black geographies in Murfreesboro.

Inside the alcove, on the front-facing wall, attached to the main entrance of the club, is a mural. The mural depicts a young, Black couple propped against a mid-century Cadillac Eldorado Seville. Each is depicted wearing their Sunday best. Both are a little buttoned down but appear casually confident. They express the empowered, nonchalance of twenty-something virility. The mural inside Eldorado Club greeted patrons when they first arrived, reflecting to them the symbolic ideals of post-World War II American culture: the advancement of automobile luxury and high-powered radio from radio stations like WLAC and WGNS that had

¹⁷⁶ “Rutherford County Public Information App.” Rcgis.maps.arcgis.com. Accessed February 09, 2019. <http://rcgis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/View/index.html?appid=a47953297819433389164af1486b0ae0>.

begun in the 1940s.¹⁷⁷ But most importantly it represents the freedom of movement for Black people and the Black music that propelled society and it.

¹⁷⁷ No Author, "WGNS Will Start On Air Monday Minus Formality," *Rutherford Courier*, December 12, 1946; Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, *Night Train to Nashville: Music City Rhythm & Blues, 1945-1970* (Country Music Foundation Press, 2004), 31-32.



Figure 17.1. Top left, *Buford Majors Band with Hal Hebb at the Eldorado Club*; Top center, *Earl Gaines at Eldorado Club*; Top Right, *Little Jackie Shane and His Combo at the Club El Dorado*, all from Hatch Show Print Still Image, Posters, Window Cards, 35 cm x 55.5 cm, 1960, 5th Floor Archives, Country Music Hall of Fame.

Figure 17.2. Bottom left, *Dance with Lattimore Brown and Arthur Barbara Allen*; Bottom center, *Buford Majores and band at the Eldorado Club*; Bottom right, *Concert and Dance with the Kingletts at the Eldorado Recreation Club*, all from Hatch Show Print Still Image, Posters, Window Cards, 35 cm x 55.5 cm, 1960, 5th Floor Archives, Country Music Hall of Fame.



Figure 17.3 Top left, *Dance with Buford Majors and Band at the Eldorado Club*; Top Right, *Dance featuring William Patton at the Eldorado Recreation Center form*, Top right, *Johnny Terrell at Eldorado Club*, all from Hatch Show Print Still Image, Posters, Window Cards, 35 cm x 55.5 cm, 1960, 5th Floor Archives, Country Music Hall of Fame.

Figure 17.4 Bottom center, *The Themes at the Club Eldorado*, from Hatch Show Print Still Image, Posters, Window Cards, 35 cm x 55.5 cm, 1960, 5th Floor Archives, Country Music Hall of Fame.

Besides the shifting social tides brought on by integration affecting the need for segregated spaces, another reason The Chitlin' Circuit began to decline was due to a series of state and federal projects historians now refer to as "urban renewal." In 1951, Murfreesboro city planners with financial support from the federal and state government rerouted the Dixie Highway in downtown Murfreesboro. They called this "The Broad Street Development Project." This urban redevelopment effort moved part of the highway to the southwestern area of The Bottoms neighborhood. As they had the decade prior, most African Americans living in and around the Sixth Ward during the 1940s rented their homes, with the exception of a few on Sevier Street.¹⁷⁸ This lack of land ownership multiplied the economic and social risks already inherent under segregation, which made these Black community members all the more vulnerable to urban renewal projects.

The Broad Street extension of the highway forever changed the landscape of this historic community and the life of the people who had inhabited it since the turn of the century. By this time, The Bottoms had become increasingly racially integrated. However, the majority of the community were disproportionately African American. Under the protection of the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, city officials razed the neighborhood of The Bottoms. This removal displaced approximately forty Black families, who were moved into a low-rent public housing facility.¹⁷⁹ The landscape of The Bottoms changed severely. What was once a walkable landscape, dotted with African American homes and small businesses, became an urban sprawl of major corporate enterprises.

¹⁷⁸ Lodl, 63.

¹⁷⁹ Albert Riley, "Murfreesboro Slum Clearance Fine Job," *The Atlanta Constitution*, August 29, 1955, Vol. 88, No. 63, 24.

Under the guise of beautifying urban enclaves through “slum clearance,” and the expansion of the highway system into interstates, urban renewal projects during the mid-century extended segregation in Black communities, ultimately becoming the reason that many historically Black neighborhoods disappeared or were greatly diminished across the entire United States. This history of displacement by urban development happened not just in Rutherford County, but across the landscape of The Chitlin’ Circuit affecting dozens, if not hundreds, of African American owned, operated or frequented entertainment venues and adjacently supportive businesses. It happened to Jefferson Street, Capitol Hill and Edgehill communities in Nashville. Beale Street in Memphis, Tennessee.

CONCLUSION

From spirituals, to ragtime, jazz to blues, and blues to rhythm and blues and the early days of soul music, The Chitlin' Circuit was defined by its ability to accelerate Black cultural innovation and achievement in the entertainment industry. Some argue it was made in the postwar era, only to die out in the sixties. However, as a state of mind it still exists as part of the continuum of Black consciousness, musical practice and culture. No matter the argument, its legacy is scattered all over the country, in small towns and major cities. And they're all connected in some way.

The double irony of the Chitlin' Circuit's relationship to road building across America is that roads were both the reasons venues were located where they were, and the demise of many. The Dixie Highway in Rutherford County was a major thorough fare until interstate expansion. Once the mainstream, now a side road, when the highway was no longer major, it lost some prestige. Prior to major road building efforts, juke joints existed in many tucked away landscapes where they reveled in obscurity from white control. Ironically, both are reasons African Americans located their clubs off-and-on the beaten path.

Today, in Rutherford County, the Circuit is still alive. Both Black and white patrons enjoy the spoils of this legacy when they eat soul food from restaurants like Kleervu Lunchroom, originally located in the heart of the historic sixth ward at 226 Highland Avenue. To date, E.A. Davis Elks Lodge (or, Club) #1138 is the oldest and longest continuously running social organization for Black people in Rutherford County. The Elks Club of the sixties burned down and was replaced with a new building at a different location in 1974.¹⁸⁰ Everything was lost but

¹⁸⁰ Devora E. Butler, *African Americans in Rutherford County*, Images of America (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Pub, 2009).

the concrete foundation, but the ruins still exist. Today, the E.A. Davis Elks Lodge #1138 is located at 2406 Halls Hill Pike in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.¹⁸¹ Prominent local figures continue to frequent the club, some have been faithful members for over thirty years.¹⁸² The E.A. Davis Elks Lodge (or, Club) continues to be a regular gathering place for local African Americans who want to engage with their musical community.

There are many limitations that exist for this research. The first regards the scope and content of the primary mapping data and research. The scope of this research is set within the boundaries of Rutherford County, Tennessee. However, most of the entertainment venues that I was able to locate exist within the incorporated municipality of Murfreesboro. For this reason, the data set itself can be considered narrow, as many more rural parts of the county have yet to be accounted for. The second set of limitations regards the thesis itself. Scholarship about the geography of The Circuit tends to focus on specific categories: 1) states as circuit locations (e.g., Mississippi), cities as circuit locations (e.g., Memphis), venues as circuit locations (e.g., The Apollo), and neighborhoods (e.g., Beale Street) and musical stars (e.g., James Brown).¹⁸³

Preston Lauterbach's book attempts to marry all of these historic categories and is a major asset to the study.¹⁸⁴ However, no major work exists that attempts to examine the circuit as both a temporal and spatial geography using geolocation. Mapping is often a component of

¹⁸¹ "Property Details of The Elks Lodge #1138," accessed February 19, 2020,

<http://asp.rutherfordcountyttn.gov/apps/propertydata/REALRESULTS3.ASPX?acct=52025>.

¹⁸² Scales and Sons Funeral Home, "Leonora Elaine Washington Obituary," Scales and Sons Funeral Home, accessed February 19, 2020, <http://www.scalesandsons.com/obitdetail.php?id=538>.

¹⁸³ Roger Stolle and Lou Bopp, *Mississippi Juke Joint Confidential: House Parties, Hustlers & The Blues Life* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2019); Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, *Night Train to Nashville: Music City Rhythm & Blues, 1945-1970* (Country Music Foundation Press, 2004); Richard Carlin and Kinshasha Conwill, *Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing: How the Apollo Theater Shaped American Entertainment* (National Museum of African American History and Culture through Smithsonian Books, 2010); Margaret McKee and Fred Chisenhall, *Beale Black and Blue: Life and Music on Black America's Main Street*. (Louisiana State University Press, 1981); Alan Leeds, *There Was a Time: James Brown, the Chitlin' Circuit, and Me*, 2020.

¹⁸⁴ Preston Lauterbach, *The Chitlin' Circuit: And the Road to Rock "n" Roll* (New York, N.Y.: W.W. Norton., 2011).

understanding the wider geography of America, individual states or neighborhoods as circuit locations. What is missing from the research is the marriage of theory and practice, where practice specifically incorporates mapping technologies in an attempt to understand more about the circuit as a physical landscape beyond particular localities. Additionally, an increasing amount of literature is being published that describes the impact of transportation on African American life, yet none analyze the impact of highway development on Black lives in Middle Tennessee.

An extension of this research across counties in the region, state, and country would better substantiate the claim that the historically Black neighborhoods grew out of contraband camps, which begat Black entertainment venues that were affected by road building efforts. However, I believe this is how GIS technology can be most beneficial to historians of The Chitlin' Circuit and African American history more broadly. If historians are able to quantify the entertainment spaces using geolocation, and make the information accessible, so much more can be known about Black history. My dream is that one day the history of every venue, if not most, will be unsilenced through this process. At least, in Middle Tennessee. Future study is needed in order to understand the many specific and continuous historical connections between the road development, urban renewal, and African American music making, not just in Tennessee, but across the country.

This research enriches not just the localized historiography of Rutherford County, Tennessee, but more regional and national ones as well. By answering a broad set of questions about the who, what, when, where, why, and how of this musical cultural history. The maps generated by this thesis are original, public documents that demonstrate how others might do the same in order to more fully understand their African American musical cultures and histories, as

well as how those stories fit into larger social contexts. The geographic information systems software used to make the maps, alone shows how a more comprehensive approach to public history can bring research data in the twenty-first century. By showing that The Chitlin' Circuit can be thought of as an intellectual idea and physical landscape, the door for new local, regional, and national histories on African American music making during the twentieth century is opened wider for future scholarship.

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