“What I Learned On Jefferson Street: The Intersection of Race, Class, Community, & Music On Jefferson Street in Nashville, Tennessee, 1860 – 1960”

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Masters of Public History

Middle Tennessee State University
March, 2022

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DEDICATION

There are many people who have undergone this journey with me.

To my beloved parents, Ottis and Felicia Reid, I dedicate this project to you. I cannot recall a time in which I did not have your support and encouragement; even when I did not realize or appreciate it. I do now, and I thank you.

To my sisters, I dedicate this project to you. Each of you have been both an inspiration and a blessing to my life. I have learned much by following in your footsteps, before being emboldened by your support to forge my own path.

To my family, I dedicate this project to you. Though I am not able to visit as often as I should or as I'd like, I am continously inspired by you all. It was through our many gatherings at my grandparents' house that I learned the power of my voice and the need to share our story.

To my friends, I dedicate this project to you. There were several times in working on this project that I hesitated or stumbled, but it was through your support that I could perservere. Thank you for the many night's we spent discussing this project and for bringing joy to this process.

And finally, I dedicate this project to the many voices who have come before me to create the soundtrack of North Nashville. Though I am not a native of this community, I have been accepted and nurtured by it since my arrival years ago. And for that, I am grateful.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Countless people have supported my effort on this project and have shared in both my facing its challenges and striving towards its completion.

Many thanks to my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Kristine McCusker who read my numerous revisions and provided invaluable feedback and advice on my analysis and framing. It was through taking her course that I first began to draw connections and develop content for this project.

I am indebted also to Dr. Learotha Williams of Tennessee State University. It was through his support that I made the decision to study African American history. From providing the opportunity for my first internship and conference attendance to writing my letter of recommendation to Middle Tennessee State University and then serving on my committee, he has shown tremendous support as a mentor.

My appreciation also goes out to the many colleagues who provided feedback, guidance, encouragement, and support all through my studies. Though there are too many to name,I am especially thankful to those who have served as both mentors and friends… Tamar, Marquita, Keitorria, Katie, and Nikki.

ABSTRACT

Research on the African American history of Nashville, Tennessee has primarily focused on the intersection of race and class between Blacks and Whites within the city. Whilst this focus has provided an understanding of the ambiguity of the relationship between the two, it has not accounted for the role music played in the city's development.

The aim of this project was to determine how Black Nashvillians utilized music to create a new intellectual and cultural identity following enslavement. To achieve this, university archives, newspapers, and literature written on Black Nashville were utilized alongside examining various songs created within the city to interweave music into the historical narrative of African American racial advancement.

This project demonstrates that understanding the myriad of ways through which Black Nashvillians understood, resisted, and interacted with their surroundings must be done through examining how advancements in Black music culture bolstered their efforts for freedom and progress.

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Introduction – Drawing Meaning From Music

Heading down Jefferson Street in the North Nashville community, you would hear music. At the intersection of Jefferson and Dr. DB Todd Jr. Blvd, you would be treated to the soothing and soulful sounds of the world-renowned Jubilee Singers of Fisk University, a place where each chord, tone, pitch, and note has for years been carefully selected and meticulously rehearsed to convey a sense of pride, preserve the Black spiritual experience, and celebrate the Black soul. Further down Jefferson and adjacent Hadley Park, you would be welcomed onto the campus of one of the city's oldest African American colleges, Tennessee State University. Two of the institution's major music ensembles, the Jazz Collegians and Aristocrat of Bands, would captivate your attention, astound you with their proficiency, and showcase an exuberant display of Black musical prowess that merges high-energy marching band culture with the articulation and melodic stimulation that one can typically only experience while attending a symphonic concert. The student musicians at both of these historically Black institutions display a performance dexterity unique to African American music culture that has been passed down through many generations of the city's Black residents. And though both the musicians and the Jefferson Street community itself have changed over the years, the streets of North Nashville do indeed still sing.

The melody that resonates through the historic Jefferson Street district is one of upliftment, cultural development, intellectual pride, and of course, community. North Nashville has been home to the city's Black residents for years, and between the early to mid 1900s, was considered to be the very heart of African American business and

musical culture.[1] Over the years, the neighborhood underwent many stages including developing from a footpath and wagon trail to an area where Black Nashvillians resided following the Civil War and eventually becoming an economic and cultural hub for their community to thrive. Having consisted of a system of eateries, stores, banks, nightclubs, and universities during the height of its history, the community formed on Jefferson Street provided African Americans the opportunity to educate themselves, establish an intellectual and cultural identity opposite of that disseminated by Whites during and after the period of enslavement, and develop a foundation upon which they could focus their efforts from the Reconstruction Era to the Civil Rights era. The formation of this community was achieved through the efforts of many Black Nashvillians and lessons passed down across several generations. As the knowledge required for the Black diaspora in America to advance has always extended beyond basic arithmetic, reading, and writing, each lesson was intertwined with a notion of racial upliftment and advancement. And for the Black community on Jefferson Street, lessons were both underscored and strengthened by the advancement of African American musical cultures.

As is the case in the historical narrative of African Americans nationally, communal growth and racial advancement for Black Nashvillians not only paralleled the progress and acceptance of Black music culture but also contributed to one another's forward momentum. At Fisk University, the Jubilee Singers toured the world beginning in 1871, garnering international fame for their school and Black spirituals while also providing financial support and negotiating a new identity that combatted notions of the

[1] Benjamin Houston, *The Nashville Way: Racial Etiquette and the Struggle for Social Justice in a Southern City*, (Atlanta, University of Georgia Press, 2012), 13.

race being child-like and unintelligent. At Tennessee State University, then Tennessee Agricultural & Industrial State Normal School for Negroes, musically-inclined students and professors brought national acclaim to the institution and made significant contributions to the expansion of Black collegiate vocal and instrumental culture. Both of these institutions, in tandem with the entertainment-driven economy on Jefferson Street, practiced the art of musicking. A term coined by music scholar Christopher Small, it is the art of taking part in any of the experiences related to music whether they be actively performing, passively listening, rehearsing or practicing, composing, or even dancing.[2] It is the act of organizing sound into meaning, a practice that has been a constant within Black culture. Both the university ensembles and musicians on Jefferson Street transformed their music into an action, weaponizing their craft to augment the goals of the city's African American leadership. The culmination of these efforts was the development of the district as a largely independent and self-sufficient economy, a notion that was highly successful until the introduction of Interstate-40 in 1957 and its displacement of the Black community.

What I Learned On Jefferson Street examines the narrative of racial and communal advancement within the Jefferson Street historic district through analyzing how the two Black educational facilities, Fisk University and Tennessee State University, gave a purpose to their music beyond entertainment for a local audience. Following the Civil War, these institutions played a significant role in the development of North Nashville into a cultural hub for Black Nashvillians and the training of the next

[2] Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 9.

generation of Black leaders. Beyond their influence on the city, the facilities and nightclubs that operated in the community attracted nationally known artists are representative of the spiritual, economic, psychological, and cultural awakening that occurred within the minds of many African Americans during the era of Reconstruction and after. The period between 1860 to 1960 is transformative for Black Nashvillians as it was during this time the residents expanded their educational opportunities and businesses. The community's growth paralleled the national shift in racial consciousness and the birth of the new Negro identity. On one side was the past and though there were some individuals who resisted their situation through rebellions and running away, there were many who prioritized survival and were dependent on guidance from Whites. On the other was an image of self-reliance, intellectualism, and economic expansion; a racial identity both learned and honed during the Reconstruction era. Jefferson Street and the African American history of Nashville was at the intersection of this decision and represented a microcosm of the race's united struggle for racial equity, class recognition, and economic and cultural progression.

Chapter I – "An Ambiguous Agreement" explores the early interactions between Black and White Americans in the settlement that would over time become Nashville, Tennessee. Delving into the history of enslavement, daily life within the territory, and the Civil War, the chapter examines the establishment of a paternalistic relationship that was enforced upon the Black community in Nashville by the more affluent White settlers. The historical narrative of racial advancement within the city was representative of a broader theme of socio-economic progress for African Americans across the nation. As such, the chapter explores and situates the intellectual and cultural awakening undergone by Black

Nashvillians into the national movement while examining how the group utilized music as a means to preserve their cultural memory and pass along a desire for the betterment of their race to future generations through song. Chapter II – "Representations of Humanity" analyzes how the lessons that were passed along to the first generation of free African Americans in Nashville were bolstered by musical innovation to achieve the wishes of their parents and teachers. Following the Civil War, the priority of Black Nashvillians was to educate themselves and form a sense of community amidst the class divisions that arose while enslaved. Fisk University, the product of collaboration between Northern White missionaries and the city's Black leadership, met both of these needs. Both the university and the efforts of the Black community in Nashville were only successful due to the work of the Fisk Jubilee Singers in weaponizing the spirituals passed down from their predecessors to provide for the financial needs of the institution, advance American music culture, and negotiate an intellectual and cultural identity for African Americans on an international stage.

Chapter III – "Enter to Learn, Go Forth to Serve" investigates how the continued efforts of Black leadership within the city to develop educational opportunities for the betterment of the race were reinforced by the musicianship of Tennessee State University's professors and students. Both the vocal and instrumental music ensembles brought the institution national acclaim and improved to recruit students and obtain financial support from donors. The efforts of these ensembles, particularly the instrumental, culminated in the institution having a sizable contribution to the expansion of the Black collegiate band movement. As such, Chapter III delves the local and national influence of the ensembles in perpetuating a Black musical identity opposite of the one

portrayed by Whites through minstrelsy. Chapter IV – "A World Within A World" examines how both Fisk University and Tennessee State University, amongst other major landmarks, solidified the Jefferson Street district as a hub for Black culture and economic independence. As these educational facilities grew, so too did the number of African American residents in the area which in turn developed a cohesive and selectively insular community separated from the rest of the city. The music and communal culture that thrived within this district both produced and drew on the musicianship of locally trained performers from the surrounding educational institutions and national Black artists who frequented its streets regularly. The chapter explores how Fisk and Tennessee A&I fostered and contributed to the advancement of African American economic and civil rights interests in Nashville as a musical act and how the introduction of Interstate 40 effectively destroyed the community and uprooted many of its residents. It is important to note that within African American history, significant movement towards advancing the goals of the race were often concurrent to one another. As such, this work will explore how issues such as a push for access to education and racial advancement were pushed by several individuals and institutions as musical acts with community and economic implications all of which culminated in the development of the Jefferson Street community.

What I Learned On Jefferson Street is both in conversation with and an extension of past scholarship regarding the African American history of Nashville. At the foundation of this knowledge base is Dr. Bobby Lovett's work, *The African American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780 – 1930: Elites and Dilemmas* which provides a comprehensive account of the development of Nashville's economy while tracing the

unique, paternalistic relationship orchestrated by White elites and families towards Black Americans and the efforts of the latter to alleviate themselves of this burden. *What I Learned On Jefferson Street* expands the narrative to interconnect the role music made by individual musicians, ensembles, and institutions played alongside the efforts of Black leadership within the city to showcase the development of a new intellectual and cultural identity across several generations. Its objective is to explore how Black Nashvillians, whether in rehearsal spaces, concert halls, sports stadiums, nightclubs, classrooms, or even the city streets, made use of music to achieve their goals.

The cover image, entitled *Sounds of North Nashville*, is representative of how (from left to right) the emerging artists from the surrounding nightclubs, bandsmen of Tennessee State University, and vocalists of Fisk University utilized their dedication and perseverance to give meaning and purpose to their music.[3] The advancement of their artistry paralleled that of the city's Black community and ultimately created a space for negotiation – negotiation of freedom, identity, and at times, even the survival of authentic Black musical culture.

[3] *Sounds of North Nashville* (located in the Appendix) was created by Afro-Hispanic interdisciplinary visual artist and researcher, Heriberto Palacio, III, student in the Fine Arts Doctoral Program at Texas Tech University. The piece was commissioned to illustrate the relationship between the educational institutions on Jefferson Street (Fisk University and Tennessee State University) and the entertainment district that highlighted Black musical talent on a regular basis. At the core of the advancement of Nashville's Black community was music, a notion that can be seen through the image of musicians from each of these areas performing together under a spotlight that accentuates communal pride and African American culture and identity.

Chapter I – An Ambiguous Agreement

"Culture is not a fixed condition but a process: the product of interaction between the past and present. Its toughness and resiliency are determined not by a culture's ability to withstand change… but by its ability to react creatively and responsively to the realities of a new situation."[1] This statement proposed in 2007 by Lawrence Levine opposed years of academic work that perpetuated the notion that the African American worldview manifested during enslavement as a direct result of the interaction between Euro-American and African cultures. Asserting that this perspective was a misinterpretation of the very definition of culture itself, Levine challenged historians to instead view the historical narrative of African culture in America as a story of transformation, rather than survival. Culture is not a fixed condition, but instead a persisting and compelling facet of life. It is a catalyst for, parallel to, and a consequence of change.

Thus, to understand the African American experience one must be cognizant of the nature of its culture. Within it lies a continuity of consciousness, witnessed through the customs and practices that were passed down from generation to generation from as early as the first enslaved individuals who set foot on American shores.[2] Taking many forms including art, cuisine, oral traditions, dialect, and even song, a community's culture is essentially a collection of its residents' lived experiences. As the community continues to grow, these customs and traditions take the form of lessons that determine and guide its progression. And though this communal inheritance can take several different paths, the development of this group consciousness and

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[1] Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5.
[2] Joyce Marie Jackson, "Continuity of Consciousness: Spirituals and Gospel," in *Rivers of Rhythm: African Americans and the Making of American Music*. Edited by National Museum of African American Music (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bookmobile, 2020), Exhibition catalogue, 15.

belief system is primarily linear. Therefore in tracing the early interactions between the White and Black populace in settling the territory that would later become Nashville, Tennessee, it is possible to discern how the experiences and objectives of the first Black settlers would go on to influence future generations.

The history of Nashville and the relationship between the Black and White settlers is one shrouded in ambiguity. Alongside necessities for founding the new territory like sheep, cattle, seeds, and tools, White settlers brought with them their social institutions, form of government (the Cumberland Compact), personal liberties, the enslaved, and racial attitudes while free Black settlers brought a dream of becoming self-sufficient.[3] Each of these preconceived notions went on to shape the relationship between these two for many years to come. Thus began the dynamic of Whites within the territory viewing Blacks as a resource and the latter continuously seeking opportunities to distance themselves in favor of independent economic stability. The objective of the African American settlers, however, was not realized for many years and was only made a reality through the evolution and spread of their music. In these early years, throughout, and beyond the period of enslavement, music was a tool. It was not only crucial to the dissemination of African ideologies that had been passed down several generations but also afforded them the opportunity to adapt to and transcend their situation.[4] Culture is neither stagnate nor definitive; instead it is pliant and yields to the needs of its creator. For the African Americans living through enslavement, music became one of the driving forces of their cultural and economic progression. And it is through examination of the convergence between their day to day life experiences and the growth of Black music culture that an accurate depiction of the ideals of spiritual awareness,

[3] Bobby L. Lovett, *The African American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780-1930* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 3.
[4] Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 19.

racial upliftment, and Black intellectuality can be seen being passed down from generation to generation as a form of communal consciousness to resist their situation.

A Brief History of Racial Compromise in Nashville

Residing on the bank of the Cumberland River, the land upon which Fort Nashborough was founded provided early frontiersmen with many of the necessities required to face the hardships of settling the territory. The land was rich with minerals (including iron, limestone, oil, etc.) and provided access to freshwater sources, plentiful vegetation, and several types of animals including buffalo, deer, and bears.[5] Before its colonization by European and African Americans the territory served as a hunting ground for Native Americans, eventually acting as a location through which the two groups would interact frequently. From the beginning of its history, this territory served as a location through which bonds would be formed that extended far beyond the confines of race and class. The territory was primarily explored by groups led by two White individuals, Capt. James Robertson and Col. John Donelson. Both of these groups included a mixture of free and enslaved Black settlers and faced many tribulations. As referenced in the *Donelson Journal* which documents the 1779-80 river voyage of Col. Donelson and his crew, the journey was fraught with obstacles such as inclement weather, disease, and conflicts with Native Americans. This included a quarrel on March 10th, 1780, when several of the White crewmembers and their accompanying Black servants were wounded and killed in combat while attempting to lessen the load of goods on the boats to escape.[6] It is important to mention that within this account, none of the Black crewmembers were named and often perished defending the boat on the orders of the White voyagers. This is representative of the value that was placed

[5] Lovett, *The African American History of Nashville, Tennessee,* 2.
[6] Donelson Journal by John Donelson, 1779-1780, THS 195, Tennessee Historical Society Miscellaneous Files, 1688-1951, Tennessee Historical Society. https://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/tfd/id/594/rec/19

on the lives of Black settlers and the trend of viewing African Americans as a resource to be utilized until discarded.

Figure 1.1 Replica of Fort Nashborough

On April 24th, 1780, Col. Donelson's journey ended with the arrival of their party in Capt. Robertson's camp. They found that Robertson had built a collection of log cabins within the territory on a Cedar Bluff.[7] These cabins became a forted station constructed right beside the Cumberland River and eventually the settlement of Nashborough. As the site continued to attract new pioneers, the number of Black and White residents grew and the territory became a state in 1796. Founded through the efforts of both White and Black workers, Fort Nashborough's population in 1800 consisted of 295 Whites, 151 enslaved Blacks, 3 free Blacks, and several scattered buildings including taverns, log and frame houses, and individual stone structures.[8] Similar to the ambitions of the White settlers, free Blacks came to exploit the land and the

[7] Ibid
[8] Lovett, *The African American History of Nashville, Tennessee*, 3

economic opportunity it provided. Despite the many challenges of settling the land, the diverse group persevered and eventually begun distributing the territory amongst each other. The settlement afforded White settlers the opportunity to re-invent themselves, seen through the lives of the many who became landowners and merchants. Many of the free Black settlers, however, were not as successful in establishing themselves as they were forced to contend with racial prejudice and discrimination. Thus, there are two major narratives to trace within the Black history of the territory: the experiences of the free Blacks and those of the enslaved. The myriad of ways in which each of these groups interacted with one another and were made dependent upon the leadership of White settlers ultimately influenced not only their growth, but the way they resisted their situation as well. It is only by looking at how the two narratives developed alongside each other that one can understand the role race and class played in shaping the Black experience and their racial objectives within the territory.

Over the years, differences in access to wealth and opportunity began to create differentiating socioeconomic classes between the settlers. Amongst the population of White individuals and families, there were those who were wealthy, high-class, and owned land (elite) and those who maintained a low-moderate amount of wealth and did not own land (working-class). Black settlers, who at this point had built up a sense of familiarity with their White counterparts, relied heavily on their support to survive in the territory due to their limited access to resources and land. Ultimately, these early interactions created an economic dynamic in which Black settlers were dependent on the generosity and support of Whites to succeed. Alternatively, an emerging settlement requires much in terms of labor and regardless of their opinion towards the Black settlers, Whites needed them as a labor force. As the territory expanded, the number of residents steadily increased. By the 1830s, there were approximately 861 male and 947 female

enslaved Black persons and 97 male and 82 female free Blacks.[9] Over time, the land surrounding the colony was given designation as Davidson County and it continued to develop under the guidance of the elite White settlers.

As frontier life was harsh and the scope of work was beyond what could be handled solely by the enslaved, Black and White settlers lived in an integrated society. As Lovett notes, it was not uncommon to find the two racial groups to be huddled around the same campfire during difficult winters, passing the time through the exchange of stories, history, and culture.[10] In time, the settlement's biracial climate produced a complex social structure including four distinct groups within the Black populace. There were free Black settlers – individuals who had received legal papers from in or outside of Tennessee; the quasi-independent enslaved – individuals who had owners but received their masters' permission to live alone and make their living while sharing profits; the hired enslaved persons – individuals who remained the legal property of their master but were hired out to make their living while sharing profits; and the general population of enslaved (the largest group) – individuals who were under the watchful eyes of their masters daily and typically unable to be involved in any decision-making regarding their lives and families.[11] These labels became the foundation of a class system in the territory for African Americans that would influence their growth for many years.

For enslaved Blacks living within the territory, their lives and duties were primarily built around a task system. This required each individual to complete a set of daily jobs, offering the incentive of being able to finish early for those who completed their work promptly. Frances Batson, a formerly enslaved person within the Davidson County territory, recalled some of her

[9] Ibid, 4
[10] Ibid, 7
[11] Ibid, 8

experiences as a child living during enslavement, stating that "Mah mammy useter tell me how de white folks would hire de slaves out ter mek money fer de marster."[12] Though this system provided White slave owners with opportunities to increase their wealth, it also made them dependent on Black labor. In contrast to this, the enslaved were not able to build capital but were instead able to gain skills in manual and industrial crafts. This was yet another dynamic that would influence the development of Nashville's socioeconomic climate.

By the late 1830s, there were many participants within the task system and enslaved Blacks were not only hired out, but at times they were also sold to White settlers dependent on the need and price of their skill. This can be witnessed through the lives of individuals such as Isaac, an enslaved gunsmith and blacksmith who was owned by David Bouie.[13] Individuals such as Isaac were viewed as a product to be traded at the market to whomever could afford them. They would operate in many capacities and learned trades to assist in the expansion and sustainment of the territory.

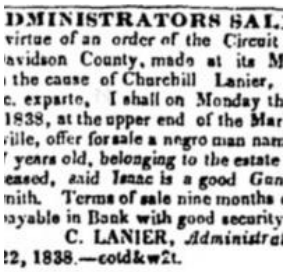
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Figure 1.2 Isaac – Administrator's Sale

However, the enslaved were not the only individuals to participate in a wide variety of industrial crafts during this time. Free Black craftsmen hired themselves out as well, making use of their

[12] Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 15, Tennessee, Batson-Young. 1936. Manuscript/Mixed Material. https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn150/, 2
[13] "Isaac - TN-GUN1, TN-BLA33," accessed March 1, 2022, https://archive.blackcraftspeople.org/items/show/743.

skills to make their living in the harsh frontier. There are records of free men of color such as John Chubs, Frank Wichfull, Ben McClenden, and William Armour who hired their skills out to White settlers as shoemakers, brickmakers, and blacksmiths.[14] In this way, the territory fostered competition between working-class Whites and the Black populace as the two fought for work. Ultimately, this affected life for all of the African Americans living within the settlement.

Life for African Americans living with the territory during the early-mid 1800s was by no means easy. Regardless of their place in the settlement's emerging Black class system, persons of color often faced discrimination and at times physical abuse. In speaking on her experience as a former enslaved person in the territory, Cecilia Chappel recalled that "Mah Missis woulden' let dem sell me. I wuz a nuss en house gal. I wuz whup'd wid a bull whup, en got cuts on mah back menny a time. I'se not shamed ter say I got skyars on mah back now fum Marster cuttin' hit wid dat bull whup. Mah Missis also whup'd me. W'en de Missis got ready ter whup me, she would gib us sum wuk ter do, so she would kind ob git over her mad spell 'fore she whup'd us."[15] White slave owners often resorted to physical punishment to exert and maintain their control over enslaved Blacks. This allowed them to place themselves in a position of power, one that they utilized to restrain the movement and growth opportunities for free Black settlers as well. In tracing the development of race and class within Nashville, Lovett asserted that the urban environment influenced some of the Black populace to develop a perspective centered around living between White and Black socioeconomic worlds.[16] Ultimately, many of these individuals built their lives around their relationship with the elite White settlers in the territory. Those

[14] "Black Craftspeople Dashboard," Black Craftspeople Digital Archive. Accessed on March 1, 2022. https://blkcrftsppl.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/7987e70774f24703b10b71ba60e3d072
[15] Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 15, Tennessee, Batson-Young. 1936. Manuscript/Mixed Material. https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn150/, 6.
[16] Lovett, *The African American History of Nashville, Tennessee,* 8.

African Americans who participated in this relationship with elite Whites were given designation and treatment that set them apart from other members of the race.

Thus, this relationship marked the development of an informal elite Black class in Nashville. These were Black men and women whose status was above others within the race due to access to wealth and education.[17] Members of the elite Black class group even received protection from the elite whites from members of the white lower-class who opposed any signs of Black racial progress. Access to education, however, only served to further separate members of the Black elite from the enslaved. Typically, enslaved persons were forbidden access to learning materials. Cecilia Chappel spoke on this as well stating “"I dunno how ter read er rite. De white folks didn' 'low us ter l'arn nuthin'. I declar' you bettuh not git kotch wid a papah in you han'.”[18] White settlers knew that education brought with it a form of empowerment. And to remain in control of the territory and ensure productivity continued satisfactorily, they had to ensure that the enslaved had no access to learning materials while some of the free, elite Blacks were granted limited access. Over time, this relationship and the restrictions placed upon them further drove Blacks within the territory to resist their situation.

Similarly to other territories, resistance was common within the history of Nashville. However, differences in the ways these two groups interacted influenced altered the ways in which they show resistance to their situation. Enslaved persons often resisted their bondage physically through escape attempts. In remembering the disappearance of their brother, formerly enslaved Frances Batson stated, “"Mah younger br'er run 'way, de caught 'im, tuk 'im home en whup'd 'im. He run 'way en wuz nebber found."[19] Escape was attempted despite the fear of

[17] Ibid, 7
[18] Federal Writers’ Project: Slave Narrative, 5.
[19] Federal Writers’ Project: Slave Narrative, 1.

capture and being beaten. These individuals held dreams of freedom carrying them far beyond the confines of the settlement and were often determined to realize that freedom however they could. In contrast to this, free Black settlers in Nashville practiced their resistance in other ways. These individuals took an accommodationist approach, a notion born from dissatisfaction with their paternalistic relationship with White settlers. The White elite, who did not want to upset the White working-class individuals, who viewed the Black populace as unwanted competitors, did not officially recognize any elite Black class and only allowed them some opportunities while having no real social standing or power.[20] As such members of the elite Black class outwardly maintained their relationship with the elite White settlers but secretly separated themselves from their ambiguous, paternalistic compromise. By the 1850s, each of these groups had been influenced greatly by their interactions with White settlers. Members of both the free and enslaved Black populace began to have thoughts towards separating themselves from White settlers. And it was through music that these individuals found a means to both give voice to these desires and resist their situation through developing a culture around weaving covert messages into their lyrics that could easily be passed down from one person to another.

Examining the Meaning and Use of Slave Songs

Music can be a force of isolation, yet also one of bonding. It is both a natural occurrence and an art form that must be given meaning through significant dedication and perseverance. It can occur anywhere, and yet the location and stage upon which it is performed may also heavily alter the listening experience. Despite all of this, however, musicking is intentional. Though musical performance provides numerous opportunities for individuals to interpret it, those who are aware of its purpose and message will always be able to understand it. Such has been the case

[20] Lovett, *The African American History of Nashville, Tennessee,* 8.

throughout Black history in America. And though the message has undergone many changes over the years due to both time and circumstance, it has been a common occurrence for African Americans to weave together rhythms and harmonizes with hidden messages woven within. For the Black population in Nashville, music was a tool to advance racial objectives, commune with one another, and contribute lessons and knowledge to the communal consciousness. And one cannot discuss the reality of Black life during enslavement without mention of the ways in which they weaponized their voices as a means to resist their plight.

Black Americans utilized music to serve the dual purpose of preserving communal values while also providing occasions for individuals to transcend if at least symbolically, the restrictions of their environment and society.[21] At their core, slave songs were a method for the race to articulate their emotions and converse with and about the world around them.[22] They recognized the need to subtly convey messages amongst themselves and, in turn, developed songs that contained dual meanings. This is the case in songs such as "The Good Old Way, which was recorded in Nashville, TN:

> "As I went down in de valley to pray, Studying about dat
> good old way When you shall wear de starry crown, Good Lord,
> show me de way. O mourner, let's go down, let's go down, let's go down,
> O mourner, let's go down, down in de valley to pray."[23]

Upon an initial glance, the song could be attributed to prayer and worship. And though it may have been used for this purpose as well, it also contains a hidden meaning. Within the lore of the history of slavery in the United States are many tales of the Underground Railroad and its use by the enslaved to gain their freedom. The path itself consisted of a strategic line of farms running

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[21] Ibid, 8.
[22] W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 244.
[23] William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison, *Slave Songs of the United States: The Classic 1867 Anthology* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1995), 84.

zigzag northward and comprised of hundreds of men and women, both White and Black.[24] These conductors guided escapees through extensive fields, dense woods, and across swift rivers. And once they became familiar enough with the path they would pass along messages through a member of the enslaved populace on the plantation to convince others to join in the arduous journey towards freedom. As traveling at night was a necessity, the enslaved had to find methods to navigate.

One of these methods was using the North Star as a beacon pointing northward towards freedom. By familiarizing themselves with the stars, particularly the North Star and the Big Dipper, enslaved persons could secretly pass this information from generation to generation through song while having a dedicated method that would guide them to freedom.[25] In examining "The Good Old Way," the act of going down in the valley to pray can be rationalized as the process of the enslaved exploring and familiarizing themselves with their surrounding territory. The starry crown refers to the use of the stars as a means of navigation that, when coupled with their knowledge of the land, showed them the way to freedom. The notion of hiding messages for escape within a song can be seen in other Nashville slave songs such as "I'm Going Home:

"I sought my Lord in de wilderness, in de wilderness in de
wilderness; I sought my Lord in de wilderness, For
I'm a going home. For I'm going home, For I'm going
Home; I'm just getting ready, For I'm going home.
I found my free grace in the wilderness,
My father preaches in the wilderness."[26]

[24] Henrietta Buckmaster, "The Underground Railroad," *The North American Review* 246, no. 1 (Autumn 1938): 142.
[25] "North Start to Freedom," National Park Service, last modified July 9, 2018, https://www.nps.gov/articles/drinkinggourd.htm
[26] Allen, Ware and Garrison, *Slave Songs of The United States*, 84.

This song references the spiritual journey, but also points to the act of preparing oneself for the expedition to freedom. The enslaved often gathered in the surrounding territory of the plantation, away from the ears of their masters, to vent their frustrations and converse. One such instance of this occurring can be seen through the words of former enslaved person, Ann Matthews who recalled that "durin' slavery de White folks didn't want de niggahs ter sing en pray, but dey would turn a pot down en meet at de pot in de nite en sing en pray en de White folks wouldn't 'yer dem."[27] Through stories of individuals such as Ann, it is clear that resistance was at the forefront of the minds of many enslaved persons. As such, the reference towards hearing father preaching in the wilderness can be thought of as a prominent member of the community of enslaved speaking in a discrete location on the details of their plan.

Despite the ability of music to serve as a tool for sending hidden messages, it was also a means for the enslaved populace in Nashville to spread and celebrate their connection to their faith.

Individuals such as Frankie Goole gathered to sing and celebrate with others as a means of releasing all of the pent up emotions they had from day-to-day life. In reflecting on his life during slavery, Goole recalled the joy singing brought to his community stating that "W'en dey would sing deze songs hit would almos' mek you hair stand up on yo haid, de way dem peeples would jump en shout."[28] Singing provided the opportunity to transcend their situation, if at the very least symbolically, and commune directly with God. In Nashville, the enslaved were singing religious songs such as "Dark wuz de Nite," "I'll live wid Gawd Forever, Bye en Bye," and "Fun dis Earth I go, Oh Lawd, W'at will Kum ob Me."[29] These types of songs articulated some of the

[27] Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative, 45.
[28] Ibid, 21
[29] Ibid, 45

deepest and most authentic emotions while also showcasing a high level of situational awareness and group consciousness. It is here one can see an early representation of the spiritual. Black Nashvillians utilized these songs as a means of resisting their situation and inspiring one another to continue along their path to freedom. And following the Civil War, they passed these songs along to their children to continue their resistance and assist them on their journey towards racial advancement.

Nashville Heading into the Civil War

The periods before and following the Civil War (1861-65) can be understood as a time in which there was a shift in mentality for Black Nashvillians. Towards one side of this pivot was the old Negro, sambo-like and docile. This individual-focused their resistance through more patient, restrained means such as funding the freedom of their families and maintaining an obedient disposition while finding methods to secretly spread messages and escape northwards towards freedom. It is to this individual that the image and characteristics of Sambo can be attributed. This term was created to subordinate the Negro and the longer it persisted, the more believable the image became and the greater the success in passing it down amongst succeeding generations as a means of control.[30] In taking on the act of being guileless, the old Negro embraced an image of subservience. Though in many cases this was done as an act of self-preservation and covert resistance, it perpetuated the notion that African Americans were inferior to Whites and dependent on continuing the paternalistic relationship with them.

Contrary to the submissive Negro was a new racially conscious, self-reliant, and image called the new Negro. These individuals were focused on racial solidarity and growth. The traits associated with the concept of the new Negro emerged within the Black populace during the last

[30] Joseph Boskin, "Sambo: The Rise and Demise of an American Jester," *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 1 (1988): 9.

years of the war. This can be understood through both a local and national pivot amongst the race towards focusing on developing themselves as a whole rather than individually. Though the methods towards accomplishing this differed at times, it was all part of a larger racial awakening. The new Negro was an individual whose cultural and intellectual sensibility were representative of the future.[31] They were symbolic of a spiritual and psychological transformation within the Black community toward developing a more collective racial consciousness that would inform their decisions for many generations. In this way, the image of the old Negro – represented by mammies, uncles, and Sambos – was shed for one that was disconnected from the negative connotations of these roles and instead more focused on improving social and economic opportunity within Black urban communities.[32] For Black Nashvillians, this cultural awakening is seen through the ways in which they continued to resist their situation by escaping from slave owners and participating in the Civil War.

Within the biracial city of Nashville, conflict between the Union and Confederate armies brought much strain to the paternalistic relationship between Whites and Blacks. While Whites struggled to maintain their power against the threat of the Union Army, Blacks utilized the opportunity to free themselves of their bonds while securing their safety through cooperating with the northern troops. Southern White slaveowners also feared how Union soldiers would treat them. At the start of the war, many slaveholders feared the Union because of the possibility of being hung for treason. Because of this, some slave owners attempted to move their slaves further down South. Former enslaved person Precilla Gray spoke on her experience with this stating “W'en de Civil wah wuz startin' dere wuz soldiers en tents eve'-ywhar. I had ter 'nit socks en he'ps mek soliders coats en durin' de wah, de marster sent 100 ob us down in Georgia ter keep

[31] Gabriel Briggs, *The New Negro in the Old South* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 2.
[32] Ibid, 1.

de Yankees fum gittin' us en we camped out durin' de whole three yhars."[33] This process allowed slaveowners to escape the judgement and often punishment of Union soldiers and maintain their power. While many of the enslaved used the advance of Union troops to disappear before their overseers could round them up, not all were able to. In some cases, enslaved persons were forced into the conflict. This was the case for former enslaved Frances Batson who, after witnessing his younger brother escape, lost his older brother after he went to war with their enslaver.[34] Aside from those who were brought into the conflict and those shepherded away, there were many who were unaware altogether of what the war meant for their lives. In this way, many White slaveholders attempted to coerce or fool Blacks into staying with them to preserve the relationship and standing they had worked so long to cultivate.

As the military presence within the city increased, so, too, did opportunities for Black laborers. Demand for many services including haircuts, shaves, baths, boarding, laundry, iron making, and other crafts rose as the Union made use of the skilled Black population.[35] To the Union army, the Black Nashvillians were a considerable workforce that could be utilized in various tasks to cement their presence. At the same time, providing opportunities for Blacks ensured they would develop a lasting, cooperative relationship with the Union rather than the Confederates. As the Union moved towards utilizing Nashville as a military base of operations, Black labor became a critical resource. They were hired to assist with the construction of approximately 90 engines and hundreds of railroad cars.[36] This was the beginning of a transformative period for the Black populace in Nashville that eventually allowed them to begin accruing capital to fund future acts of reconstruction.

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[33] Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative, 25.
[34] Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative, 1.
[35] Lovett, *The African American History of Nashville, Tennessee*, 47.
[36] Ibid, 49.

Following the Union victory in the Battle of Shiloh in the spring of 1862, thousands more enslaved sought out refuge within the territory of the Union to gain freedom and access to jobs. This prompted General Ulysses S. Grant, who designated Blacks as forms of contraband, to authorize the creation of camps at Northwest Nashville (1863), Edgefield (1864), and Edgehill (1864) to hold them.[37] Camps such as the one at Edgefield depicted in the pictorial lithograph below held Black Nashvillians throughout the duration of the conflict.

Figure 1.3 Nashville and the Camp of the Sixteenth Regiment of Ills. Vols. Inft. At Edgefield, Tennessee

As the presence of the Confederate army continued to dissipate, Black Nashvillians were forced to take on more roles by the Union to ensure the security of the region. Regardless of their designation as being enslaved or free, Blacks were treated as a source for manual labor. At height of the need for the fortification of the city's defenses, Union soldiers even went as far as to force Black men, women, and children as young as 13 into labor positions.[38] This labor was used by General James S. Negley to construct several forts including Fort Andrew Johnson, Fort Casino,

[37] Lovett, *The African American History of Nashville, Tennessee*, 55.
[38] "The Complicated History of Nashville's Fort Negley," WPLN News, last modified September 15, 2017, https://wpln.org/post/the-complicated-history-of-nashvilles-fort-negley/

Fort Confiscation, and Fort Negley. Aside from constructing forts, they were also used as staff to work at various institutions. Below is an image of African American men and women hanging laundry at a military hospital in Nashville in 1863.[39]

Figure 1.4 Hospital Yard, Nashville (Civil War, 1863)

Through tasks such as this, many Black Nashvillians freed themselves from their relationship with their former enslavers and sought refuge from the Union army. In May 1863, the U.S. War Dept. issued General Order No. 143 to establish a Bureau of Colored Troops and provided individuals such as formerly enslaved Nashvillian Dennis Morgan to serve in the Union army.[40] The push to join and support the northern troops was done by Blacks as a means of personally securing their freedom. A movement that took place nationally, African Americans from across the lands were determined to win their independence themselves and strike a blow to the Confederate troops. Their time spent serving in the military transformed their mindsets from

[39] Photograph of Hospital Yard, Nashville, July 1863, 3248, Library Collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives. https://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15138coll5/id/21/rec/9
[40] Certificate of Enlistment for Dennis Morgan into the United States Colored Troops, April 1864, 35092, Morgan Family Papers, 1775-1938, Tennessee State Library and Archives. https://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15138coll9/id/16/rec/24

servants and slaves to that of the skilled worker who was compensated for their labor. However, though they received compensation for their work with the Union, they were still grossly underpaid compared to White laborers. By as late as August 1864, the army owed them an additional $12,297 for their services.[41] Despite this, Black laborers within the city continued their work within several capacities. This conversion served as the precursor for the development of a new Negro elite class, one who did not need to solely rely on the elite White class. Instead, these individuals were not only community-minded but had the knowledge, support, and means to - achieve its goals.

Though the end of the Civil War in Nashville brought an end to one ambiguous, paternalistic relationship between White and Black residents, it did not solve all of the Black populace's problems. Instead the end of the conflict shifted the power structure. Though wealthy White individuals remained in control, the Black population gained a voice in the direction of their future. As issues regarding how the race should advance following their time in bondage arose, the race was called upon to use this newfound voice to drive their growth. One of these issues was the preservation and categorization of Black musical culture. During the Civil War, Black music spread across the nation and became a subject of study and imitation.[42] By 1867 White scholars began collecting the slave songs and spirituals used by the enslaved to preserve what they felt was an accurate, and more importantly acceptable, depiction of Black culture. This led to Whites across the nation forming an image of the Black American identity rooted in subservience and limited intellectual capability. However, the period of Reconstruction following the war afforded Black Nashvillians the opportunity to be at forefront of the movement to combat this inaccurate, parody of their artistry. Armed with the culture and lessons passed

[41] Ibid, 51
[42] Irwin Silber, *Songs of the Civil War* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1995), 3

down from their parents, the next generation of African Americans in Nashville learned from the accommodationist and concealed musical approach their parents utilized to resist and instead chose to weaponize those same songs to move towards the realization of the goals of racial upliftment that were present since the founding of the territory. And it was through this approach that individuals such as the Jubilee Singers of Fisk University emerged to present an authentic depiction of Black culture that showcased the race's humanity and an image opposite of the one projected by White preservers of slave culture.

Chapter II – Representations of Humanity

"Oh Africa, land of shadow,
Oh Africa, land of song,
Land of long night's oppression,
Land of sorrow and wrong,
Thy echoes return unto thee,
Bearing on golden wing
The tidings of earth's salvation,
The song that the angels sing.

Oh songsters of liquid sweetness,
Songsters of beauteous lay,
Sing on of the glad hereafter,
Sing of the blessed to-day.
Sing to the listening nations
The song so new and old,
Till the echoes are caught by the angels
In the city whose streets are gold."[1]

On January 1, 1876, Reverend Adam Knight Spence spoke these words in commemoration of the construction of Jubilee Hall on Fisk University's grounds in Nashville, TN and to memorialize the Fisk Jubilee Singers' accomplishments in making its assembly possible. Both this day and those following were filled with joy, celebration, worship, and fellowship as both Black and White Nashvillians joined together to witness the hall's dedication. The celebration marked that Fisk had overcome the many obstacles, such as financial instability, that it had faced. Aside from Black Nashvillians, the dedication was attended by White guests including distinguished individuals such as Reverend Pike of the American Missionary Association who gave a lecture on Africa; the Sixteenth Infantry Band who performed pieces such as the Jubilee Inauguration Quickstep; and even General Clinton Fisk, whom the university

[1] "Educating The Freedmen," *Daily American*, January 2, 1876. https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.mtsu.edu/news/docview/939578386/pageviewPDF/5F8B9EDEDB434A86PQ/7?accountid=4886 (accessed October 1, 2021).

was named for.[2] The celebration included many different opportunities for participants such as various addresses, letter readings, performances, and worship sessions. All of these events culminated in a banquet held that evening for three hundred guests. It was there that Reverend Spence, amongst several discussions on the educational capability of Black Americans and the future of the institution, recited a poem that truly encapsulated the efforts of the Jubilee Singers.

It was at this moment that the group was seen not solely as students, but as a representation of the African American race and how it could advance following enslavement. To the White individuals within the crowd, the students were an image of what the Black race could be if given proper guidance and allowed to flourish. The songsters had turned the sorrow of the past into salvation, rising to the heavens on wings of song. To fellow members of their race who attended the ceremony, the students were the realization of a dream. Though Black Nashvillians faced many years of oppression, limited opportunity, and restricted access to formal education, the choir transcended all of this through their efforts to sustain an educational institution that many Black Nashvillians saw as their salvation. The poem speaks to individuals who set out on a journey across both the nation and North Atlantic to secure funding for the education of their people. Many of them born after slavery, this generation of students used music as a tool to accomplish this goal. If their parents made use of their artistry during enslavement as a means of passing hidden messages to one another in quiet rebellion, then it was the Jubilee Singers who continued this trend through weaponizing the songs passed down to them to fulfill their objectives as well. However, this new generation did not take an accommodationist approach as did those before them, if indeed those others did. Instead they were an active voice in conversations regarding the Black intellectual and cultural identity

[2] Ibid

following the Civil War. And it is through examination of their journey that a depiction of the pivot from an approach to racial advancement rooted in caution and accommodation toward one that favored open resistance is seen.

The historical narrative of the Fisk Jubilee Singers is immensely important to gain a comprehensive understanding of the emergence and acceptance of the Black spiritual. As such, there have been many who have added to the substantial body of scholarship surrounding the choral group. Because much of this work explores themes such as the path the singers took toward concertizing the spiritual and the importance of Fisk as a site for Black education following the Civil War, this work will not revisit previously published content. Instead it will elucidate how the narrative and influence of the Fisk Jubilee Singers developed parallel to and often intersected notions of Black racial advancement and independence in Nashville, Tennessee. Their journey across the nation occurred alongside efforts in the city to advocate for Black education and the establishment of Black economic and political power. Ultimately, the Jubilee Singers built upon the racial consciousness that had developed during enslavement by both the enslaved and elite Black Nashvillians. As the choral group brought attention to the Black spiritual on a national stage, they also actively negotiated with White Americans regarding an intellectual and cultural identity for Black Americans that was opposite of the one portrayed through minstrelsy. And as such, this work will focus on two prominent members of the group – Ella Sheppard and Frederick Loudin – who served as representation of this dialogue and a pivot towards emergence of the new Negro identity.

Black Education & The New South

The emergence of a group like the Fisk Jubilee Singers would not have been possible without the work of elite Black Nashvillians who created opportunities for their community to educate themselves after the war. Often teaching both enslaved and free Blacks in opposition to laws put in place to control them, these individuals were some of the earliest representations of the new Negro in Nashville. Though many scholars cite this as appearing primarily during the twentieth-century, it can be seen through the lives and efforts of individuals like Alphonso M. Sumner. These were African American individuals who were distinctly different from the rural, uneducated African Americans. Members of the new Negro identity instead focused on notions of self-help, racial solidarity, economic independence, racial consciousness, cultural and educational advancement, and agitation for full citizen rights.[3] And though many scholars typically attribute Black education in the city to the establishment of Fisk, it began through the efforts of local African American educators who instilled notions of racial consciousness and solidarity into each of their lessons, musical and otherwise. And it was because of these individuals and the learning environment they created that a group of educated, racially conscious Black individuals could emerge. The Fisk Jubilee Singers were a product of Black Athens, a title attributed to Nashville during in the 1800s through the development of educational schools that promoted Black self-esteem and overall racial pride.[4]

Before the Civil War, a free Black barber named Alphonso M. Sumner operated a small school for Negroes. He did so by relying on the paternalistic sympathies of White Nashvillians to turn a blind eye to a school for Black children. And White Nashvillians allowed the school to

[3] Ibid, 2
[4] Crystal A. Degregory, "We Built Black Athens: How Black Determination Secured Black Education in Antebellum Nashville," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (2010): 126

operate, under the premise that he did not allow anyone but free children to attend. Though Sumner did allow a small number of enslaved children to attend classes, it was not until he hired more free Black teachers that education in Nashville truly begun to have a considerable impact. By 1836, Sumner and his new staff of Black educators increased the school's population from roughly 20 to about 200. It was also during this year he was exiled from the city due to racial prejudice and his school was closed. However, his work in educating Black Nashvillians was continued two years later by one of the teachers he had hired, Daniel Wadkins. Hailed as the "Father of Negro Education" in Nashville, Wadkins was an unskilled free Black laborer who instilled his spirit and enthusiasm for African American education and racial upliftment into every one of his students.[5]

Working-class Whites, who did not approve of Black education in any form, obstructed progress wherever they could. Members of this group saw African Americans with economic independence, education, or success as threats and acted aggressively towards them.[6] However, this did not deter Black Nashvillians from seeking out opportunities to educate themselves. In 1838, Wadkins partnered with fellow school operator Sarah Porter Player to continue efforts to educate both free and enslaved Blacks while also avoiding the anger of the White working-class for many years.[7] During his tenure, Wadkins taught many young, impressionable, Black students, including future Jubilee Singer Ella Sheppard Moore. His approach was cautious, as he had seen what had happened to his predecessor and learned from the experience. Two main facets can be ascertained from his story. First, Black education in Nashville began long before the efforts of individuals such as J.G. McKee to establish Fisk. Wadkin's efforts and resilience

[5] Ibid, 129-131
[6] Lovett, *The African American History of Nashville, Tennessee*, 106.
[7] Ibid, 131

not only laid the framework for future schools to be built but also planted the seeds within the minds of many Black youths in Nashville that they had to push against their confines and re-invent themselves. Second, Wadkin's approach towards using the protection and support of elite Whites as a means to reach his goals covertly and carefully is one that would be seen throughout Nashville's Black educational history. Doing so not only allowed elite Blacks to continue their work but provided them allies in their mission that bridged the gap between these racial groups.

Though the efforts of individuals such as Sumner and Wadkins pushed the notion of Black education forward in antebellum Nashville, it is important to note that the end of the Civil War brought with it new ideas from outside of the Black community. The newly freed Black populace represented a new element which had to be incorporated into the American social and political structure.[8] Yet, amidst the many conflicting thoughts between northerners and southerners on the status and intellectual abilities of Negroes was a consistent atmosphere of racial prejudice. Even arguments in support of African American abilities demonstrated by fighting in the war were quickly dismissed by those shaping the image of African Americans as docile and servant-minded though no longer enslaved. The disagreements between the two groups primarily centered on attempting to answer one key question: were the acquired habits of servility within the Negro community a result of the condition of enslavement or instead inherent and intrinsic to the race itself?[9] Ultimately, these debates plagued African Americans before and after the war, affecting their social, economic, and political status.

Issues of Whites controlling the narrative of the Black intellectual and cultural identity troubled African Americans nationally for many years. By the 1860s, the narrative of African

[8] George M. Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1971), 165.
[9] Ibid, 46

American capability was controlled by southern, White higher education leaders such as Edwin Alderman (president of the University of Virginia), Samuel Chiles Mitchell (president of the University of South Carolina), Walter Barnard Hill (chancellor of the University of Georgia), and Charles Dabney (president of the University of Tennessee).[10] In Tennessee, Dabney depicted African Americans as a child-like race, at least two thousand years behind Anglo-Saxons in terms of development and requiring the supervision of White superiors.[11] As White national leaders debated the educational capabilities of Blacks and continued to assert the paternalistic relationship they had relied on in the past, African American leaders used Reconstruction as a means of advancing their interests.

The Reconstruction era provided elite Black Nashvillians the power to take on more active roles in their communities. Their first decision was to tackle major problems for the race such as poverty, lack of jobs and access to city services, limitations on their ability to participate in politics, poor housing and healthcare, a lack of educational resources and access to recreational/cultural activities, and participation in conversations on the future of the race.[12] Many scholars including August Meier, W.E.B. Dubois, and Gabrielle Briggs have written on the era following the war as being one of increased urbanization and increased self-reliance for Black Southerners. For Black Nashvillians, Reconstruction transformed the city into a unique, nontraditional urban center which afforded them the opportunity to organize themselves and resist being dominated by the decisions of economically and politically established White leaders.[13] It was in this new environment that the Fisk Jubilee Singers emerged. Fueled by the

[10] Michael Dennis, "Schooling Along the Color Line: Progressives and the Education of Blacks in the New South," *The Journal of Negro Education* 67, no. 2 (1998): 142
[11] Ibid, 144
[12] Ibid, 72
[13] Briggs, *The New Negro in the Old South*, 34

notions of racial solidarity and upliftment that were passed to them through the urbanization of Nashville and the education they received from Wadkins, the songsters weaponized their voices to contribute to the creation of educational opportunities for Blacks within the city.

The Black Identity After Slavery

It is important to note three main arguments that arose during Reconstruction that southern Whites created and sustained regarding the capabilities of Black Americans. They perceived Blacks as being 1) destined by providence for slavery, 2) intellectually inferior to Whites, and 3) unfit for self-governance.[14] Through these perspectives, Whites justified how they treated those they deemed as lesser. No matter how they might move to block African American social or economic advancement, Whites excused their actions because the race itself was little more than childlike and dependent on their guidance. This perspective solidified an image of African Americans that, despite the significant growth they had made, was a caricature of their culture. Ultimately, this culminated in the creation of a comical, minstrel mask of the Black identity that was spread nationally through minstrel shows. In using these shows as an outlet, Whites controlled racial narratives, thereby pivoting from the physical shackles of enslavement towards binds that were more obscure.

Though minstrel performances had existed before the Civil War and has even included African American performers, the entertainment style typically embraced a majority White audience and performer base.[15] Perhaps it was the allurement of a music aesthetic reminiscent of plantation life that made minstrel songs resonate so heavily on a national scale. Or perhaps it was so easily digestible by northerners because it provided them an interesting, whimsical view into a

[14] Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 46.
[15] Richard L. Hughes, "Minstrel Music: The Sounds and Images of Race in Antebellum America," *The History Teacher* 40, no. 1 (2006): 28

controlled portrait of southern culture. It also could have been the imagery and poetic nature weaved into the songs and overall performance that accomplished this as well, depicting African Americans in a manner that was easy to consume by the average, working-class White individual. In either case, minstrel performances dominated the post-antebellum American entertainment industry. These crude and comical portrayals of Black mannerisms and culture, as seen in songs such as Stephen Foster's "Massa's In De Cold Cold Ground," shaped and reflected dominant ideas about race and slavery and ultimately served to control views on race in America.[16]

Songs such as Foster's denote a relationship between the enslaved and their oppressor centered on paternalism, dependency, and in some cases, fondness. These caricatures of Black culture surfaced as a result of blackface minstrelsy denied the harshness of enslavement and demeaned the race while exonerating and romanticizing the actions of White enslavers.[17] Take for instance another song by Foster, "Ring, Ring de Banjo." The lyrics portray an African American who recounts his recent life experiences and relationship with his overseer. He thinks back on the freedom granted by his oppressor and how, after gaining more experience through traveling, he preferred the love and safety of his old life on the plantation instead. Within this verse alone, one can see how the image White southerners sought to shape with the song. Though written in the years before the Civil War, it mirrored arguments took take place after its end. It spoke to the belief that even if African Americans were freed from bondage, they did not have the mental capacity to make use of that freedom and instead were better left being subservient to their oppressor.

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[16] Ibid, 27.

[17] Blackface minstrelsy was a form of entertainment that used "caricatures of African Americans in song, dance, tall tales, and stand-up comedy." Reference from https://www.loc.gov/collections/songs-of-america/articles-and-essays/musical-styles/popular-songs-of-the-day/minstrel-songs/

However, in direct opposition to this notion was the establishment of Fisk. Having opened on January 9, 1866, Fisk University was a result of the joint efforts of three White, northern abolitionists, John Ogden, Erastus M. Cravath, and Edward P. Smith, the American Missionary Association, and the Western Freedmen's Aid Commission.

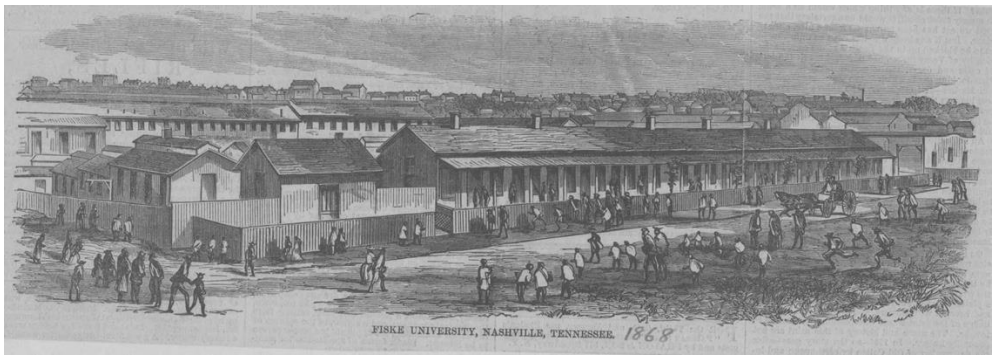

Figure 2.1 Fisk University

Towards the beginning of its history, the institution occupied old hospital buildings that were left over from the Civil War.[18] Though founded by Whites, the university served the needs of elite Black Nashvillians to provide opportunities for training the next generation. Its development marked the formalization of a Black education system in Nashville that was sanctioned and recognized on a far greater level than past efforts, though the university did face many similar issues to native schools in terms of racial prejudice and overt oppression.

In its first month, the university welcomed 200 students and by February there were 500 in the day school and 100 in the night class.[19] Within this first group of students were also some who were taught by Wadkins, such as Ella Sheppard. Though she may not have known at the time, the lessons she learned under his tutelage were instrumental to her utilizing her musicianship to help save the institution. In 1867, Fisk part-time music instructor and treasurer

[18] The Origin of the Jubilee Singers, November 1891, Fisk University Library, Special Collections. https://hbcudigitallibrary.auctr.edu/digital/collection/FUPP/id/1321/rec/16
[19] Ibid, 27

George L. White conceptualized a group of singers who could perform concerts in Nashville and surrounding areas to raise funds for the institution.[20] However, the school's trustees were not very receptive of the idea as they sought to keep Black Tennesseans out of the institution. It was four years before White had the approval to begin the group In 1871, the institution's trustees made the decision to train a company of singers during the summer with the plan of sending them out in the fall.[21] But by the time the fall semester occurred, the trustees were still not prepared to allow the group to begin their tour. It was then that the group's director, George L. White made the decision to begin their journey without the trustee's permission. Initially, he planned for the group to perform standard White concert pieces such as "The Old Folks at Home" and "Home Sweet Home."[22] This decision was made to show their audiences and potential benefactors that education would provide Black students the opportunity to grow intellectually and culturally.[23] White's choices were dual-purposed as they both promoted the educational offerings and capabilities of Fisk University and presented Blacks in a manner that was not typically seen in an era dominated by minstrel performers and comedians. However, his early ventures with the Jubilee Singers did not achieve this purpose as many within the early crowds were not interested in the concert pieces. As such, George White consulted with the singers and decided to make use of the spirituals that had been passed down by their ancestors. It is between this point in the singers' journey and their subsequent conquering of the East Coast that a shift occurs in their mentality. One could imagine the mental anguish involved in deciding to make public the intimate spirituals passed down to them by their families. For years African

[20] Tim Brooks, "Might Take One Disc of This Trash as a Novelty: Early Recordings by the Fisk Jubilee Singers and the Popularization of Negro Folk Music," *American Music* 18, no. 3 (2000): 280
[21] Publication, The Origin of the Jubilee Singers. https://hbcudigitallibrary.auctr.edu/digital/collection/FUPP/id/1321/rec/16
[22] Ibid, 280
[23] Ibid

Americans had sung not only as a means of appeasing their enslavers but also as a means of salvation. These songs had been passed down from parent to child over several generations, and the Jubilee Singers weaponized them to support their school and Black education in Nashville.

By this time, Blackface and minstrel music had built a stage upon which, at that time, most African American performers had to stand, and to do otherwise was to defy the warped image of blackness that had received approval by the majority of Whites.[24] Ultimately, the singers had to answer whether their public spirituals would bring shame or newfound strength to existing efforts of uplifting the Black community. As for their answer, following the group's performance in Oberlin, Ohio for the annual Council of the Congregational Church the group donned the name of the Fisk Jubilee Singers. Invigorated by their new direction the group took on a persona that exemplified the new Negro, one who did not wait on support from their white patrons, but instead weaponized the spiritual and fight for salvation themselves.

Before venturing further, it is important to fully define the spiritual. American musicologist Eileen Southern in her work, "An Origin For the Negro Spiritual," touches upon three of its most important traits. The Negro spiritual 1) falls into the category of folk music, having existed for a long period of time in oral tradition, 2) is typically reshaped over the years, bearing little resemblance to its pristine form apart from the basic melodic structure and essential message, and 3) adapts to the music taste of both performers and listeners.[25] As it pertained to the newly declared Fisk Jubilee Singers, Southerns' definition gives insight into a musical and cultural element of African American music that was discussed in the first chapter. For their ancestors, spirituals were a closely guarded means of escaping or alleviating the burdens of one's

[24] Eric Bernard Grant, "Message in our music: Spirituals and the cultural politics of race and nation, 1871 to 1945" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2005), 21.
[25] Eileen Southern, "An Origin For the Negro Spiritual," *The Black Scholar* 3, no. 10 (Summer 1972), 9.

reality. In the hands of the students at Fisk University, the songs of bondage, pain, sorrow, and hope were adapted into tools to meet the collective needs of all of the individuals advocating for the university's success, post enslavement. It is within examining the songs and their influence on public opinion regarding the humanity of the Black diaspora in America that one can see a direct pivot as a result of the songster's efforts.

One such instance of this is an early racially-driven experiences of the group's tour in which the nine members and George White were waiting for a late train at a Midwestern railroad station. The singers, finding themselves surrounded and verbally battered by a group of White onlookers, turned to singing their songs of sorrow.[26] Miraculously, the decision amounted to be the correct one as it weakened the mob's ire. We can only guess what the reason for the White mob's initial hostility was, be it either dissatisfaction in seeing a Black not living up to the standard blackface portrayed or perhaps even pure discontentment at the group on the grounds of their skin color alone. One thing, however, is certain and perhaps set the tone for the remainder of their journey. The spiritual was a weapon, not of violence, but instead of peace; one that could cross boundaries of race and prejudice to dissipate any misgivings or anger and connect the two groups.

Throughout their journey, the Fisk Jubilee Singers experienced many situations in which they weaponized their songs to send other clear messages. The group represented both their home city and the modern African American. One instance in which the songsters' efforts were spread was in a letter written by Dr. Theodore L. Curler to the New York Tribune in 1872. In the letter Curler recounts the singers' performance of songs such as "Go Down Moses," "Roll, Jordan, Roll," and "Turn Back Pharaoh's Army," at Lafayette Avenue Church stating that, "the

[26] Grant, "Message In Our Music," 169

wild melodies of these emancipated slaves touched the fount of tears, and gray-haired men wept like little children."[27] This particular article and performance held much significance as at this time, musical critics in New York had not taken notice of the group. This letter was written during a time in which the city was a major hub for traffic from New England and publications within the city held a significant influence. As such, this letter assisted in spreading knowledge of the band of singers and brought public attention to their cause.[28] On their return trip to Nashville, the Jubilee Singers experienced a similar predicament to the one they had faced in being assaulted by a mob outside a railroad station while trying to start their journey. This instance occurred in Louisville where the songsters were reprimanded by officials in the train station. The waiting room at the station had been separated based on skin color and the officials, determined to enforce the rules and keep the two races separate, made threats and eventually seized and forcefully removed the singers from the station despite their first-class tickets.[29] However, at this time their reputation preceded them. When conductors heard that the group of African American students had just performed on a concert stage and raised $20,000 in funds, the group made their way into a first-class car and proceeded to Nashville without any more issues. This time, the idea of a band of Negro singers traveling the country, outside of minstrel bands, did not seem so farfetched.

The New Jubilee Singers

In 1878, the Fisk Jubilee Singers ended their tour and dissolved. However, the group reformed the following year, independent of the school. The group consisted of eight members including Maggie Porter, Jennie Jackson, Patti Malone, Mabel Lewis, Richard A. Hall, George

[27] Gustavus D. Pike, *The Jubilee Singers: And Their Campaign for Twenty Thousand Dollars*, (Boston: Lee and Shepard Publishers, 1873), 118.
[28] Ibid, 119
[29] Ibid, 151

Barrett, Frederick J. Loudin, and Ella Sheppard. The original group had done much to improve the worldview on the socio-cultural standing of the Black diaspora in America, but their overall contributions had mostly been a result of their decision to weaponize the spiritual rather than more active resistance. One could theorize that contributing factors to the more concealed politicalness of the original Jubilee Singers was in part due to 1) needing to avoid any conflicts that would be detrimental to their main objective of raising the necessary funds to save their school and 2) their association with Fisk University and therefore the American Missionary Association. However, this new group was not limited by their past ties and could give voice to the issues of the race. Alongside Frederick J. Loudin who served as stage spokesman for the Jubilee Singers, the group would go on to take a more active role in the politics of race and identity in America by using their platform to publicize issues of race and civil rights.[30]

Many of this new ensemble's political views were given voice by Loudin. Though he was not a native of Nashville and had no formal education, he became a pivotal member of the group who often spoke out against the racial prejudice and injustice the choral group faced. At their first concert on September 26th, 1879, it was Loudin that came out just before the final song to make a statement. The following day his speech was paraphrased by the local news:

> If he could tell the story of their experiences, [they were] probably checkered. They had supped in the palace of Frederick The Great, but had also been kicked out of hotels, and that too in this their native land. They had tasted the extremes of honor and indignity, and although now their lines were falling in pleasant places, they could not forget that in some portions of the country their people were still oppressed as cruelly as in the days of slavery. The common rights of humanity and citizenship [were] still denied them, but a just God would not always allow it to be so.[31]

[30] Ibid, 136
[31] Ibid, 137

In this way, Loudin used his platform to bring attention not only to the injustices faced by the Jubilee Singers but also the issues of racial prejudice faced by African Americans across the nation.

As their tour continued and the group made use of their fame, newspapers in cities throughout America published articles on the singers' experiences. In November 1879, the *Daily American* published an article headlined, *Civil Rights in Boston: Shabby Treatment of the Jubilee Singers at a Hotel*. The article summarized the group's experience, explaining that, "it is said that the Jubilee Singers from Fisk University have been rather shabbily treated at the New Marlboro Hotel in this city. They engaged quarters, but some of the guests objected to their company on account of their color, and the proprietor accordingly requested them to sit at a second table. This they [refused] to do and the proprietor informed them that he could not entertain them."[32] No longer bound to Fisk and having performed across the nation, the Jubilee Singers refused to allow themselves to be docile and understanding in the face of racial discrimination. Not only did the songsters refuse lodging accommodations that were inferior to those of White patrons, but they also publicly condemned them. As they traveled, the group often compared their treatment in their homeland against their experiences overseas. In another instance they were refused lodging at a hotel in 1885, the group posted their experience in the *New York Times* stating that, "[they had] been recipients of most distinguished attention from all classes in Great Britain and on the Continent. The slave songs have been sung before nearly every throne in Europe, and the singers have sat as guests at the tables of the noblest houses in England, Ireland, Scotland, France, Germany, and Austria. With such remembrances to look

[32] "Civil Rights In Boston: Shabby Treatment of the Jubilee Singers at a Hotel," *Daily American*, November 2, 1879. https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.mtsu.edu/news/docview/928198795/4EF7B062FE90437BPQ/1?accountid=4886 (accessed October 1, 2021)

back upon, and with other equally pleasant reminiscences at home, [they could] well afford to treat with contempt the petty indignities offered by the Troy publicans."[33]

In leveraging their influence, the Fisk Jubilee Singers used their position and artistry to pave new pathways for African Americans. From hotel owners to venue operators to even the leadership of the United States itself, there was no individual able to escape unscathed if they treated the group with contempt or prejudice. In his work, "A Voice in the Wilderness: The Fisk Jubilee Singers' Civil Rights Tours of 1879-1882," scholar Doug Seroff recalled an incident in which the Fisk Jubilee Singers were asked to perform six songs at the White House. As cited in his work, their performance was met with no signs of appreciation or applause, a response that made the headlines of the *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle* the next day stating that "not a voice thanked them for the pleasure they had given… we appreciate their music, but we must be careful lest our manifestations concede too much to their superiority."[34] This experience and the resulting article showcased the priorities American society placed on maintaining strict racial boundaries and an image of superiority nationally.

Ultimately, the actions of both the original and 1879 Jubilee Singers created an African American identity that differed from those perpetrated by Whites. From how they conducted themselves on their journey to the types of music they performed, each aspect of their career developed a new notion of Black culture and intellectual capability that inspired future generations. In alignment with the wishes of many generations of African Americans in Nashville, the Fisk Jubilee Singers instilled within Black Nashvillians a notion of racial pride

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[33] "Refused By the Troy Hotels: The Galling Experiences of the Fisk Jubilee Singers," *New York Times*, December 24, 1885. https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.mtsu.edu/news/docview/94251075/E67FE42A23B7418CPQ/1?accountid=4886 (accessed October 1, 2021)

[34] Pike, *A Voice In The Wilderness*, 145

and empowerment that transformed how they viewed themselves. Aside from this, the group also contributed to the development of their surrounding area as a Black residential community. As seen through the image below, Fisk had been founded on Jefferson Street, an area that held several brick and stone buildings by 1889, a little over two decades after the institution was founded. As the school grew, so too did the number of individuals who gathered to live beside it. Over time, the residential area would only continue to grow as many Black Nashvillians rallied behind the efforts made to educate the race.

Figure 2.2 Nashville. Plate 11 from G. M. Hopkins' Atlas of Nashville (1889)

The school, like the historically Black educational facility that would follow years later, was a testament to the notion that African Americans were not inferior to White Americans, but instead were the victim of having any social or intellectual advancement they could have made restricted by oppression. The singers showed both elite Blacks and Whites across the nation that the problems faced by the Black diaspora in America were no different than those faced by any

lower-class members of another race.[35] As such, the Jubilee Singers were representative of the humanity and ability that the race possessed. Their tour had shown the world that if the race was allowed to advance and mature, they would not need to rely on the guidance and patronage of Whites but could instead progress themselves. And by the end of their tour, the Jubilee Singers had made two things clear. First, the African American race was in no way inferior to another and just as human deserving of civil rights as others. And secondly, the modern African American would not sit idly by and wait for their status and voice to be handed to them, but instead, they would earn their own. Following the Jubilee Singers at Fisk who were utilizing their artistry to support the Black community in Nashville, musicians at Tennessee Agricultural & Industrial Normal School were doing the same. Together, the two established the Black residential area of Jefferson Street as a cultural hub for Black Nashvillians to promote an accurate depiction of Black culture and work towards achieving their objective of advancing the race.

[35] Ibid, 47

Chapter III – Enter to Learn, Go Forth to Serve

In 2012, award-winning author and scholar of African American history Dr. Bobby Lovett claimed that the history of Tennessee State University (TSU) was a microcosm of historically black colleges/universities' journey towards racial advancement.[1] From its humble beginnings as a land-grant institution and public normal school for the training of the next generation of Black leaders, the university took on a similar role as Fisk in influencing the social, political, psychological, and cultural development of the Black community in Tennessee and was representative of the similar impact and significance Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCU) across the nation held for their Black residents. Like its predecessor further down Jefferson Street, TSU served as one of the core institutions for the development of the next generation of Black leadership in Nashville. And similarly to Fisk, the university utilized the musicality of its students and professors to further its goals and garner international recognition. Dr. Lovett's assertion speaks to the challenges and overall success that were experienced by many Black colleges. But in truth, the connection extends further, and their full success cannot be measured solely through examining an HBCU's coursework, graduates, and achievements. The HBCU story, like much of African American history, is one of struggle, innovation, and negotiation. For both TSU and many other historically Black institutions of learning, their history is intertwined with the advancement of Black music culture.. And like their neighbors further down Jefferson Street, it was through innovation in music that the Black community in Nashville found their voice.

As previously explored, the end of the Civil War in Nashville brought with it a new focus for African Americans on furthering their pursuit of knowledge and establishing a formal system

[1]Bobby Lovett, "Tennessee State University: A Synopsis of A Touch of Greatness," *The Journal of Tennessee State University, 1912-2012* 1, no. 11 (2012), 1.

of education. While Fisk University was the product of a collaboration between White northern beneficiaries and elite Blacks, TSU was primarily founded and nurtured by the latter. The period following the Civil War and up to the early 1900s began a focus on accessible education as African Americans across the nation began to vocalize their goals and concerns for equal education opportunities for their communities. Three of the more dominant spokesmen for the future of Black education in Post-Reconstruction America included W.E.B. DuBois, Frederick Douglas, and Booker T. Washington. The Washington model of industrial education, which he learned while at Hampton and emulated at Tuskegee Normal and Industrial in 1881, focused on farming as a curricular model that would be a learning pathway to careers in agriculture and manual labor.[2] The model was grounded in the theory of self-help, providing African Americans the opportunity to earn their funds to support their education and perform manual labor themselves, as necessary. Through this approach, schools focused on an agricultural and industrial modeled curriculum including practical farming, the principles of farming, chemistry (with special reference to agriculture), practical mechanics, the principles of mechanics, and mechanical drawing.[3] For African Americans in Nashville, the teachings of Washington and the Hampton model of industrial education was the more practical means towards achieving their goals. However, their efforts would not have been as successful without the formation of a music education and performance program.

The emergence and growth of music culture and ensembles at then Tennessee Agricultural & Industrial Normal School (A&I) reinforced the efforts of elite Black Nashvillians to establish a largely self-sufficient university and by extension contribute to the development of

[2] Samuel Henry Shannon, "Agricultural and Industrial Education at Tennessee State University During The Normal School Phase, 1912-1922: A Case Study" (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1974), 30.
[3] Ibid, 35.

an independent community. Music was part of daily campus activities as early as 1913, made available primarily through both student-led ensembles and a mixture of official and unofficial faculty-led groups.[4] Similar to Fisk, students at A&I weaponized their craft as a means to support their institution. Not only did these students represent the next generation of educated Blacks to join the elite, their accomplishments while at A&I also served to create a music culture that paralleled the gradual acceptance of African American influences on mainstream American culture.[5] This chapter will focus on the history of vocal ensembles such as the Tennessee Agricultural & Industrial College Concert Singers, instrumental ensembles such as the Tennessee State Collegians and the Aristocrat of Bands, and the many music professors that contributed to their growth. Because previous scholarly work has documented the historical development of the music program at TSU, this work will instead attempt to interpret the story of the emergence and growth of music culture at the institution, its establishment through the efforts of Black Nashvillians, and its concurrent and often intersecting development alongside the institution and the HBCU musical aesthetic as a whole. Through focusing on the conditions through which these ensembles were formed, their history, and their achievements, this approach will focus on their role in highlighting how African Americans blended improvisation techniques with classical and professional training to develop a unique aspect of Black music culture.

Though it was neither one of the first HBCUs founded nor the first institution dedicated to the advancement of educational opportunities for African Americans in Nashville, A&I was one of the originators of HBCU marching band culture nationally, which became a strong influence on the university and surrounding community, and responsible for training and

[4] "Undergraduate Catalogue 1912-1913" (1913). *Tennessee State University Undergraduate Catalogues*.
[5] Reginald A. McDonald, "The Aristocrat of Bands: A Historical Investigation of the Tennessee State University Instrumental Music Program And Its Directors" (PhD diss., The University of Alabama, 2009), ix

professionalizing the next generation of music educators and performers for Nashville and surrounding states. The Black collegiate musical aesthetic at A&I strengthened the efforts of elite Blacks in sustaining the institution and ensuring it accomplished its vision of advancing the education-centered goals of African Americans in Nashville and further supporting the continuity of consciousness begun by their predecessors.

Towards Uplifting the Race

If the story of African American education in Nashville began through the efforts of members of the older generation of Black elites such as Alphonso Sumner and Daniel Wadkins, then it was continued and eventually realized through the efforts of the next generation of elite freedmen and their strides towards developing an economically independent Black community. In post-Civil War Nashville, African Americans combatted racial prejudice and oppression as they fought to advance themselves as a race through a focus on community-building and developing a system for public education at the grade school and collegiate levels. The passing of the 13th Amendment and the abolishment of enslavement provided a place to start; however, it did not impede Whites and their efforts to control the Black community through segregation. By the end of the war, Black Nashvillians had begun to form three class distinctions amongst themselves including the elites, middle-class, and lower-class.[6] And though the three were different in terms of social standing, Black Nashvillians as a whole were limited in economic and political mobility and thereby unable to advance their objectives. Due to issues of segregation and racial prejudice, the three classes were forced to live within the same communal confines and endure oppression together. Through living within these close confines, Black Nashvillians

[6] Lovett, *The African American History of Nashville, Tennessee*, 105

grew to hold the interests of the race at the center of their efforts as a means of combatting racial prejudice and advocating for equal opportunity.

Parallel to the growth of the Black community in Nashville was the spread of philosophies concerning approaches towards educating and bettering the race amongst African Americans nationally. The Reconstruction period brought forth several leaders within the race whose thoughts towards the future of the Black diaspora in America set them on the path towards advocating for equal and accessible opportunities for education. In following the example of individuals like DuBois, Douglas, and Washington, elite Black Nashvillians utilized their economic independence and political connections to invest in education to encourage future generations toward becoming community-driven and self-sufficient scholars, businessmen, professionals, and entrepreneurs. Through this mindset, the period of 1862-69, Black Nashvillians became more established and economically independent. Across the city, members of the elite opened and expanded their businesses. Individuals such as William Sumner, Benjamin Hadley, and George Trimble opened a saloon on Capitol Avenue, Henry Harding expanded his blacksmith trade to include a saloon and boarding house, and formerly enslaved musician John Hill formed the Hill String Band to cater to fashionable parties and dances.[7]

As elite Black Nashvillians continued to swell in number and influence, so too did their thoughts towards how to approach education for their community. Much like the teachings of Washington, the group was concerned that the former enslaved would forget the crafts and manual skills learned in bondage and ultimately fall into a state of dependency.[8] To combat this, Black leaders in Nashville pursued a focus on agriculture, mechanics, and other trades. They did so by seeking the support of national Black leaders to influence the community in Nashville

[7] Ibid, 107.
[8] Ibid, 109.

towards industrial-driven education. In 1866, Black community leaders formed the Colored Agricultural and Industrial Mechanical Association and invited Fredrick Douglas, John Mercer Langston, and other leaders to attend. With a focus on emphasizing the importance of agricultural and industrial training, business, culture, politics, and etiquette, the meeting attracted thousands of Black freedmen from across the state and served to legitimize the existence of the elite Black class to both the Black and White communities in Tennessee.[9] Ultimately, the efforts of elite African Americans in Nashville during this time laid the foundation upon which education would be founded for their community. Through the belief that success was achievable for anyone in Nashville's service-oriented environment as long as they had the desire and will to work hard, display honesty, and become literate, members of the elite strove towards creating opportunities to develop an economically and culturally independent Black community through industrial-driven education.

Alongside the growing focus on industrial and manufacturing training for Black Nashvillians was that of the South as a whole. Building off of the Morrill Land Grant Act that had been passed in 1862, White southerners drove their economy and educational focus towards training the next generation of laborers. The act distributed 17,430,000 acres of public land amongst thirty-seven states, each eligible as long as they adhered to its guidelines and terms of creating agricultural and mechanical focused educational facilities by 1870.[10] It was also during this period that arguments regarding Black education in Tennessee continued to thrive as both Black and White individuals formed opinions on what was best for the territory's growth. There were some individuals such as formerly enslaved Benjamin 'Pap' Singleton, who was a member of the Edgefield Real Estate Association. Singleton and the association called for meetings such

[9] Ibid, 110.
[10] Shannon, "Agricultural And Industrial Education At Tennessee State University," 16.

as the one held in May 1875 to advocate for Black Tennesseans to emigrate as a means of finding opportunities for economic growth and land to cultivate.[11] Migration was not, however, the answer for many southern Whites. There were many among their race who saw the emergence of a new ideology that focused on agricultural training as a necessity to ensure southern states continued to advance. These individuals believed that the South would be severely crippled if the Black populace migrated as they were necessary as laborers.[12] As these conversations continued on both sides of the racial boundary, the vast majority of the South began to focus on agricultural and industrial training as a means to meet the needs of both races. White southerners sought Black labor to continue the expansion of their manufacturing industry while African Americans living within the South sought a foothold from which to grow.

It was also during this era of reconstruction, however, that it became clear to Black Nashvillians that the Morrill Land Grant Act would not be enough to solve their problems by itself. Though the act was developed to allocate provisions to all Tennesseans, it was not used as such. Government funding was distributed to states for the creation of separate provisions for African Americans. However, because the act did not contain specific rules for the distribution of funds, only Virginia and Kentucky utilized it towards agricultural and industrial aid for Black residents.[13] It was at this time that it became clear to African Americans in Tennessee that if they were to receive their portion of the funding towards their educational initiatives, they would have to become more active in the political sphere. In 1881, Isaac F. Norris, a Black legislator from Shelby County, presented a petition to the General Assembly calling for the establishment of a

[11] A Call for Convention, March 1875, 42163, Newspapers on Microfilm, Tennessee State Library and Archives. https://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15138coll18/id/1128/rec/16
[12] The South and Negroes, October 1900, 43647, Newspapers on Microfilm, Tennessee State Library and Archives. https://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15138coll18/id/2798/rec/33
[13] Lester C. Lamon, "The Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial Normal School: Public Higher Education for Black Tennesseans," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (April 1973), 44.

Normal School for the African American community.[14] However, his request was met with silence. Blacks negotiated with White legislation for equal educational facilities for several years. On August 30, 1890, the United States Congress passed the Second Morrill Land Grant Act with the stipulation that funds would not be released to institutions that discriminated based on race.[15] Tennessee, unlike other states, was slow in creating a public land-grant school for African Americans. Instead, the state sought to comply with the regulations by using the University of Tennessee, a product of the first land grant act. However, this notion did not last long as many White professors and university affiliates felt that admitting African Americans into the school would decrease its value and upset its stakeholders.[16] Thus began a cycle of African Americans having to not only negotiate with the State for adequate and equal education opportunities but with the leadership of the University of Tennessee as well.

To circumvent the obstacle of opening admission to African Americans, the University of Tennessee attempted several arrangements between the 1880s to the early 1990s to appease the Black community. Among these included sponsoring Blacks to attend Fisk, the creation of Roger Williams University in Nashville, and placing Black students in Knoxville College, an institution established by the United Presbyterian Church in 1875.[17] However, these arrangements only further ignited African Americans across the state to search for a means towards developing their public school. Though Black Nashville had Fisk University, its development was a combination of Northern White benevolence and effort from the African American community. For a community that had for years been dependent on the generosity or lack thereof, of the White

[14] Mingo Scott, Jr., *The Negro in Tennessee Politics and Governmental Affairs, 1865-1965: The Hundred Years Story* (Nashville: Rich Print Co., 1964), 77.
[15] Shannon, "Agricultural And Industrial Education At Tennessee State University," 45.
[16] Ibid, 62.
[17] Ibid, 64.

community, they needed a school that was produced primarily through their own means. It was not until 1909 and the passing of House Bill 242, or the General Education Bill, that a stipulation was created to require the creation of three White normal schools and one for African Americans.[18] With this, the Black community in Nashville had found their opportunity. And over the course of the next few years, they utilized the resources and connections they'd built over the years and utilize them to the fullest.

Following the passing of the General Education Bill, Black Nashvillians began their push toward initiatives that convinced officials to establish a normal school dedicated to training African Americans across the state in agricultural and industrial curriculum. This approach, though having some similarities, was different from that utilized by elites of the previous generation. In the past, the Black community in Nashville took an accommodationist approach towards making their gains, always being considerate of the opinions and wishes of Whites. This generation, led by individuals such as Henry Allen Boyd and James C. Napier, while being cognizant of the influence and control of the Whites and calculating that into their approach, united their community to build a case for Black education in Nashville. Boyd founded the *Nashville Globe* and built a network of 20,000 readers while providing coverage on issues related to the community, its goals, and its progress. The *Globe* criticized those who oppressed the race as well as Jim Crowism as a whole, celebrated those who showcased its best qualities, and advocated for religion and involvement in politics.[19] As a member of the elite, Boyd strengthened the image of intellectualism and overall humanity for Black Nashvillians that had begun with the Fisk Jubilee Singers and their international tour. He also ensured that the issues

[18] Ibid, 96.
[19] Lovett, Bobby L. and Wynee, Linda T., "Profiles of African Americans in Tennessee (Book Project)" (2016). *Nashville Conference on African American History and Culture*, 18.

that had previously been pushed aside did not lose their relevance. Alongside the efforts of Boyd were those of Napier, who traveled to and from Washington, appealing for equitable distribution of funding to state officials. Each of his trips was covered by the *Globe* and galvanized the Black community.[20] Together, these two individuals alongside other elite Black Nashvillians led the movement towards establishing a normal school for the training of African Americans in Nashville.

Despite the progress elite Black Nashvillians made over the years and the focus on industrial education, the African American community across the state was not completely unified on the matter. In some cases, the Black populace was divided on whether or not the school should be placed in Nashville as opposed to Knoxville, and in others, there was opposition to focusing on industrial education as a means of alleviating the concerns that plagued the race. In 1910, the *Globe* published articles speaking on the individuals who assembled community groups and held meetings to lobby for support of the school being placed in Nashville.[21] Months later, an article was published detailing the doubt spread by citizens of Nashville concerning the school not proving to be a financially beneficial decision for the city.[22] In this way, the Nashville Black community remained divided about whether the establishment of an industrial education focused school would truly benefit the city. Furthermore, many who supported Fisk University and the philosophies of DuBois saw the development of a normal school within the state with disdain as they did not believe it was designed to produce a leadership class amongst the race and would instead focus on developing laborers.[23] Yet, despite

[20] Lamon, "The Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial Normal School," 49.
[21] "Great Activity: Among The Negro Business Men of Nashville." *Nashville Globe*, March 18, 1910.
[22] "Nashville Turns Down The Normal School: Votes Nearly Two to One Against It." *Nashville Globe*, November 11, 1910.
[23] Shannon, "Agricultural And Industrial Education At Tennessee State University," 142.

all of this, there was an overall sense of pride when the decision was made to establish Tennessee Agricultural & Industrial Normal School in 1912. The school represented the collective wishes of the many members of the elite Blacks over the generations and the African American community in Nashville specifically. It was a step towards further establishing the Jefferson Street community as an economically and culturally independent hub for Blacks in Nashville and it would be furthered by the establishment of a music program to further its purpose.

Teach A Student, Build A Legacy

Founded in 1912 on thirty-three acres of land from the old Hadley farm and sixty-seven acres purchased from the local bank , Tennessee A&I Normal School for Negroes marked a new chapter in the history of Black education for Nashvillians.[24] The school was constructed down the street from the emerging community on Jefferson Street that had been started by Fisk. Alongside Fisk, Tennessee A&I further established North Nashville as a residential area around which Black Nashvillians could gather. This was noted in an auction sale that took place on May 19, 1914, where 150 lots were sold in Heffernan Place just south of the Jefferson Street car line and between the educational facilities.[25] The schools not only brought credibility to the efforts of the Black community but also provided them an area to congregate within and grow.

Moreover, the institution was the culmination of the efforts of multiple generations of elite Black Nashvillians who had sought to develop a racial identity separate from those placed upon them through enslavement. It was through forming a community dedicated to advancing the goals of the race that they had come this far, and it would be through the very same determination that they would go on to not only sustain the institution but also make significant

[24] Lovett, *The African American History of Nashville, Tennessee*, 169.
[25] State v. Robert Marable and Lizzie Smith map exhibit (1917), 1914, 45865, RG 170: Supreme Court Records, Tennessee State Library and Archives.
https://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15138coll23/id/10373/rec/2

achievements. Tennessee A&I was accessible by foot, streetcar, and wagon, providing easy access for the 247 students that made up its inaugural class to engage their surrounding community.[26] In its initial year, A&I faculty consisted of William Jasper Hale, a well-known Black elementary school principal who had raised a significant amount of capital for the African American community and school, and an all-Black staff comprising of three graduates from Atlanta University, three from Fisk, one from Hampton, one from Howard, and two from northern institutions.[27] It was through the leadership of these individuals that the vision for the institution was founded and a plan to sustain it was created. At the crux of this plan was Hale, who led the fundraising efforts to gather $71,000 in pledges for the school from across Tennessee and developed and employed a service-minded approach towards educating the school's students and engaging with White officials and potential donors.[28] It was through this perspective that the early years of the school's operation would be based upon.

During his tenure as president of the institution, Hale invited White state legislators to campus and tasked students with serving and entertaining them while feasting on food that had been grown on-site.[29] Through this approach, Hale was able to showcase the impact industrial-focused instruction had on the surrounding Black community, appease White conservatives who were cautious of the race bettering themselves by displaying that industrial education trained Blacks to enter into more hands-on or service-minded roles, and negotiate commitments of financial support while also spreading the name and achievements of the institution. However, like the Black elite educators who had come before him, he made use of this accommodationist approach to mask the true intent of his work. As the institution progressed, Hale began to

[26] Ibid, 169
[27] Lamon, "The Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial Normal School," 54.
[28] Lovett and Wynee, *Profiles of African Americans in Tennessee*, 57.
[29] Ibid, 57.

incorporate notions of racial upliftment and intellectual, social, and cultural advancement into the curriculum taught at the school. He learned of this method while visiting other Black institutions with a similar curricular focus. From there, he secretly created an African American history course called industrial education with an emphasis on negro problems to emphasize that students should approach learning with their mindset towards improving the Black community.[30] In this way, Tennessee A&I prepared the next generation of Black leadership for Nashville and beyond while also serving as a beacon around which the community could gather. None of this, however, would have been possible without the institution's leadership making use of music to promote and fulfill its goals.

Throughout American history, Black music culture has constantly grown to meet the needs of the race. This fact is especially true as it relates to many historically black colleges and universities, whose early years were often fraught with financial concern and instability. At Tennessee A&I, the growth of music ensembles and the overall musical aesthetic paralleled not only the emergence of the institution's unique identity as a center for learning but also its ability to achieve its goal of educating the next generation of Black professionals. In the past, scholarly discourse regarding the history of the institution has focused either on the narrative of race, class, and politics or instead that of the music ensembles themselves. However, the two must be combined to fully comprehend how they drew from one another to later amplify Jefferson Street's communal musical identity, covered in the next chapter. To understand the success of the institution, one must begin with its music history.

In its inaugural year, Tennessee A&I published a catalog named the *Bulletin* to provide details on the university, its courses, and students, and define its institutional purpose to "impart

[30] Ibid, 57

knowledge, discipline the mind, train the hand, and influence the heart of its students [to ensure they would] go out of the school fully qualified to discharge every duty faithfully and well."[31] The school was comprised of an academic department that prepared students for either normal or professional training, which then extended focus on other areas of industrial education. As early as this first year, the institution incorporated music training into its catalog of available classes to augment the knowledge being taught in order to develop more well-rounded students. Music was made available as an academic course that could be taken at several levels (junior and senior), taught by Noah H. Ryder, a graduate of Fisk University.[32] Students were provided both vocal and instrumental training, a decision that would go on to be immensely impactful as it laid the foundation for the establishment of ensembles that would bring the school considerable recognition and acclaim.

Over the next two decades, music courses at the institution and the professors who taught them varied from year to year. In his study of the program, Dr. Reginald McDonald cites the contribution of several key individuals including Harold Brown (1912-26), Clarence H. Wilson (1926-30), Marie Brooks-Strange (1930-48), Jesse D. Hayes (1937-43), Jordan D. "Chick" Chavis (1946-51), Frank T. Greer (1951-72), Clifford E. Watkins (1972-79), and Edward L. Graves (1979-2012).[33] However, examining issues of the *Bulletin* between the period of 1912-51 indicates that the school had many individuals who stepped forward to provide music training including Noah Ryder, Hazel Thompson, Martha Brown, Nannie A.B., Chas Cohen, Edith Moore, Clara Stevens, Marion Algee, Clarence Hayden Wilson, and Frances Grimes. Many of them taught music in addition to another course and several received their training at Fisk,

[31] "Undergraduate Catalogue 1912-1913" (1913). *Tennessee State University Undergraduate Catalogues*, 19.
[32] Ibid, 10
[33] McDonald, "The Aristocrat of Bands," 2.

further adding to the communal musical narrative. Of significant importance was Noah Ryder, who served as the first official professor associated with the music program. An important member of the community who spent the early 1900s as a solo vocalist, vocal quartet member, and composer, Black Nashville followed his music career and appointment at the institution with excitement and enthusiasm.[34] Ultimately, this was the beginning of a strong connection between the music program at Tennessee A&I and the Jefferson Street community.

From the institution's conception, music was intertwined with the service-minded values passed on to students. When no professors were available to teach the class, students took on the role of practicing and leading themselves.[35] As with the Jubilee Singers who honed their craft to impact the way their school and the African American race, so too did the students of Tennessee A&I align their efforts with the notion of self-sufficiency that had been instilled within them to accentuate the institution's growth. The school also made use of its musicality through small performances at notable events. In 1917 at Tennessee A&I's flag raising in which Governor Tom C. Rye and Mayor Robert Ewing were in attendance, Professor Ryder led the audience and band in the "Star-Spangled Banner" and additional melodies.[36] Through efforts such as this, the school continued to build a rapport with the local officials to garner support. As the institution continued to mature, it began to expand its operations further and add additional opportunities for students to participate in music training. This included listing music-related ensembles under available student organizations in the catalog and requiring students to participate in vocal training during each year of their school career.

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[34] "Opening of State School Tuesday." *Nashville Banner*, September 22, 1913.
[35] Lamar Keith McCarrell, "A Historical Review of the College Band Movement From 1875 to 1969" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 1971), 11.
[36] "Undergraduate Catalogue 1917_18_vol_vi_nos_4_5" (1918). *Tennessee State University Undergraduate Catalogues*, 54.

The movement toward further emphasizing the importance of music training for students expanded greatly only five years later. In 1922, Tennessee A&I listed music under special societies, increased its membership in what, and began providing students the opportunity to "fill his place wherever he may be called to serve."[37] Service for individuals who were musically inclined meant forming quartettes/ensembles and venturing out into the community to perform and thereby bring additional recognition to the institution. The school complemented this new focus by developing a formalized curriculum for the music program that included music harmony, theory, and conducting. As the program continued to mature, so, too, did the institution itself. By 1922, it began granting bachelor's degrees as a four-year college and by 1924, became known as the Tennessee Agricultural & Industrial State Normal College.[38] Dropping "Normal" from the name five years later, Tennessee A&I embraced a collegiate, musical identity that would go on to shape how the Jefferson Street community would develop.

Following its rebranding as a college dedicated to elevated level of educational opportunities to African American students across the state, the institution began to further utilize student ensembles and performers to fuel its emerging musical image. As the school recreated its institutional identity, the program expanded exponentially during the late 1920s-30s to increase instrumental and vocal musical activity. A portion of this effort was extended to provide more opportunities to grow the orchestra and band program that eventually was led by Clarence Hayden Wilson.

[37] "Undergraduate Catalogue 1922-1923" (1923). *Tennessee State University Undergraduate Catalogues*, 30.
[38] "About TSU: An HBCU Legacy," Tennessee State University, accessed January 13, 2022, https://www.tnstate.edu/about_tsu/history.aspx.

Figure 3.1 Orchestra

However, the movement did not halt there; instead, it was just the beginning. The late 1930s proved to be a very eventful period for the institution. The Tennessee State Collegians, a student-organized dance orchestra (jazz band), performed at numerous community and campus events including attracting and performing alongside famed musicians such as Count Basie, Billie Holiday, and Benny Goodman.[39] The State Collegians also established a reputation for themselves and became well-known throughout the community. As the number of their performances increased, they were called one of the top ensembles for swing down in the south, further adding to their growing list of highlights.[40]

Aside from their musicality bringing renown to the institution, its music ensembles strengthened the communal musical identity that began with the Jubilee Singers. In weaponizing their voices to combat racial prejudice in service of assisting their institution and the race, the Jubilee Singers brought attention to not only Fisk but also Black Nashville as well. They created a new identity for the community as being representative of the newly educated and racially progressive Black American that many philosophers and scholars of the race had once spoken of.

[39] McDonald, "The Aristocrat of Bands," 21.
[40] Tennessee A&I State College, "May 1937" (1937). *The Bulletin in 1930s*, 8.

However, they were not the only group to arm themselves with their voices in service of their school. Fisk had the Jubilee Singers and by 1931, Tennessee A&I had the State College Concert Singers, its version of the Jubilee Singers in reputation and skill.

Figure 3.2 Concert Singers, 1931

Founded by Marie Brooks-Strange in 1931, the Concert Singers brought a considerable amount of national acclaim to the institution. Adding to the already expansive musical image of the college, the singers were featured several times on nationwide broadcasts including CBS and NBC.[41] As a conductor, concert pianist, and organist, Professor Brooks-Strange led the group to perform for thousands on several trips across the country. Their list of accolades included entertaining key individuals and performing at many diverse locations. Examples include singing "Hand Me Down the Silver Trumpet, Gabriel" by request for U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt on his visit to Nashville on November 17, 1934; performing in the commodious opera house in St. Louis, Missouri, during the 1936 meeting of the National Education Association; performing at the Chicago World's Fair in 1932 and 1933,;performing at New York's World Fair in 1939; and being invited to sing at the White House by Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt in 1943.[42]

[41] Tennessee State University, "Tennessee State University Building Programs" (2020). *Tennessee State University Building Programs*.
[42] Ibid

As in earlier years, Tennessee A&I made use of the achievements of their musical groups to boost recruitment and advocate for additional support and funding. This was highlighted through the several times that President William J. Hale traveled alongside the Concert Singers. In the 1930s, President Hale was pictured with the singers before a performance on the WSIX Radio Station in Nashville, Tennessee.

Figure 3.3 President William J. Hale and the Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College Concert Singers Performing on WSIX

Opportunities such as this allowed him to spread news regarding the school and its success. In this way, the growth of the music program and ensembles at the institution paralleled that of the school itself. The students and professors utilized their artistry to support their school over the years and provide considerable national acclaim in terms of both vocal and instrumental music. This only continued as the notion of big bands spread across the nation, captivating the attention of many. From the 1930s and into the 40s, the concept of big bands spread across colleges and eventually influenced Tennessee A&I and the development of the State Collegians.[43] As the nation pivoted towards favoring large ensembles, Tennessee A&I shifted towards utilizing their jazz ensemble more often and eventually creating a marching band to capitalize on the attention

[43] Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State University, "The Tennessean 1962" *Tennessee State University Yearbooks* 21 (1962).

large ensembles were garnering nationally. Ultimately, this pivot led to the development of a marching band program that not only increased the reputation of the school, but also Jefferson Street's musical reputation as well.

That Old Tennessee Spirit

Moving beyond its communal impact and the role of the Concert Singers and State Collegians, the music program at Tennessee A&I's growth paralleled the national campaign towards developing a new negro identity. This period, often noted as the New Negro Movement or Negro Renaissance occurred between the 1910-the 50s and served to elevate the race through re-defining concepts of Black culture and intellectualism in America.[44] So far, this thesis has explored the notion that for African Americans music has historically been a tool for racial progress and has either been utilized covertly or openly as a means to achieve their goals. This was no different in the case of Tennessee Agricultural & Industrial State Normal College. It was during this time the institution made significant strides towards establishing and expanding its instrumental music program to include a marching band, a notion prompted by the efforts of HBCUs. Through the cumulative efforts of these institutions, there began a sub-movement within the Negro Renaissance as HBCUs developed a collegiate musical identity that served to strengthen the acceptance of authentic Black culture within American society.

Authenticity is perhaps one of the most important concepts within the discussion of the HBCU marching band movement, which began with the establishment of programs at Tuskegee Institute (1895) and Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (estimated between 1892-98).[45] The marching style, popularized mainly by the school in Florida, set the standard by which

[44] Samuel A. Floyd Jr., *The Power of Black Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 99.
[45] Clifford Edward Watkins, "The Work of Three Selected Band Directors in Predominantly-Black American Colleges and Universities" (PhD diss., Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, 1975), 31.

future HBCU programs would be held and that many would seek to pull from in developing their style. Though each institution within the movement could serve as a microcosm of the HBCU band movement and provide insight into its development, it is through examination of Tennessee A&I and the Jefferson Street communal music narrative that the parallel between this sub-movement and the larger push towards racial and cultural progress can be easily seen. Like Fisk and the Jubilee Singers, the music program at Tennessee A&I supported the development and acceptance of an intellectual and cultural identity that was opposite of the one spread through minstrel culture. Both of these institutions represented an opposite approach towards achieving this goal, Tennessee A&I taking a route in alignment with an accommodationist approach.

As is the case with many styles of Black music in America, the HBCU marching band musical aesthetic grew out of a combination of cultural influences. The most impactful of this included participation in military bands, brass bands, and minstrelsy. Each of these, often intersecting and developing concurrently with one another, provided African Americans with experience in classical training, military precision marching, strengthening and employing second-hand learning tactics, and conducting high-energy movements while performing. Having spread to the schools primarily through artists taking their knowledge and disseminating it amongst their students, these styles eventually found their way to Black institutions of higher learning and strengthened efforts to advance their fundraising and recruitment abilities. Ultimately, each of these three core influences created a unique musical identity for HBCUs through combining techniques to develop a new marching, sound, and performance style that combatted the spread of minstrel culture. Because much previous scholarly work has documented their historical development, this work will not delve too deeply into them and

instead provide an overview of their influence on HBCU music culture, specifically at Tenn. A&I.

African Americans have a long history of participating in the armed services. Though the records were often incomplete, many scholars have cited that Black men participated in military marching bands well before the American Revolution and as early as 1723.[46] During this experience and during participation in the Civil War and World War I, members of the race held roles within American military campaigns that were often associated with playing an instrument or singing as part of their typical duties. Their time within these regiments not only honed their musical talents but also provided experience in conducting precision marching drills, moving in formation, and stepping in time with one another. The influence of their participation in the military can be seen through many of the well-trained musicians who, following the Civil War, scattered and attached themselves to town bands, minstrel troupes, and roadshows.[47] This served to disperse Black military-trained musicians across the nation, adding to the number of professional musicians that could take on new roles as performers and educators. Some of these individuals, like W. C. Handy who worked at Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical College as band director, and Frank Drye who led the band at Tuskegee Institute, brought their military experience with them and utilized it to develop the HBCU musical aesthetic.[48]

While military enlistment provided the HBCU musical aesthetic with its marching technique, it was the spread of New Orleans brass bands that shaped its image and sound. Having been present during and after the antebellum period, brass bands hold a long history within

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[46] Robert H. Clark, "A Narrative History of African American Marching Band: Toward A Historicultural Understanding," *Journal of Historical Research* 41, no. 1 (2019), 10.
[47] Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997), 258.
[48] Darryl Marc Singleton, "Black Band for Brown Students: A Culturally Relevant Pedagogy" (PhD diss., Boston University, 2020), 60.

African American music and serve as the foundation upon which the Black marching band aesthetic was developed. One of the influences on the marching band image was the evolution and repurposing of the military marching style. While military bands used marching solely as a means of discipline and movement, brass bands gave it a purpose embedded in the art of entertainment.[49] Like brass bands, this new use of marching provided college marching band programs a method to attract and entertain crowds through incorporating drills and precision steps into their performances. Another aspect of brass band culture that influenced the HBCU musical aesthetic was the popularization of all-Black brass groups and parades. Individuals like Francis ("Frank") Johnson, who was said to have led one of the most popular all-Black brass bands in the country at the time, led both professional and military brass bands that toured the country and performed in a variety of events ranging from parades to ballroom dances.[50]

Thus emerged a notion that would remain a constant fixture within Black collegiate marching band culture, the art of being able to adapt in both image and instrumentation, as necessary. In this way, Black marching bands were able to pivot to the needs of the performance and cultivate a culture of flexibility innovation. The final influence of brass bands lies in the sound itself. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Blacks in New Orleans were divided into two classes. There were the Uptown people of mixed race who received European music training and the Downtown people of African heritage who utilized a tradition of second-hand or autodidactic music training.[51] Through this separation, bands in New Orleans developed different musical styles and sounds. This continued up until the Reconstruction era following the Civil War and the merging of the two groups. Their joining created a mixture of European tone quality

[49] Clark, "A Narrative History of African American Marching Band," 12.
[50] Ibid, 11.
[51] Ibid, 14

and style with self-taught tactics, a combination of European and African techniques.[52] Ultimately, this began a gradual change in the New Orleans brass band sound and paved the way for its musicians to utilize it in the development of a distinctive sound for Black college marching bands.

Looking beyond the image, sound, and techniques that made up the HBCU marching band aesthetic, it was African Americans participating in minstrelsy that served to influence the style's performance tactics and culture. For years, Whites participated in and popularized minstrel culture as a means to imitate and often ridicule Black culture. To combat this, individuals such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers arose and weaponized their artistry to display an authentic form of Black culture that could advocate for a new narrative surrounding the race's intellectual identity. However, theirs was not the sole approach to halting its spread. As early as the 1840s, a small number of African Americans formed all-Black minstrel troupes.[53] Though it is impossible to know the intentions of all of the musicians who participated in and assisted in the perpetuation of this parody of Black culture, many scholars have written on the notion of wearing the metaphorical minstrel mask and its use in taking a more covert approach towards combatting this negative identity. Prominent among these opinions is literature scholar Houston Baker, who has written on the parallel between the teachings of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois and their opposing approaches towards the same goal of advancing the race. Though individuals like DuBois and the Fisk Jubilee Singers represented open and outgoing resistance to cultural silencing, Washington and music ensembles at HBCUs including Tennessee A&I represented a more concealed and gradual weakening of minstrel culture.[54] As

[52] Ibid, 14
[53] Ibid, 16
[54] Houston A. Baker Jr., "Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance," *American Quarterly* 39, no 1 (Spring 1987), 93.

such, Blacks utilizing minstrel culture not only served to develop a method that would provide them an opportunity to undermine the negative images perpetuated by Whites but also develop a foundation upon which HBCU marching band culture could be laid.

Minstrel shows occurred both at night and during the day, often with a parade serving as its main source of advertisement and using instrumentalists and drum majors to attract attention through military-style uniforms, dance, and baton spinning techniques.[55] Alongside the sound and marching techniques that had been gained from military participation and New Orleans brass band culture, this performance style served as a popular format to entertain the masses. Additionally, it also provided Black musicians the opportunity to display their musical dexterity. The parade portion of the performance featured musicians marching through town and performing military marches, the works of then-current composers, and popular dance songs while the minstrel show itself featured Black musicians putting away their marching instruments to instead play violins, violas, cellos, basses, guitars, and pianos.[56] This method became a pivotal piece within the HBCU marching band aesthetic. Individuals such as W.C. Handy, who also participated in minstrel culture outside of his military service, founded Black marching band culture on the notion of showcasing versatility in terms of repertoire and meeting the needs of its audience. It was through this foundation that Black schools for higher education such as Tennessee A&I were able to popularize a fresh style of music that would go on to assist in making African American music culture mainstream.[57]

Though Tennessee A&I was not the originator of the HBCU band movement nor present during its early years, its band program grew to become one of the most recognizable and

[55] Ibid, 16.
[56] Ibid, 17.
[57] McDonald, “The Aristocrat of Bands,” ix

impactful. Following the growth of the institutions' music programs and ensembles over the years, the school began plans to join the movement. It was through these efforts that the development of the program continued and paralleled the expansion of the school's collegiate identity. Following the Tennessee State College Concert Singers serving as the school's recruit ambassadors, Tennessee A&I began efforts to replace the vocal ensembles with an instrumental program. Though no evidence points to the reason for the decline of the Concert Singers, it was likely due to either changes in staffing as she was no longer mentioned in the university catalogues between 1950-52.[58] In 1946 President Walter Strother Davis hired Jordan Douglas "Chick" Chavis, a graduate of Fisk University and former bandmaster at the local Pearl Senior High School to oversee instrumental music education.[59] As the first official director of bands for the institution, Chavis served as one of several individuals who contributed to the development of the marching band program's unique image, sound, and style. Though each of these individuals brought something new to the program during their tenure as director, this study will focus solely on Chavis as its founder and innovator and Frank T. Greer as the individual who replaced him, solidified its image, and took it to national heights.[60]

Tasked with developing the foundation of the program, Chavis received financial support from the institution in the way of scholarships to recruit prospective students from surrounding states. Within his first year of operation, Chavis embarked on a recruitment tour and gave out 20 four-year scholarships, created a 100-piece marching band, and led it as the first instrumental ensemble to perform during halftime at the school's football game.[61] Building upon

[58] "Undergraduate Catalogue 1950-1952" (1952). *Tennessee State University Undergraduate Catalogues,* 18.
[59] Linda T. Wynn, "Tennessee State University's Aristocrat of Bands" *Nashville Conference on African American History and Culture* 24 (2012).
[60] Wynn, "Tennessee State University's Aristocrat of Bands."
[61] McDonald, "The Aristocrat of Bands," 36.

their actions in previous years regarding utilizing the music program and artistry of students, Tennessee A&I used the band program to entertain visitors and important guests and embolden their students through creating and perpetuating a school spirit centered around Black collegiate excellence. As the program progressed, so, too, did the HBCU band movement as well. During the next two years of the marching band program's existence, Chavis led them to perform in the Washington Classic in Washington, D.C. alongside the top programs from other historically Black institutions to compete for a national championship in what was known as the Black Super Bowl of that era.[62] Their participation in this competition served not only to introduce the still fairly new program to the collegiate marching band world but also to bring national attention to Black music culture.

Aside from these early accomplishments, the most impactful achievement of Chavis during his five-year tenure was in situating the program more closely within the institutions and the Jefferson Street community's culture. Like many institutions within the Black collegiate band movement, the marching band was utilized not only to strengthen the ties between students but also within the surrounding community as well. Through his leadership, the marching band at Tennessee A&I moved beyond serving solely as a recruitment tool and instead as an important part of the school's larger events such as homecoming. By participating in events such as this, the band became an integral part of the institution's culture and one of the most impactful ways in which it could relate to and engage with the Jefferson Street community. Each year, students marched throughout the neighborhood, performing hit songs and dances and ultimately adding to the Jefferson Street communal narrative. Chavis's work would only be extended under the work of Frank T. Greer, who would take over leadership of the program in 1951.[63]

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[62] Wynn, "Tennessee State University's Aristocrat of Bands."
[63] Ibid.

Having attended Tennessee A&I in 1936 and having founded the Tennessee State Collegians, which served as the first band at the institution, Greer was an individual who was familiar with the Tennessee A&I musical sound and music education program. It was under his direction that the marching band program at Tennessee A&I would not only form its unique identity within the HBCU music movement but also gain national attention as one of the highest achieving and executing music programs at a HBCU at the time. If Chavis laid the foundation for the marching band, it was through the efforts of Greer that the ensemble developed its musical identity, sound, and image to set it apart. One of his first decisions was to transform the band's marching style and sound to be more unique and different from that of other programs. He held big plans for the institution in terms of both recruitment and providing more opportunities to garner national attention. In a recruitment letter to high school band director Conrad Johnson in 1952, Greer stated that the band of seventy-two would be extended to 110 by the next fall, uniforms would be purchased, and the concert band would embark on a spring tour.[64] He delivered on all of these goals, expanding and popularizing the band program across the state. These changes were also followed closely by the institution and the student body and publicized through the school's newspaper, *The Meter*. In its 1954 issue, the newspaper commented on the expansion of the music education program through the hiring of Anceo M. Francisco to serve as an instructor in instrumental music and assistant director of bands and the development of a new marching style, stating:

> Seventy playing musicians and a majorette corps of sixteen beautiful coeds move with clock-like precision in TSU's Marching Band under the direction of Frank T. Greer and Anceo M. Francisco. On the gridiron the band marches eight steps to every five yards, averaging 180 to 200 steps per minute. All this and high-step precisely-timed marching through intricate formations while the band plays. Music and mass in motion - that's the

[64] Watkins, "The Work of Three Selected Band Directors in Predominantly-Black American Colleges and Universities," 57.

> TSU Marching Band - an indispensable part of the spectacle that Tiger gridiron classics offer.[65]

Greer elevated the performance style of the band by emphasizing flashy steps and high-energy movement, adding to the notion of entertainment around which the HBCU marching band aesthetic was developed. It was through this new style that the Tennessee A&I marching band began to separate itself from others and develop its brand. As the program grew, so too did their opportunities to perform across the nation. Between 1955 and 1978, the Tennessee A&I marching band performed half-time shows at nine professional football games; this included serving as the first Black university band to appear on national television at the Chicago Bears vs Los Angeles Rams game.[66] This is also where the band received its name, the *Aristocrat of Bands*. Ultimately, it was through the efforts of Chavis and Greer that the instrumental music program at Tennessee A&I positioned itself as a prominent school within the historically Black college band movement and showcased African American bands culture on a national stage. The music ensembles at Tennessee A&I and Fisk would only continue to mature and expand in influence as the Jefferson Street musical narrative expanded to develop an independent community that could contribute to the city's musical image.

[65] Tennessee State University, "October 1954" (1954), *The Meter Documents in 1950s*, 5.
[66] Wynn, "Tennessee State University's Aristocrat of Bands."

Chapter IV – A World Within A World

"Jefferson Street [was] the vein which [carried] much of the life blood not just for North Nashville, but for Nashville culture."[1]

- Dr. Reavis Mitchell

If Fisk and Tennessee A&I and their music were the catalyst for those within the generation following enslavement to educate themselves and form connections to advocate for and coordinate racial progress, then Jefferson Street's musical scene was the product of their efforts. At its peak, the historic Jefferson Street district was representative of the musical best and brightest that Nashville had to offer – intellectually, culturally, professionally, and musically as well. And as was the case with Fisk and Tennessee A&I, one cannot understand the full story of race, culture, and class in the African American history of Nashville, Tennessee without mention of the many artists whose collective voices rang out in support and celebration of the community. It is through tracing the intersection of economic growth, efforts to push Black-influenced/produced genres and songs into mainstream culture, and the struggle for civil rights that the comprehensive story of the Jefferson Street community unfolds remind your reader how the previous chapters set this up to happen.

Within African American folklore, there are many stories of enslaved individuals looking to the North Star for guidance. Though sometimes dim and difficult to see, the star remained a constant fixture within the sky and helped to provide direction to enslaved persons looking to travel north of the Mason-Dixon line. It was representative of a longing within the Black

[1] Discussion – Highway 40 Blues: Jefferson Street – 2004-09-25, 25,09, 2004, PP0213, Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum Digital Collections. https://digi.countrymusichalloffame.org/digital/collection/musicaudio/id/3374/rec/1

community to be free from the oppression they faced and ultimately to have the opportunity to create a life of their own. And like the North Star, the Jefferson Street community and North Nashville as a whole were synonymous with the concept of freedom and served as both a beacon and anchor for the African American community as early as the mid-1800s throughout the 1950s.[2] During the Jim Crow era, a time in which racial separation was the norm and access to basic human needs such as business, nourishment, housing, and entertainment was paramount, Jefferson Street provided a space for the Black community to expand and eventually thrive both economically and culturally. It was a place of freedom, one that may not have been as well-funded or maintained as other parts of the city but held meaning in the reality that it was primarily Black-owned, Black-operated, and cultivated a community of acceptance of Black innovation and culture. Alongside this movement to create more Black businesses and develop the local Black economy was the growth of the Black music and entertainment scene in Nashville. With the music programs at Fisk and Tennessee A&I at its back, the Jefferson Street community served to nurture and promote local talent through the provision of performance, recording, and broadcasting opportunities. These institutions created a pipeline through which local talent could mature and find work. On a more national scope, the community attracted Black music stars such as B.B. King, Ray Charles, Etta James, and more. Like the North Star in African American folklore, Jefferson Street's history was not always bright, and nor was the community without strife, but it was a constant for Black Nashvillians. Ultimately, Jefferson Street was the culmination of the wishes of elite Black Nashvillians since the founding of the territory and the efforts of the music ensembles at Fisk and Tennessee A&I.

[2] "Facing North Jefferson St, Nashville: Explore the Artwork," National Public Television, accessed February 24, 2022, https://www.wnpt.org/jefferson-street/artwork/

A Community of Their Own

The role of the Jefferson Street community in serving as home to many of the Black residents of Nashville, TN began years before the rise of its business and entertainment districts. Having originated as a footpath and then eventually a wagon trail from Hadley Plantation on the west to the Cumberland River on the east, the territory was given new meaning during the Civil War when the Union Army began to occupy parts of the state.[3] African Americans, who were considered a form of contraband at the time, were split between serving as soldiers in the federal army and being separated into various contraband camps. Designated as possessions and prizes of war, many Black Nashvillians lived in these camps until the end of the conflict. After the war, the contraband camps became small communities for the African Americans who had spent much time within its confines. In the case of Jefferson Street, it was created from a large contraband camp that was opened north of downtown Nashville and near the site of Fort Gillam.[4] Over the years, it was through the joint efforts of various parties, including White Northern missionaries and elite Black Nashvillians, that would see the community truly take shape.

Following the Civil War, the community developed as a prominent location for African Americans within the city. On a small scale, African Americans began to seek out entrepreneurial opportunities. Between 1862 to 1866, many African Americans formed businesses like former Union soldier Joseph H. Williams who opened a counseling office that assisted veterans with obtaining their bonus money or created associations to continue their local trade monopolies such as the Colored Barber's Association (1865) and Colored Mechanic's Association (1866).[5] However, it was between the late 1860s and early 1900s that the emerging

[3] Reavis L. Mitchell, Jr., "Jefferson Street," *Nashville Conference on African American History and Culture* 39 (1999).
[4] Ibid.
[5] Lovett, *The African American History of Nashville, Tennessee*, 107.

Jefferson Street community received several major institutions that increased its ability to meet the needs of its residents. Over the years, institutions such as Fisk, Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church (1868), Abraham Lincoln Land Company (early 1900s), and Tennessee A&I cemented the area as center for Black Nashvillians to gather and thrive.[6] Working collaboratively, these institutions provided for the basic needs of members of the Black community in Nashville and allowed for various residential communities to develop around them and increase the Black populace within the city. Through service at Mount Zion, the Black community was able to satisfy its needs for religious service. And through real estate companies such as the Abraham Lincoln Land Company African Americans were able to purchase and own land, a notion that their predecessors had not been able to achieve.

The establishment and expansion of these core institutions/businesses coincided with the push within the Black community to establish more businesses within North Nashville. The first movement began in 1865 with the establishment of the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company and ended shortly thereafter in the 1870s with the bank's collapse.[7] This failure halted the collaborative efforts of the Black elite in Nashville to make economic progress for many years. It was not until 1898 and the spread of a national focus on racial and economic progress for Black Americans that the Nashville elite began their efforts anew. Over the next two years, as W.E.B DuBois and Booker T. Washington headed the national movement to form the National Negro Business League (NNBL), Black Nashvillians such as James C. Napier and R.H. Boyd renewed their passion for Black business expansion through the establishment of a Nashville Chapter of

[6] Mitchell, "Jefferson Street."
[7] Lovett, *The African American History of Nashville, Tennessee*, 112.

the NNBL.[8] However, it was several years later before the Black business movement in Nashville made significant progress, facing as it did considerable internal strife.

The Black community in Nashville had high expectations for the NNBL to not only be a voice for the race but also to place the interests of the whole community above their businesses and entrepreneurial pursuits. The Nashville *Globe*, that had for years held both Whites and Blacks accountable for what? and supported their whose? efforts where necessary to do what?, held members of the Nashville league to a high standard. In a 1907 article commenting on the ineffectiveness of the NNBL, the *Globe* stated that "business interests, so far as the Negro is concerned, [are] not looked after and one can readily see the need of some organization that could, with a united effort of all the business men, change and better the condition of the people identified with the Negro race."[9] The NNBL received criticism for not meeting frequently enough to make significant progress in supporting the needs of the various business enterprises in the city. Despite these issues, the development of Black businesses in Nashville steadily continued. Following the conclusion of World War I (1914-1918) and the return of African American veterans, the student populations at both Fisk and Tennessee A&I expanded and with them, greater demands for services available to the African American community manifested, ultimately leading to an increase in the commercial development for Black Nashvillians.[10]

[8] Ibid, 114.
[9] "Local Business League," *Nashville Globe*, March 08, 1907.
[10] Mitchell, "Jefferson Street"

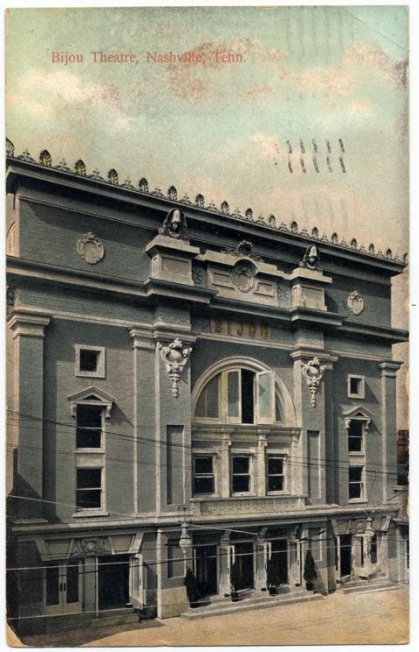

Figure 4.1 Bijou Theater, Nashville, Tenn., 1908

Due to this growth in population and economic need, Black Nashville began a period of developing spaces that welcomed and catered to African American audiences. One such space was the Bijou Theater on Fourth Avenue North. Having originally opened in 1904, the theater was a white-operated space that transitioned in 1916 towards being more Black-oriented and primarily utilizing Black talent. Between the 1920s and 30s, the theater brought in legendary artists such as Blues singer Bessie Smith and local talents such as Nashville jazz artist Adolphus "Doc" Cheatham and Jerrie Jackson of Jerrie Jackson's Hep Cats.[11] Ultimately, the Bijou Theater was one of the early institutions in what would eventually become an expansive entertainment district. Not only did the theater attract and showcase Black performers, but it also provided local Black musicians the opportunity to make a living as well. Bijou Theater dancer

[11] *Night Train to Nashville: Music City Rhythm & Blues, 1945-1970* (Nashville, TN: CMF Press. 2004), 4.

Irene Jackson, wife of Jerrie Jackson and a regular performer alongside the Hep Cats reflected on her time with the theater stating, "I think the Bijou did a lot for, I'll say the Black community. It gave them something of their own to see and enjoy. And that's what they did. And they really supported it. They really did."[12]

Parallel to the development of Black-oriented spaces like the Bijou Theater was the creation of two separate business sectors for the African American community in Nashville: the Cedar Hill Street downtown Black business district and the Jefferson Street/North Nashville district. The Cedar Hill Street district primarily served working-class Blacks and ultimately collapsed during the Great Depression while the Jefferson Street district, which served a more affluent and middle-class Black population, was able to weather the worst of the poor economic conditions.[13] Similar to the Bijou Theater, Black Nashvillians utilized the period of the 1910s-30s to develop a business foundation rooted in serving the African American community. The Jefferson Street district grew, with businesses like beauty shops and barbershops, and funeral parlors and retail outlets anchoring as the district. Businesses included K. Gardner's Funeral Home, Isom's Beauty Shop, William Hemphill's Press Terrance Restaurant, Jefferson Street Pharmacy, I.E. Green Grocery Company, Terry's Pharmacy.[14] Ultimately, this began a transformation on Jefferson Street toward becoming a center for the Black community in Nashville to gather.

Black Nashvillians spent years combatting racial prejudice and segregation. From streetcars and railroads to schools, to public accommodations (theaters, parks, shows, etc.), African Americans in Nashville faced Jim Crow policies and segregation tactics. Across the

[12] Ibid, 6.
[13] Mitchell, "Jefferson Street"
[14] Ibid

state, there were many accounts of individuals dealing with racial prejudice and at times even losing their lives. In a letter written by Elizabeth L. Koen in 1917 to Governor Thomas C. Rye, she recounted the lynching of a Black man in Memphis stating that, "If a white man should murder a negro woman, and a negro mob should throw the white man's charred head at us-what then!"[15] Though there was a strong racial undertone that saw African Americans as inferior throughout the letter, Koen condemned the actions of the mob and the atrocities they committed. Just a year later, Governor Rye received another letter from a former enslaved person and North Nashville resident, Reverend A.J. Jones. In 1918, Jones wrote to the Governor discussing a lynching that occurred in the city of Lexington. Rye stated that the after being captured and tortured until he was unconscious, the Black individual was hung, riddled with between 150-200 bullets, and then his lifeless body was dragged around.[16] Ending his letter, Jones appealed for Governor Rye to bring those responsible for the lynching to justice. Throughout the state, racial tension was high as many Black Tennesseans strived to live under the oppression of Jim Crow. It was due to these experiences that in Nashville, many individuals sought to further expand the environment they created in North Nashville. The development of a Black-owned and operated community like Jefferson Street was thus not only a desire but a necessity as well, especially in theaters and other entertainment businesses which were always segregated. For unsegregated spaces, Black entertainment businesses continued to thrive within the community. Institutions such as the Ritz Theater, a business that opened on Jefferson Street in 1937 across the street from Fisk, catered to African American patrons and provided them with entertainment opportunities.[17]

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[15] Letter from Elizabeth L. Koen to Governor Thomas C. Rye, May 1917, 42679, Governor Tom C. Rye Papers, 1915-1919, GP 38, Tennessee State Library and Archives. https://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15138coll18/id/2026/rec/32

[16] Letter from Reverend J.A. Jones to Governor Thomas C. Rye, April 1918, 42682, Governor Tom C. Rye Papers, 1915-1919, GP 37, Tennessee State Library and Archives. https://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15138coll18/id/2010/rec/24

[17] National Public Television, "Facing North"

Figure 4.2 Ritz Theater – Jefferson Street

By the end of the 1930s, the community on Jefferson Street had grown from a small footpath and wagon trail to a vibrant community that catered to and supported Black business. In 1936, the street held many commercial sites (noted by the gray space with diagonal black lines) and was surrounded by houses (noted by the gray space).[18]

[18] Building Zone Map of Nashville, map 7, 1936, 43700, Library Book Collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives. https://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15138coll23/id/10650/rec/22

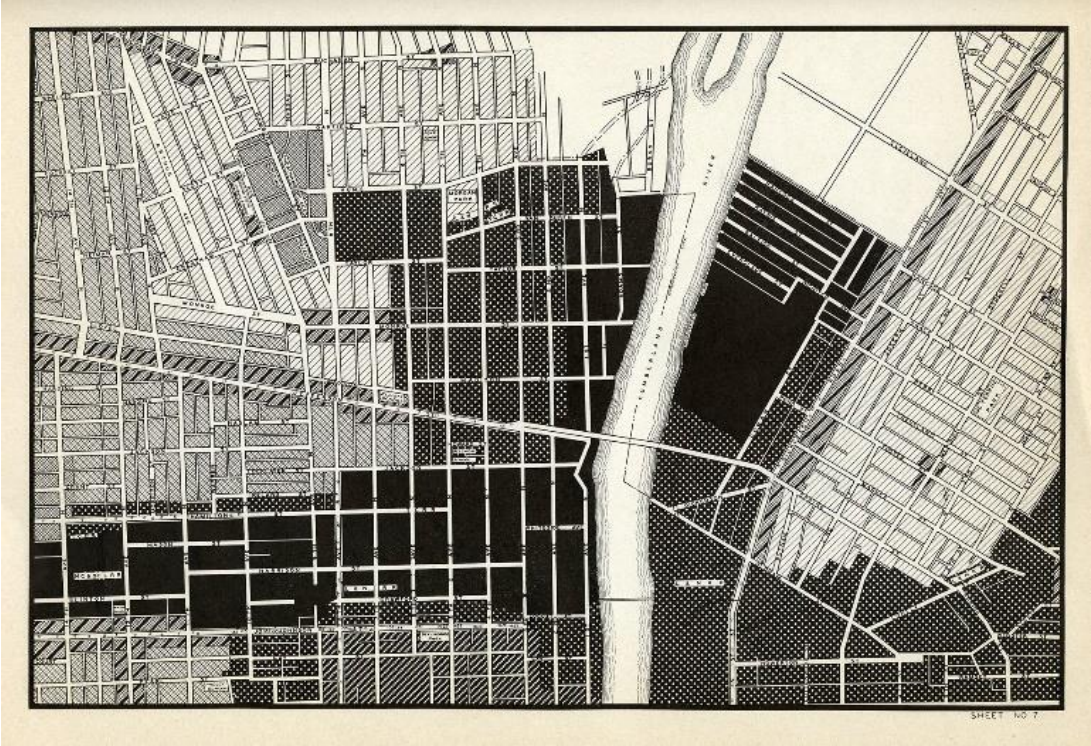

Figure 4.3 Building Zone Map of Nashville

Amidst the many eateries, retail stores, and various businesses that populated the district, there grew a formal entertainment industry that attracted nationally-known Black music artists. Like Fisk and Tennessee State, Jefferson Street's music scene brought national attention to the city of Nashville and showcased the Black cultural identity in a manner opposite of that imposed onto them through bondage and Jim Crow. As the universities continued to produce more musicians and the Black populace in Nashville began to enjoy live music, the community developed a group of nightclubs, supper clubs, hole-in-the-wall Chicago-style speakeasies, dance halls, and various other local landmarks.[19] Ultimately, it was through these institutions that Jefferson Street

[19] Mitchell, "Jefferson Street"

truly shined as a sanctuary for Black Nashvillians and a flourishing entertainment scene with national implications.

Nashville Really Jumps!

"Nashville really jumps
Really jumps all night long
I'd rather be in Nashville
Than to be way back (back) home

Jump Nashville…"[20]

And indeed Nashville did jump, long before and after local R&B artist Cecil Grant recorded his song "Nashville Jumps," in 1946. Grant, like many other Black musicians in the city, frequented North Nashville on an almost weekly basis, performing wherever there was a stage. During the period of 1935-65, a time many Nashvillians consider as the Golden Age of Jefferson Street, the community served as a cultural hub for the development and expansion of Black music culture.[21] During its prime Jefferson Street did indeed jump from night to night and week to week, each music venue bringing in regular acts or new performers and creating a communal culture centered around music. And as Cecil Grant said it was a place that many musicians of that era would rather be than anywhere else.

By the 1940s, the budding business district within the Jefferson Street and North Nashville community had survived complications of leadership, a world war, the great depression, and more. It was now a thriving hub for Black culture that had extended its provisions to include several nightclubs and live music venues. African American musical artistry, which had been for years utilized by Black Nashvillians to accomplish their goals, was

[20] "Nashville Jumps," Letsloop.com, accessed February 24, 2022, https://letsloop.com/artist/cecil-grant/song/nashville-jumps
[21] Mitchell, "Jefferson Street"

now a permanent and prominent fixture within a community they had established themselves. It was accessible through several clubs that were spread throughout the community including Price's Nightclub, Black Diamond Club, Club Baron, Maceo's Club, Del Morocco Club, Fireside Club, Brown's Dinner Club, Club Stealaway, New Era Club, and Good Jelly Jones. Each of these businesses provided local and national artists the opportunity to perform and be receive compensation for their musical talents. In reflecting on his time within the neighborhood, Little Richard stated, "I used to work in Nashville quite a bit when I was young. I used to come in and work because that's where I really made my $100 a week at. I didn't make $100 a week nowhere but there, really."[22] In this way, emerging artists from Fisk and Tennessee A&I were able to establish a professional reputation and build their careers.

In this way, the Jefferson Street community developed a pipeline for musicians. Students at the surrounding educational facilities were not only allowed but encouraged to be a part of the community's musical narrative beyond the work they were doing at their respective institutions. Reflecting on the relationship between the schools and Jefferson Street regarding Sunday afternoon performances, Nashville musician Earl Gaines stated, "we'd play like 2 o clock in the afternoon until around maybe 8 at night… [we] had a lot of students from TSU [that] would come in there and play [and leave because] they had to get back to class."[23] Musicians from the local colleges performed on Jefferson Street to gain experience as professional musicians and at times, upon graduation, transitioned to making their living in entertainment. From 1947-48, the Tennessee State Collegians jazz band, for example, was an active participant in the Nashville

[22] "Little Richard, 1932-2020," Country Music Hall of Fame, accessed February 22, 2022, https://countrymusichalloffame.org/little-richard/

[23] Discussion – Highway 40 Blues: Jefferson Street – 2004-09-25, 25,09, 2004, PP0213, Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum Digital Collections. https://digi.countrymusichalloffame.org/digital/collection/musicaudio/id/3374/rec/1

R&B scene.[24] The relationship between surrounding educational institutions and the Jefferson Street community created a pipeline that moved musicians from the university band room to the club ballroom, ultimately adding to the number of Nashville-trained and nurtured musicians.

Figure 4.4 Tennessee State Collegians

One such case of this pipeline can be seen through the career of Hank Crawford. A saxophonist and graduate of Tennessee A&I, Crawford led Little Hank & the Rhythm Kings to perform often at the Subway Lounge in Printers Alley and was eventually hired by Ray Charles to join his band.[25] Crawford credited his time performing within the city stating, "Nashville holds a dear place in my heart… Ray Charles asked me to join his band after hearing me there. A lot happened for me during that time."[26] Ultimately, the entertainment scene for Black Nashvillians routinely nurtured and promoted local talent. Local artists such as Crawford, Marion Anderson,

[24] *Night Train to Nashville*, 11.
[25] Ibid, 22.
[26] Ibid, 22.

Earl Gaines, Gene Allison, Jackie Shane, etc. were provided the necessary opportunities to grow and add to the community's musical narrative.

Figure 4.5 Ray Charles and band at Maceo's in Nashville c. 1959

(Hank Crawford looking back)

Looking beyond the development of local talent, the entertainment district of the Jefferson Street/North Nashville community attracted many major Black artists as well to the area. In July of 1957, the Nashville *Banner* covered the visit of Ray Charles to Club Baron to perform to Black patrons only.[27] Though White individuals often frequented these clubs as well, Black-only shows were dedicated primarily to serving the needs of their community to ensure they had access to entertainment despite segregation and Jim Crow policies. These shows provided Black residents the opportunity to satisfy their need for enjoyment while also providing national artists

[27] "Blind Pianist to Play Club Baron." *Nashville Banner*, July 22, 1957.

with venues to perform. The district was visited months later by B.B. King and his recording orchestra, who held a concert and dance on October 29, 1957, for Black patrons at Club Baron, too.[28] These two represent of the countless African American musicians who performed in the city's R&B clubs. The notion of Black artists seeking out Nashville as a hotspot for R&B music continued into the early 1960s when Etta James visited the city in 1963 to record her live album, 'Etta James Rocks the House,' in the New Era club because of "the atmosphere generated by the public who [patronized the] club."[29] It was a common occurrence for major acts to find their way to the Jefferson Street music venues and whenever they did, there was an audience ready and waiting for them.

The importance of the musical narrative of the Jefferson Street community extends beyond the nightclubs and their relationship to the development of local talent and the attraction of national artists. The entertainment industry in Nashville also influenced radio and television on a national scale as well. Prompted by the words of college students back from serving in World War II, on-air personality Gene Allison decided in 1946 to shift the Nashville-based radio station WLAC from pop songs to boogie, blues, and jazz after dark.[30] This decision was monumental as it was the first of many nights that jazz and R&B rang out from the WLAC's 50,000-watt signal.

[28] "Blues Boy King at Club Baron." *Nashville Banner*, October 29, 1957.
[29] *Night Train to Nashville*, 21.
[30] Mathew Leimkuehler, "WLAC: The Powerhouse Nashville Station that helped Introduce R&B to the World," Tennessean, accessed on February 24, 2022, https://www.tennessean.com/in-depth/entertainment/2021/09/23/wlac-radio-nashville-station-rb-soul-music/5606792001/

Figure 4.6 WLAC Coverage

The station's night coverage extended primarily from midwestern to southeastern states. With R&B music at its core, WLAC served to center Nashville as a major recording center for R&B a source that African Americans could rely on for the latest songs. However, WLAC was not alone in its efforts to meet the needs of the African Americans across the nation. In December 1951, WSOK debuted on Nashville airways as one of the first full-time, all-black stations featuring both Black announcers and Black-oriented programming.[31] In this way, radio stations in Nashville were community-focused and driven, providing opportunities to promote local businesses and engage directly with their core Black audience. Radio, alongside the many nightclubs on Jefferson Street, served to expand the community's ability to meet the needs of the African American community in Nashville. However, all of these efforts were effectively halted with the introduction of Interstate 40 to North Nashville.

The interstate was introduced through the signing of the Interstate Highway Act (also known as the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act) by President Dwight D. Eisenhower on June 29, 1956.[32] This decision was made amidst conversations across the nation

[31] *Night Train to Nashville*, 32.
[32] Linda T. Wynn, "Interstate 40 and the Decimation of Jefferson Street," *Nashville Conference on African American History and Culture* no. 12 (2019).

on building expressways to eliminate urban areas and to develop a roadway system that could be utilized during national emergencies. To the city of Nashville, the interstate was a way to regulate traffic and create alternative routes. To the Black community on Jefferson Street, however, it was the end of an era. Once Black Nashvillians became aware of plans to construct the highway system through their neighborhood, leadership from both Tennessee State University and Fisk University joined together alongside prominent businessmen and politicians to form the Interstate 40 Steering Committee. Members included Flournoy A. Coles, Iman Otey, Curlie McGruder, Dr. Edwin Mitchell, and attorney Avon Williams Jr.[33] The committee filed a legal suit to halt its construction, building their argument around the notion that the plan was discriminatory to the Black community as they had been left out of the initial planning. Despite their efforts, however, plans to develop Interstate 40 on Jefferson Street were solidified and the highway was constructed in 1957.

Interstate 40 cut through the Black community in Nashville, demolishing a hundred square blocks (including 16 blocks of stores) and hundreds of homes and businesses.[34] It also severed between all of the Black educational facilities, separating institutions that had built connection across many years. These institutions, in tandem with the economic and entertainment district in North Nashville, had for years utilized music to promote notions of racial advancement, communal growth, and economic independence. The introduction of Interstate 40 effectively cut off their voices. And yet, if you were to head down Jefferson Street in North Nashville today, you will still hear music. Though many of the nightclubs, diners, and other Black-operated residential and commercial spaces that once populated the streets of North Nashville have closed, the music ensembles at the surrounding historically Black colleges

[33] Ibid
[34] Ibid

continue to weaponize their voices to provide an accurate depiction of Black music culture. The only difference is that now, behind those voices are a rich history of African American culture that serves to propel them forward. And though the musicians change from year to year as both Fisk University and Tennessee State University continue to attract new Black scholars looking to educate themselves, the message of communal and racial growth will continue to be part of their music.

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APPENDIX

Sounds of North Nashville (Image by Heriberto Palacio, III)