Reckon with It: A Podcast Exploring Tennessee Cultures and Identities

By

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Dedication

To Tennessee and the folks who make it home.

Acknowledgements

I am but a puddle of gratitude to all the folks who helped me throughout this process. First and foremost, thank you to my interviewees for lending your voices and inspiring me to continue to seek new ways to advocate for my community. To Dr. Detweiler, thank you for your patience as I shuffled through dozens of project ideas over the past couple of years and your guidance throughout this process. Your mentorship has been invaluable in my undergraduate years. Where my background singers?!? To Eric, thank you for being the most constant source of good in my life and also for feeding me. I have consumed far less boxed mac and cheese during this process than anticipated. To my UWC crew, especially Max and Hanan, thank you for digging into this project with me and helping me give these ideas sufficient voice. To Imaan, thank you for being a sounding board on all things audio. To Katrina and Ella, thank you for supporting and encouraging me and for making this virtual thesis process and senior year far more enjoyable than I anticipated. And, of course, to Carter, for never barking during my Zoom interviews and for giving the best cuddles after a long day of work. I had to throw you in here because I am convinced that you can read.

Podcast Episode Files

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ewFfT1lN3O3lbmUCcgjD9UDSGvvGl4NX?usp=sharing

Table of Contents

Abstract

For this honors thesis, I created a podcast in which I weave historical narratives and personal experience together with examples of community members and organizations working to procure a more equitable Southern future. I alternate between narrative segments and non-narrated interviews to provoke listeners to question their previous notions of Tennessee. Aside from the introductory episode, each topical episode follows a similar format, beginning with a story, following with a question asserting the topic, then discussing historical and current relevance, and finally transitioning into clips of interviews with local Tennessee leaders interspersed with narrative dialogue. The intent of this creative project is to dispel the idea of a singular narrative of Tennessee cultures and identities.

Introduction

This thesis was born of the desire to show people the Tennessee I love. I shaped and realized this idea during a palpably divisive time in this country, both culturally and politically. In conversations I had over the past year and a half with folks from here, from other parts of the U.S., or even from around the world, I was always struck with their perceptions of Tennessee, from the state's handling of the Coronavirus pandemic to its response to the racial justice demonstrations over the summer of 2020 and so on. Though I agreed that there were and are many abysmal things happening in Tennessee, I found myself frustrated that they didn't also know of the incredible people here on the ground.

Having been involved with community work and organizations since I was in middle school, I wanted to try my hand at finding that delicate balance between acknowledging the negatives while highlighting the positives. Singularity, I realized, was the biggest issue in common narratives about Tennessee; the treatment of Tennessee as a place that is inherently good or inherently bad is unproductive. The problem of singularity is exemplified well in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's famous TED talk, "The Danger of a Single Story," in which she discusses her limited view of books as a Nigerian child reading British and American literature as well as other people's limited understanding of her based on their preconceived notions of where she was from. Adichie's talk clarified the work that I was aiming to accomplish by demonstrating the exigence of expanding cultural narratives. From this point, it was important to me to consider what Southern narratives are popular within the media, before focusing on Tennessee as a case study.

For those outside the South, public figures and news stories might define their understanding of Southerners. Perhaps people see the anti-mask protestors in Nashville and think Southerners are loud, inconsiderate rednecks. Maybe they watch Honey Boo Boo and think Southerners are poorly educated and unhealthy. It's even possible that they learn about Joel Osteen and think Southerners all believe in the prosperity gospel. Stereotypes like these plague the South's reputation, and these are only a handful of the characters that represent the South in popular culture and media. Though certainly not all press about this neck of the woods is negative, many of the headlines about its politics or cultural relations do not shine favorably upon it, and while many of these portraits are founded on difficult truths about the South, they limit the scope of understanding.

It should be noted that a prominent place from which non-Southerners gather these stereotypes is literature. Take, for instance, Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird.* According to a study conducted by the Thomas Fordham Institute that surveyed 484 teachers from across the United States (Shanohan 12), Lee's novel was the most commonly assigned book of those listed with 35% (Shanohan 35). This widely taught but also widely beloved ("Great American") novel encapsulates so many deliciously comfortable Southern stereotypes. There is, of course, the small-town, moral hero Atticus Finch and his kids Scout and Jem, hopeful kids who do not understand the racial divide. There is Tom Robinson, an innocent black man accused of rape by Bob Ewell, the ignorant, racist, and impoverished abuser of his daughter Mayella. There is Boo, the creepy but misunderstood neighbor and Miss Maudie, the "woke," white widow. Let us not forget Calpurnia, the loving, black, and church-going cook who takes care of the Finch children. In so many ways, *TKAM* has served as many people's introduction and

model narrative of Southernness because of its sheer popularity, but though it is beloved, even to me, it can be a problematic singular narrative.

Because a novel like this is so beloved, these stereotypes have become comfortable to the general public and are emulated in other works as well. Even still with literature, consider the popularity of Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees* or *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett. These books create white saviors and overt racists while marginalizing Black folks. Similarly, in non-fiction literature, author J.D. Vance's hugely popular and simultaneously notorious bestseller *Hillbilly Elegy* tells of his troubling childhood in Appalachia, which is in and of itself a distinct Southern region. He also heavily criticizes Appalachians and paints a decidedly negative and singular picture of them. Not only did the book become incredibly popular, Netflix recently released a movie version of the book, despite complaints from Appalachian scholars and even a literary pushback titled *Appalachian Reckoning: A Region Responds to Hillbilly Elegy*.

It should be noted, though, that the overgeneralization of this region is an ongoing trend. Especially in the years since the election of Donald Trump, we have seen the popularity of regional broad-brushing, as people look for ways to pinpoint a far-right emergence that they didn't see coming. What is most concerning to me is that the projection of the American South as a homogenous identity is directly harming the marginalized and underrepresented populations that account for a sizable portion of the South's cultural identity.

I specifically wanted to focus on Tennessee because it is my homeplace, and for that reason, I am well aware of the varying happenings of this state and particularly the Middle Tennessee region. I watched as we made national news for having the highest

number of daily Covid-19 cases in the country, and I heard the general uproar when Tennessee began to push anti-trans legislation and severely strict abortion regulations at the beginning of the most recent legislative session. I know that, as a state, we are not often making national news for positive reasons, usually unless it involves Dolly Parton, our collective Tennessee heroine. Yet, from being involved in the community myself and engaged in social justice discourse, I know that the news about Tennessee is not wholly representative of the state.

With all this in mind, I began to search for the ways diverse Tennesseans are actively trying to change the limiting narrative of Tennessee. How could I inform non-Tennesseans to see Tennessee as a more dynamic place and for the culturally diverse place that it is? This was not a quest for redemption but for recognition of the hard work of underrepresented Tennesseans and Southerners in general who have long strived to procure a better collective future.

This was an effort precedented by podcasts like *The Bitter Southerner Podcast* that work to expand public understanding of Southern culture by outwardly condemning its less favorable aspects, in a series of audience driven questions and requested themes. For example, an episode on folk music explores and contests the popular understanding of folk music and argues that OutKast is an important Southern folk music (Reece). Another source of inspiration was the Southern Foodways Alliance's *Gravy* that investigates various elements of Southern food culture (Antolini). Other podcasts like *Dolly Parton's America* (Abumrad) and *S-Town* (B. Reed) highlight specific corners of regional identity. I found particular effectiveness in the ability for podcasts to follow narrative arcs in these serialized podcasts, like Sarah Koenig does in *Serial*, weaving

storytelling elements and garnering prolonged attention. As many others like Reece and Antolini already have, I believe that podcasting is a potent media and educational tool, in these times especially, because it is readily accessible and engages its audience in ways that contrast popular video mediums.

My original intent was to create a podcast that examines the ways in which Southerners are working to dispel stereotypes and expand the narrative of the American South, either directly or as byproducts of their work. The goal of this audio work was to illuminate the efforts to create a better Southern future and the presence of diverse cultures and communities while focusing specifically on Tennessee or a certain interest group of the collective South. For an audience of non-Southerners, I hoped they could gain awareness of groups working within the South not just to broaden their individual understandings of Southernness but so that they can potentially support these organizations' work in the future.

Though, like with any project, my original ideas developed and changed, I still focused on combating a singular narrative. I highlighted some organizations and leaders within my community in conjunction with historical evidence and personal narration. The project focuses primarily on Middle Tennessee and does not offer, by any means, an exhaustive study of the social progress movements in the area but instead examples to further encourage thought and exploration.

Methodology

Preparation

Once I solidified my initial ideas for the project in my thesis proposal, I began to consider realistically the people with whom I might be able to get into contact. I emailed a large swath of people who never responded, and a few who replied only once. With the ongoing pandemic and the toll it has taken on our collective mental health as well as the ongoing political strife, I realized the necessity in being more realistic with my goals and recognizing that some organizations were so busy that I couldn't expect them to have time to speak with me. This dwindled my number of episodes, but I was eventually able to acquire five people to interview within a feasible timeframe: Abdou Kattih of Murfreesboro Muslim Youth, Chris Sanders of the Tennessee Equality Project, Greg Reish of the Center for Popular Music, Bradley Hanson of the Tennessee Arts Commission, and Mary Watkins of the African American Heritage Society of Rutherford County.

Interviews

I maintained regular email and/or phone correspondence with each interviewee in the time leading up to the interviews, answering any questions they had. All my interviews took place over Zoom, and I set up individual meetings. A couple days prior to each interview, I sent the interviewee a series of general questions to prepare them for the meeting (Appendix F). These questions were intended to direct the conversation while maintaining that each individual had autonomy over the conversation. Despite giving them guided questions, I formatted this in a non-narrated interview style, as outlined in *Out on the Wire* (Abel 80), to put emphasis on the commentary of my interviewees.

Keeping the goals of my podcast in mind, I found it most valuable to let the talking points feel organic to further engage the listener.

For my first interview, I spoke with Abdou Kattih. Because he and I are already friends, the conversation was more casual and less focused at parts, and this prior acquaintance did make me able to ask more directed questions. I recorded this interview to my computer and recorded multitrack audio.

My interview with Chris Sanders was conducted in the same manner. The format of this interview was more straightforward, and Sanders worked through the material in a linear fashion. Seeing as his organization, the Tennessee Equality Project, is heavily involved in legislative activities, it was a fortunate accident that we held our interview on the first day of the new legislative session for 2021. This expanded the scope of our conversation to current events and news.

Unlike the other interviews, my interview with Gregory Reish does not appear in the completed version of the thesis. Because it was important to me that I allow the interviewee to discuss details they felt pertinent, it did mean that I occasionally did not receive material that fit into my thesis thematically. Also unlike the other meetings, he set the meeting up and eventually shared the recording with me, and we had a more deconstructed conversations than some others, largely because I have previously had Dr. Reish as a professor.

With Bradley Hanson, we actually spoke on the phone a week before the actual interview to ensure that he had a solid grasp of what I was looking for in the interview and to ensure that he could contribute valuable information. Unlike in the other interviews where we addressed more conceptual components of organizations and

advocacy, Bradley talked about the more technical innerworkings of the grant program. I recorded this call directly to the cloud, which unfortunately did not yield two separate audio tracks.

Finally, when I spoke with Mary Watkins, we had a solid two hours of conversation that I also recorded directly to the cloud. We did, at first, have some technical difficulties getting her on the call, but once we did, she covered a wide swath of topics, ranging from her childhood to her current leadership positions. There were some issues with the quality of the audio due to connectivity issues, but these problems were unavoidable since the interview had to be conducted over Zoom.

Research

Simultaneously to my work interviewing people, I was also conducting research to compliment the material of the interviews. Due to the restrictions of Covid-19, much of this research was conducted online using databases available through JEWL Scholar as well as from various news websites.

I was also fortunate enough to be able to visit the Albert Gore Sr. Research Center on MTSU's campus to personally comb through the OutCentral archives. Sarah Calise of the Gore Center was incredibly helpful in my research process, meeting with me over Zoom and sending me resources over the past two semesters, as well. I also spent time at the True Black exhibit in the library that details student movements toward racial equity, which benefitted my script writing.

Recording

For recording my own vocals, I used a Zoom H1 Handy Mic. All interviewees vocals were recorded through Zoom due to the constraints of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Script Writing

At the heart of this project is the reminder that words matter and how we talk about certain things controls how other people view them. This made the process of writing the script incredibly intensive. It was important to me that the tone was casual and inviting enough that the listener felt involved in the learning process but not so causal that the material felt ill-prepared.

I did not intentionally order the episodes in the order that I conducted my interviews; instead, I was aiming to organize them thematically. Following the introductory episode, I wanted to begin with what, in my opinion, is a ubiquitous Southern conversation: religion. The conversation about religion led naturally into a discussion on LGBTQ issues. Then the discussion of the historical presence of LGBTQ groups flowed well into a discussion on the historical presence of Black folks in country music for the episode on music and arts. This led directly into a discussion on groups advocating for racial equity. Once I decided on the order of the series, I was able to comb through each interview using an auto-transcription service called Otter.ai. The audio transcriptions for the episodes include auto-transcribed portions from Otter.ai that have been minimally adjusted, only to fix glaring errors and points of confusion (Appendices A-E).

Episode 1

Unlike the other episodes, this introductory episode required mostly my voice and ideas to direct it. Because I wanted to strike a personal chord with listeners, I opened with a childhood saying that I felt embodied the goal of this podcast: to present alternative narratives and separate the “stupid” from the “ignorant.” Though I did make my voice

less prominent in the podcast than I initially planned, I still wanted to introduce myself and give listeners background on who I am. Ideally, the listener can engage with my personal admittances here and feel welcomed to join me in learning. Also important in this first episode was clarifying what has historically defined the South in order to give context to Tennessee's larger cultural background.

Episode 2

For this episode, I chose to focus on religion because it seemed like one of the most obvious places to begin given what an influence religion has on defining a region. Like can be seen with episodes 3 and 4 as well, I open this episode with a story to engage the listener. Here, I chose the Scopes Trial of 1925 because it highlights the prominence of evangelical Christianity in Tennessee that dates back over a century. The Scopes Trial is also the origin of the term "Bible Belt," which is crucial terminology for discussing religion in this region.

As noted in my original proposal as well as in Episode 1, I believe it's important to address where common narratives of the South originate, and I wanted to address that here by admitting the prevalence of Christianity and Christian culture using statistics and personal experience. This flowed well into my interview with Abdou.

For this interview in particular, I did reorganize quite a bit of his dialogue to make the flow of the piece more cohesive. As I did with all other episodes, I also interspersed the clips of his dialogue with a few explanatory lines from myself, describing some contextual information to clarify his points.

Episode 3

Keeping in mind that the process for assembling these scripts was similar across the board, I structured this episode in much the same way, this time opening with a tidbit on Short Mountain in Cannon County. I then dug into my lack of understanding about the LGBTQ community growing up and used that to pivot into a discussion about the presence of the LGBTQ community in the Middle Tennessee area, using evidence from my Gore Center research. This pivoted the discussion well into Chris Sanders' interview, which is largely still in its original order, simply dispersed with more information by me.

Episode 4

This episode opens with a discussion on a recent public scandal involving a major country artist. I wanted to highlight country music especially because it's such a crucial Southern export and because Nashville is the country music capital of the world. I also argue that country music is emblematic of difficult themes across the music industry. I discuss some historically important artists in the country music genre to exemplify elements of country music that might be unfamiliar to some.

I then broadened the discussion to mention varying types of music throughout the South before bringing the discussion back to Middle Tennessee and posing the question of how the government promotes and protects different artforms in the state. In arranging this episode, I found it especially valuable to emphasize some more technical components of advocacy work that don't appear in the other episodes.

Episode 5

This episode opens with a history of MTSU's troubled legacy with Confederate imagery and then juxtaposes the common narrative with information of Black activist

movements on campus that fought the Confederate memorialization. I then highlight other community groups and efforts from the past and present before included long clips of audio form my interview with Watkins. She used very intricate storytelling in her interviews, and I wanted to honor that by not cutting her audio in the same way I did the more conversational interviews.

Editing

I edited each episode using Audacity for MacBook. The editing process included trimming and refining audio as well as adjusting the audio levels and reducing the room noise. I included music that was written and performed by James Touchton and myself to give the podcast an overarching sound. I also incorporated bits of songs and other audio to weave throughout the piece and give the ideas some sonic texture.

Result

This project has culminated in five episodes that explore themes of religion, sexuality, music, and race, specifically within Tennessee. The conversations it holds are not exhaustive summaries of all aspects of Tennessee culture but rather introductory conversations to engage non-Southerners, and anyone else for that matter, in more constructive discourse about Tennessee and the South that does not forgo the historical and ongoing positive contributions made to advocate for a more equitable Southern future.

There were numerous limitations while undergoing this project, the most visible of which being the ongoing pandemic. Out of safety concerns and limitations, I had to conduct all interviews virtually, which led to lower quality audio. It was also more

difficult to get into contact with people and organizations. Additionally, there were the general constraints of completing this project during my final two semesters as an undergraduate. Since this was a solo project, without a team of researchers or collaborators like podcasts often have, the workload was difficult to juggle while also navigating graduate program and fellowship applications, completing my coursework, and being employed.

Still, I feel this project is a strong example of my ability to envision and execute a large-scale creative project, and the podcast functions well as an introduction to diverse cultures and identities within Tennessee. As a listener, I believe the podcast is sonically engaging and informative and, by taking the format of a podcast, makes an important conversation accessible to a wider audience in a way that academic research papers or think pieces do not.

Conclusion

With this podcast, I hoped to contribute to efforts that expanded the Southern narrative, specifically within the context of Tennessee. I learned a great deal about Tennessee and about underrepresented communities through this work, and I feel especially invigorated to continue finding creative ways to advocate for my community. If I have the time, I see myself expanding this project to include more organizations and more historical narrative, and ideally, I would like to be able to use higher quality resources to rerecord some of the material. This research directly fuels my desire to work within Southern education, particularly in finding more accessible ways to promote diverse identities and cultures, and I could see this work continuing as part of my master's thesis. Most importantly, I am grateful that this experience has reminded me of

just how crucial it is to get involved and stay involved in my community. That isn't something I'm going to forget.

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Appendix A

Episode 1: Introduction

Kelsey: Growing up, if I ever tried to say that someone was being stupid or had said something stupid, my mother was always pretty adamant that there was a difference between being stupid and being ignorant. Ignorance, she said, was when you didn't know any better. But stupidity–that was when you knew better but didn't do better.

As an adult, I recognize there are a lot of complexities that this simple dichotomy doesn't address. But I do still think it gets to the heart of something pretty important: access to knowledge. If you have been surrounded by one narrative, if you have unknowingly been consuming a limited view of something, then how *would* you know better?

This is *Reckon with It: A Podcast Exploring Tennessee Cultures and Identities.*

My name is Kelsey Keith. I am a born and raised Tennessean. And I see a lot of this place that I think outsiders miss. My fellow Tennesseans and I, we see a different Tennessee. Maybe it's one that not everyone chooses to acknowledge, but it's here all the same. And if you're an outsider, I'm not going to blame you for not knowing any better. Instead, I'm going to try to learn you a few things.

You see, I hadn't ventured much out of the South until I went to college. And even internationally, people are always so intrigued, confused, even annoyed with the fact that I am from the South. Which is funny because I'm much more proud to proclaim that I'm

from Tennessee and pull up some pictures of my pretty little state than I am apt to proclaim that I'm an American, even if one does imply the other. And I started to wonder why that is that I'm so proud of Tennessee. Because, admittedly, we don't always put our best foot forward.

And it's for that reason, I think, that people have a lot of ideas about who I am and where I'm from, and they aren't really all that shocking, albeit sometimes upsetting. I mean, just think about what representations of the South get thrown out into popular culture. Like, just think on that for a second. What comes to mind?

I really do think it's important to consider here where our ideas of the South come from for the sake of all the people who aren't getting recognized in that common narrative. And I also feel an obligation, as a Tennessean myself, to give you a better, more rounded picture of my state, some examples of people or groups you might not otherwise consider. And my hope is that in learning to see Tennessee as the more nuanced place that it is, you might feel compelled to dig a little deeper into your conceptions of the South as a whole.

In fact, let's start with a necessary premise for this podcast. What is the South?

A lot of people have different ideas on this, but I want to reiterate something that Southern scholar and sociologist John Shelton Reed pointed out back in the 70s: that the South isn't solely a geographical entity so much as it's a cultural grouping, an identity

formed by various commonalities. In *My Tears Spoiled My Aim*, he says, we might try to understand the South "as the home of people somehow bound together by ties of loyalty and identification." So you have to think back in our nation's history.

When colonizers first came over to North America, the South became an incredibly important location for commerce and crops, like tobacco and, of course, cotton. You might have heard that saying about cotton being king. In the early 1800s, cotton, unlike tobacco, wasn't depleting farmland soil as ravenously, and textiles were in high demand. And no matter what you were taught about Eli Whitney and his invention of the cotton gin, it didn't change the fact the Southern economic machine still relied entirely on the toiling labor of enslaved African-Americans, so much so that the demand for cotton and the institutions established around it brought forth what was known as the Second Middle Passage.

Then there was, of course, the Civil War. Which despite what I was taught in my fourth grade social studies class, was not–and I quote– "about taxes and not slavery." It was definitely about slavery and the fact that unpaid labor was making a lot of people very wealthy. The secession of Confederate states played a huge role in defining Southern identity. First came South Carolina at the end of 1860, then in early 1861 came Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and finally Tennessee. These 11 states formed the official Southern secession. Of course, as you're aware, the secession didn't last, but the commonality that all these share in being part of a failed plan to start a new nation has had lingering effects that we

still see today. I mean, Mississippi just now removed the Confederate symbolism from their state flag at the end of 2020. There was also the Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863 which did abolish slavery in the states that seceded but, it should be noted, not in border states like Kentucky, Maryland, Delaware, Missouri, and West Virginia. It also didn't apply to the places where the Union army had already claimed victory in the South. Oh and it all obviously depended on the Union actually being able to win the war.

So after the Union victory, those 11 states were not only assimilated back into the country as the losers of the war, but they also faced widespread physical destruction. According to the Library of Congress, the majority of battles took place on Southern soil. So not only all of that but suddenly this government that they weren't vibing with in the first place tells them that they can't keep using the labor of enslaved people to fuel their economy. Rightfully so. But this is a very foundational anger. And on the other end of that, formerly enslaved people might have been free but they were still operating within a society that was built on the pillars of white supremacy.

This isn't an exhaustive explanation by any measure, but it does point at an initial grouping of the Carolinas, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, Virginia, Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Florida. And this grouping had and still has intensely resonating effects. And I think it's important to understand where cultural understandings of the South come from. But again, it isn't exhaustive. A few years back, a professor of mine said something to me that absolutely changed the way I look at history and how I

consume news. They said, “History is always an act of forgetting.” And there are lot of good people doing good work

With that in mind, the aim of this podcast is to make sure that in the mess of what the South has been and in the mess that it is now, we don’t forget the people doing the good, hard work. Those people shouldn’t be relegated to the shadows just because the people doing the bad things are big and loud.

There are plenty of other Southerners like me who are also trying to change the way the rest of the country and world sees us. And I want to be very careful not to dismiss the South’s complex history that is riddled with abysmal racist, sexist, classist, xenophobic, overall hateful and unforgivable institutions. Anyone who tries to defend the South with some sort of a “Yes, but” attitude has got it all wrong.

I think instead we need to start focusing on the people fighting the good fight, and along the way, maybe we’ll reexamine and reshape your understanding of the South. Here, I’ll be focusing on Tennessee, namely Middle Tennessee, because I couldn’t possibly do the entire Southern U.S. justice with the time I have. In reality, I’ll only be able to skim the surface. But as I mentioned earlier, I hope you feel encouraged to expand your understanding of Tennessee and of the South as a whole, to question when you hear singular narratives.

It's important to me that I share these stories, these people, these organizations with you, so that you, me, all of y'all listening, can not just know better; we can do better. Because Tennessee and its people, the South and its people deserve better.

Alright, now let's get to the good stuff.

Appendix B

Episode 2: Loving Your Neighbor

Kelsey: In 1925, journalist H.L. Mencken coined the term "Bible Belt" with his coverage of the Scopes "monkey" trial in Dayton, Tennessee. If you haven't heard of that case, teacher John T. Scopes was accused of teaching evolution which was unlawful in Tennessee at the time. He kind of pre-orchestrated getting caught in order to make a point and garner attention, which definitely worked. Though Scopes lost the case, the fundamentalist viewpoints of numerous Tennesseans became a national conversation. By and large, the term "Bible Belt" came to encompass the Southeastern United States, though the specificities of location have always been widely debated. These days, the Bible Belt is roughly understood to span from northern Texas to western North Carolina and from Mississippi up north to Kentucky, a region that, of course, includes Tennessee.

The Bible Belt refers to a region associated and, in some ways, dominated by fundamentalist Protestant Christianity. According to Pew Research Center, Tennessee is about 81% Christian, with 52% being evangelical protestant, 13% being mainline protestant, and 8% being historically black protestant. And if you're wondering what the differences are between evangelical and mainline Protestantism, evangelicals are usually focused on spreading Christianity–hence evangelizing–and often believe in a more traditional interpretation of the Bible. Mainline protestants are more prescribed to a modernist theology and more likely to believe that people practicing other religions can still reach salvation in their own ways. With all this in mind, Tennessee is absolutely another notch in that Bible belt.

So, what's important for us now is to consider how we think about religion in Tennessee. How do we think about how different faiths show up in Tennessee communities?

When we think about all these statistics, we might feel encouraged to view that the prominence of this religious culture defines this state. And I want to be clear, it definitely influences it. For one, it's literally built into our landscape. Tennessee alone has 67 megachurches, which are giant Protestant churches. We're talking room for thousands of people. And for each of those megachurches, there are likely dozens more Churches throughout the state, though it's hard to get a precise number. In fact, I remember in high school going on day trips with my friends and counting whether we saw more roadkill or churches. Both are pretty omnipresent. And just like in the Scopes trial, this fundamentalism affects education. Take for example that Tennessee public schools are only allowed to provide abstinence-centered sex ed. Students are allowed to opt out, but in my experience, opting out meant getting assigned busy work. This enforcement of abstinence programs comes from fundamentalist culture and lawmakers who themselves believe in fundamentalist type ideals.

I know that when I was in high school, I started church hopping in hopes that I would find religion that spoke to me. I would hang out with Methodists one week and then Baptists during another. I tried the non-denominational route, too. Myself, I grew up with what I'll call implicit Christianity. The fact that my family was Christian was an unspoken deal. I only regularly went to church for a few years. My family never talked

about faith or religion. I had Bibles, but no one ever taught me about them. When I went to vacation Bible School every summer as a kid, I was way more focused on getting to take a trip to see my grandparents than I was to be learning about Jesus. Maybe it was the number of churches on the highway I grew up on or the overwhelming pressure to be a practicing Christian, but it never really occurred to me that I could explore other religions, despite the abundance of resources around me and the numerous non-Christian religious communities in my area. I was very desperate to have some sense of religious belonging, but because the only community narrative presented to me was a Christian one, I never thought I could belong anywhere else.

But one group's religious identity is different from the community's identity as a whole.

When you look at the numbers, non-Christian faiths, like Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, only make up 3% of the Tennessee population. And while that's still a small number, if you were to do the math on 3% of the current projected population of Tennessee that would be roughly 200,000 people. In Middle Tennessee alone, there are all sorts of different houses of worship, from Buddhist temples to Jewish synagogues to Muslim mosques. But the numbers on these different types of places of worship are hard to find. There's no master doc. And you can't know what you don't know. So, I can understand how not being from here, it might be difficult to know how those of non-Christian faith move through our community if you only hear about the majority, the Bible belt side of things. But as a proud Tennessean, I have seen this firsthand, and it all started with a community potluck.

Abdou Kattih: My name is Abdou Kattih. I am an immigrant from Syria back in 97. I am from the Muslim faith. I've lived in Tennessee since I moved to the United States permanently. Living in Chattanooga and Murfreesboro. I am a father of five. I'm a pharmacist. I work here locally in Murfreesboro, married now for 19 years. I love doing community service, community work, and all that work we do is on volunteer basis. That's one of my personal belief that community service should be free, not something you get paid for.

Kelsey: I met Abdou before I had even graduated high school. I found out about these community potlucks that were happening in my town, where, genuinely, everyone would make a dish, and we would eat together at these giant picnic tables under a pavilion at the park. They were called “Love Your Neighbor” potlucks, and they were my foundational introduction to Murfreesboro Muslim Youth and the work they do within our community.

When I started thinking on the best aspects of my local Tennessee community, Murfreesboro Muslim Youth was the first thing to come to mind. But though they are a huge community force now, their beginnings were far from simple.

Abdou: As I stated, I was one of the individuals who purchased the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro property. We started that project with a vision of 10 to 20 years vision and that started the backlash in the community that resulted in an almost famous you can easily Google it.

Kelsey: The backlash was swift. In fact, even being from the outskirts of town and not very involved in the going-ons of the city, the commotion around the Islamic Center was dinner table conversation at my house. Which is southern for "the big news of the day." Even at 10, you could understand the horrifics of the anti-Muslim rhetoric that occurred. In January and June of 2009, the sign naming "the future site of the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro" was vandalized. A few months later, arsonists lit the construction equipment on fire. The following summer, a lawsuit was filed trying to get rid of the already approved building permit with people claiming that Islam wasn't a religion but a radical political organization that advocated for child abuse and world domination. The lawsuit failed, but people still continued to protest the Islamic Center, and in September of 2011, a man was arrested for calling in a bomb threat. And then there was 2012 election where Diane Black ran her campaign for Congress on anti-Muslim hate speech. And she won.

Abdou: I was in the heart of that when it was happening. And naturally or unnaturally– I'm not sure–you retract. As individuals who are being attacked, you retract. You just pull back from the community. You go to your own kind, for lack of other words. You go to your own bubble that is comfortable. And what happened when I stopped to realize toward the end that our kids were watching, our kids were seeing this, and they were considering it normal. And we start seeing our children not performing well in social life in school and universities, having issues blending with others, looking at others with with with an enemy. Not not somebody likes me, not somebody that that welcomes me in a

city I was born in. And that was strike one for me. So when I stepped out of the board of the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro, in my mind was like, how do we make a difference? How do we correct this? And I start looking back at the controversy, and I did something called timeline I created a timeline for the events in my head and start writing it down. And I realized something personally is that, during the controversy, we were looking at the skies but not seeing the stars. We were just seeing the void. And I realized the sky was filled with stars, people in the community who showed love, empathy, care, stepped forward went out of their comfort to show love and care, and I'd like–we felt to see this and even more miserably. We failed the show our kids the stars. We were so focused on the darkness, we failed to see the light. Then start to happen which was personal to me. One of my friends in Raleigh, his son, you know the story of Chapel Hill shooting back in time, in February. I was actually already home. It was evening and I get a call. And it was the uncle of Deah, who said, "They just called Deah." And I was like, "What?" And Deah was the child of one of my friends, and he was newly married, two months married. He was having a dinner with his wife and her sister in his house, and the neighbor knocks on the door and they open the door and he kills all three of them in the house. And I went to the funeral. I flew in the next morning. I was there in the morning, spent it with the family for the funeral and so forth. And my personal relationship there my personal notice is how many people showed up to the funeral. And I was asking a lot of them like, "Why are you here? What brings you here?" And I realize hey, one of them would say, "Hey, Yusor has been feeding the shelter for the last two years, every Sunday. She comes in every Sunday. She provides food, and she fed me several times. And other guy, "Hey when I applied to school to UNC, Deah helped me settle here. He helped me move. And

the next person and the next. And I was like, these kiddos were touching lives constantly in their life like seemingly without without making effort. They were like, everything around him, they took part of it. They will not in any way an organized force, but they did not let any opportunity to go do good pass by them without them taking part of it. So flying back here, I start to think about the controversy, what this is. And I had a vision to create some sort of an organization independent from the mosque that will actually provide opportunities for the youth to see the community, to be part of the community, and for the community to see us. And in the process of building that bridge. help our kids be proud of who they are as Muslims, as Americans, as Murfreesboroeans, Tennesseans, whatever whatever title they want to carry, be proud of all of it, and more importantly see it as a blend of who they are not not a conflict.

Kelsey: Murfreesboro Muslim Youth officially began in 2015 and is registered as a nonprofit organization. In 2020 alone, the organization donated more than 15,000 meals to community members in need and helped more than 67 families in urgent need with things like rent, transportation, bills, and so on. In the aftermath of the Nashville tornado in early March of 2020, the group spent roughly three weeks transporting meals to organizations on the ground in Nashville. With the Covid-19 pandemic, the group has been working tirelessly to contribute masks, food, and other basic needs to the community. And even though Eid celebrations were cancelled in the face of the pandemic, the group delivered hundreds of gifts to local Muslim children. And this was all just 2020.

Abdou: Right now we have a board of directors that has seven individuals. I am the only one in the board of director that's over the age of 23. The youngest, we have is 17 on the board. And then we the way we do our work is very organic. Our work is organic. We have a WhatsApp group for our youth that has about 180 of them. We have a texting group with about 300 supporters. And if there's something coming up, we just text the group, put it on WhatsApp, and who steps up steps up. If they don't, we just start calling people individually to help. Generally, what happens is, let's say you're a high schooler, you are in college, you are, wherever you are, and something comes up around you and like, you know, "My friend here who plays soccer, he was in a car accident. And what can we do?" I said, "What would you like to do?" And they said, "Can we send them flowers?" And now we can send them flowers, and that's a simple act. The next one would be, "Hey, you know, the shelter here in town is in need. They have, I saw something in the paper that they're in need of, like, female care packets. Can we help?" Say, "Yeah, you want to do that?" "Yeah, I want to do that." "What do you think you'll need?" "I think it'll cost us like 300 bucks. And I need at least one helper." "Okay, you got $300 and helpers. You want us to announce it and so forth." So it became more of empowering them to make things happen. And sometimes we present the idea and they say, "I love doing this, I enjoy doing this kind of work, let me do it." So in the process, they're learning how to manage money. They're learning how to raise money, they have to they're learning how to order stuff, how to ask for stuff, how to package packages, how to communicate with organizations. And in that process, they're building a relationship with an outside, with somebody's outside their bubble, whether it is a shelter that is Christian based or that is an atheist based, whether it is the Rainbow of Murfreesboro, the

LGBT community, whether whatever it is, there were lots of bridges being built. And then I think in in, in a way, our youth right now we have the Pearls of the group, which you don't see, they're girls and boys between the age of 10 and 15. They're not visible, they don't go to community service. We just make them, make sure they have fun. Like we host them for dinners. We take them skating, they just go walking, hiking a park and get together and dance, whatever they want to do. And that group is kind of the group that would feed to replace the current team, the crew that's running the group. Now one of the blessings, we're having, nobody leaves. Like they get older and they just don't leave, they stick around, like you call for innovate, you know, to host dinner for the young girls, and they were like, "Why are you not hosting one for us? We're not that old, you can still have us come over there." That's been a blessing. But that's that's it. They quickly Who are we we are compromised from? Now one of the things we pride ourselves onm everything we do is open to everybody. We don't have any restrictions. Our board meeting can be attended by you tomorrow, if you want to attend one of them. There's no restriction. There's no limit. There's no secrecy in anything we do. There's no requirements for anything we do. So a lot of our supporters are not from the Muslim community. A lot of the youth that volunteer with us are not from the Muslim community. And that's been helpful on many levels to us. And I think to the Murfreesboro community.

Kelsey: Abdou is very adamant that the work he does and the work the Murfreesboro Muslim Youth do is never about recognition. You'd be hard pressed to get him to talk about it at all or to be able to find information about their accolades online. But they were

invited to a Harvard symposium, received honors from the NAACP, and are constantly garnering local attention.

Abdou: I mean, it's nice for the kids to be recognized every once in a while, so I, this is internal, like I tell the kids all the time this, and they laugh when I tell them this. Like whenever one of them feels recognized and really proud. I usually give them the broom telling them go do something that will humble you. Go get the mop and mop the floor, go clean the house or do something that will humble you. Because whatever good that just came your way is not because of you.

Abdou: I think what I'm most proud of how we always have an overflow of volunteers. It sounds petty sometime, but I know a lot of organizations. Another thing that I'm most proud of, and this is, they'll hate me for saying this. We we spend we, we probably average about $90,000 in expenses a year. And about one third of it comes from the youth.

Very often like you will have, like when we have a fundraiser for rent or whatever, probably at least one third would be from 16, 17, 18 years olds. And I think that takes certain level of conviction to be able to just I'm going to give. . . I remember. Last year one of our young boys made a donation out of the booster was this boy said this is my first paycheck. So these are the kind of things that personally make me, there's a certain level of conviction in their heart for that kind of work.

Abdou: I think vast majority of them are born and raised here. Are we Southern? I would like to think of us as a mixture of like, a solid wall with southern parts, you know, that middle eastern part, that Pakistani part that. I mean, within our youth group, our kids speak probably close to 10 languages. It's incredible. And several of them are very fluent in these languages. So they quite a few of our kids, I mean, almost, I would say vast majority of our kids are bilingual.

Kelsey: The kids, teens, and young adults truly are the heart of Murfreesboro Muslim Youth, and while anyone is welcome to join, their Islamic faith is foundational to their work.

Abdou: It is the one of the verses we always talk to the with the kids is, is a very, very famous verse or saying from God, he said, all the creation are the servants of God, and the most beloved to God, or the most beneficial to his creation. And that's a general statement. So the environment is a creation of God, Earth is creation of God, animals are creation, God, humans are the creation of God. So if you want to be most beloved to God, be, you need to be the best of his creation. So everything stems from that everything around it goes from that. And it's in our, in our mind, in our, you know, in my personal mind, and in my faith, I believe that, that love to be loved. And to love God is the ultimate objective for me. And if this is the way to it, then this is the way through it. And it's important for me to recognize that it is unconditional. So I'm going to be nice to the cat that lives in my house and at the stray cat in the street. I'm going to be nice to the person that is good to me. And if I get a request tomorrow from somebody who sued the

Islamic center of Murfreesboro for crisis maintenance, they will get the same help that the other person received does not matter. Because it's not about who they are. It's about who I it's not about doing what, you know, when I like to do. It's about doing what is right to be done, even if it's against what I as a petty human would want to do sometimes.

I think we are meant to connect, we are meant to be good to each other. And I think all these are core human values. And I strongly believe that faith does not come to teach you human values. human values were created in you When God created you. Faith comes to perfect it to give it deeper purpose than what you initially believe. And I think what that's what people miss is like you need before you become a person of faith, you need to visit your human values. And make sure you have them and make sure you live them. And then you can claim faith.

Kelsey: I want to thank Abdou Kattih for speaking with me. You can find ways to get involved by donating or volunteering with Murfreesboro Muslim Youth at murfreesboromuslimyouth.org.

Appendix C

Episode 3: Y'all Come Out Now

Kelsey: In 1979, a group of folks descended upon Short Mountain in Cannon County right here in middle Tennessee. These people called themselves faeries–that's f a e r i e s– and they were part of this counterculture movement started by activist Harry Hay. He encouraged gay men to quote "throw off the ugly green frog-skin of hetero-imitation." Short Mountain became one of a handful of these refuges throughout the world, though it is arguably the most famous one in the country. And in the past roughly 40 years, there's been next to no protest from the Cannon County community. In Southern terms, everyone seems to be minding their own.

I've lived about a stone's throw from Cannon County for most of my life, yet I had never heard of Short Mountain until recently. The people I asked within my own circle of friends, even those who themselves identify as part of the LGBTQ community, hadn't heard of it either. And though Short Mountain is a very purposefully private community, it still brings some questions to the table.

So what's important for us now is to consider how we think about LGBTQ folks in Tennessee. How do we think about their presence and their history?

I want to start off by saying that I'll be using the term "LGBTQ" for continuity as the organization I'm highlighting at the end of this episode also uses this specific version of the term.

There are certainly a lot of upsetting stories that come out of the South about the lack of safety and support for members of the LGBTQ community. And in a lot of ways, it relates to that religious presence that we talked about in the last episode. I don't want to say that Christianity is the only religion that can be unwelcoming to this community, but being that Christianity, especially evangelical Protestantism, is such a huge cultural force here, Christianity is footing most of the bill.

I fully grew up in this atmosphere, and for myself and others like me, most of us have internalized this negativity at some point or another. I remember the time a relative found out a friend of mine was gay and acted so thoroughly disgusted that they just kept shaking their head and wincing. There was another time, back a number of years before the 2015 Obergefell v Hodges supreme court case that legalized gay marriage across the country, that a relative of mine listened to a news story about gay marriage and then proceeded to laugh about the notion and say that it just doesn't make any sense because the parts just don't fit.

It horrifies me to think back on all of that. And also to consider that I didn't really understand that LGBTQ people were such an integral and present part of the South. But in that regard, it also took me quite a few rounds of watching the Southern classic *Fried*

Green Tomatoes to even question the intimate relationship between Idgie and Ruth. [audio]

It's important to acknowledge that the LGBTQ community has always been here, just oftentimes without high-profile recognition. At the same time, getting the hard facts and numbers can be difficult because so many folks were forced to hide their identities under the oppression of an unaccepting government and climate. Here in Middle Tennessee, in Nashville, we know that there were dedicated gay bars as far back as at least the 60s. There's evidence of gay pride weeks in Nashville in the following decades and record of Tennesseans traveling to the national marches in the 80s in D.C.

There were actually a number of LGBTQ publications in the later part of the 20th century that give us some really interesting details about daily life within that community. On my own campus at MTSU, the Albert Gore Research Center actually has an entire collection of LGBTQ memorabilia from the past few decades that they received when the local organization OutCentral went defunct.

In that collection is a fascinating weekly magazine called DARE. Not to be confused with the drug abuse resistance education program, DARE was a Nashville-based magazine that debuted in 1988 calling itself the gay and lesbian newspaper from the heart of the American South. And listen to this detail from their first issue about how they got their name:

“Where’d we get it? Remember that old Oscar Wilde-ism ‘the love that dare not speak its name’? Well, we DARE.”

Within getting too in the weeds, that quote was actually written by Lord Alfred Douglas in his poem “Two Loves,” and is believed to be in reference to homosexuality and the intimate relationship that Douglas and Wilde shared.

But in getting back to the magazine itself, it covered a lot of stories of interest for the LGBTQ community. There were articles on recent issues facing the community like the harassment of a trans individual at a local Kwik Sak, monthly calendars detailing upcoming local events like book clubs, gay and lesbian parents’ support groups, HIV support groups, and more. There were listings of restaurants and other local LGBTQ friendly joints like Juanita’s. The early issues also heavily emphasized the June 1988 Pride Week, which was always advertised quite brilliantly with the tagline “Y’all Come out Now, Y’Hear!” The “come out” part was always underlined too. One advertisement for Pride Week ‘88 said, “Don’t miss Nashville’s first Lesbian and Gay Pride Parade. Meet at Fannie Mae Dees Park, Saturday, June 25, 12:30pm. Be there or be straight.”

From DARE, we also see that there were things like the official Miss Gay Tennessee Pageant and even a big LGBTQ friendly country music show called The Dena Kaye Show that happened at a place called The Chute. DARE was a huge source of information, but unfortunately, it only lasted about 2 years until 1990.

In the same Out Central collection, you can find what was called the pink pages. Like the green book that was created to help Black Americans while traveling, the pink pages were a guide for Nashville's gay friendly businesses and community resources that used the tagline "support the businesses that support us!"

Even here at my own university, our LGBTQ rights organization has had a long and storied history fighting for representation on campus. In 1988, Daniel Webster, John G. Weaver, and Richie Smith created the MTSU Lambda Association in response to a homophobic news article that was being published by a writer for *Sidelines,* the campus newspaper. MT Lambda was the one of the first officially recognized LGBTQ organizations in the state of Tennessee, and it immediately became a safe place for students to freely express their identity. It was due to the hard work of MT Lambda's Uniform Equality Committee (UEC) that was founded in 1995 that sexual orientation and gender identity/expression were added to MTSU's non-discrimination policy in 2001 and 2009 respectively. The group continues to serve as a refuge for LGBTQ students and create events that cement their belonging in collegiate life, like the LGBT+ College Conference that has been occurring annually since 2014.

But even still, while LGBTQ folks are an integral part of our community, Tennessee is still listed by the Human Rights Campaign as being at "High Priority to Achieve Basic Equality" on the 2020 State Equality Index. The LGBTQ population of Tennessee is currently estimated to be about 223,000. But we need to keep in mind that that number is probably lower due to folks who are not ready or who are afraid to proclaim their

identity. Tennessee has no laws prohibiting discrimination against LGBTQ folks in housing, employment, or public accommodations. The state has no laws that address discrimination in education against LGBTQ students. There are no restrictions or bans on so-called "conversion therapy." There are no transgender-inclusive health benefits for state employees and no bans on exclusionary insurance policies against transgender healthcare.

I know all of these things about my state government. I've seen the protestors at Pride events. Every weekend at the farmer's market, I still see that Westboro Baptist type guy yelling across the town square. I see all of this, these really harrowing facts, and I ask myself how is this going to change? Who is fighting for LGBTQ rights and protections under the law?

So I reached out to an organization that I've seen moving throughout the community: the Tennessee Equality Project (TEP).

Chris Sanders holds a Master's in Divinity from Vanderbilt University, and he also previously served as the president of the Nashville LGBT Chamber of Commerce and as a founding member of Nashville's first gay rugby team, the Nashville Grizzlies Rugby football club. He has been president of the TEP and the TEP foundation since 2013.

Chris Sanders: We were founded in 2004. And at that time, the marriage discrimination state constitutional amendment was working its way through the General Assembly in

Tennessee, if you want to amend the Tennessee constitution, it has to go through the legislature a couple of times, and then it goes to the voters. So that was the reason we were founded, to fight that. But in 2005, which is the first legislative session that we faced after we were founded. In addition to marriage issues, anti LGBTQ adoption bills were also being filed. So we've had plenty of reason to stick around since our founding, of course, the marriage discrimination amendment did pass the legislature and then was passed by the voters and became a part of our Constitution, and was not nullified until the Supreme Court ruled in 2015. But we faced a raft of other issues, like adoption, discrimination. But now the focus a lot of the focus in the legislature is on attacking trans youth in our state, attacking their ability to play school sports, attacking their access to gender affirming care. You know, there have been plenty of reasons to stick around and continue to do work, unfortunately. But we also do work at the local level. When the Rutherford County Commission a few years ago, introduced an anti marriage equality resolution, which wouldn't have had legal force, it would have just been a slap in the face. We organized a large group of people to come to the courthouse in red to oppose it, but also speak against it. And in the end, the states rights provisions and the marriage equality provisions of the resolution were stripped out. So, you know, occasionally you get some good success at the local level. I don't think those county commissioners were expecting that many people in Murfreesboro to show up. It is a diverse community with people from a lot of political views. And there are a lot of examples of when we organize, we can actually achieve some succe ss. And while at the state level, some anti LGBTQ bills pass, most don't. Because people do organize and work very hard against them. So we came about because of an attack we've stuck around because of an attack but also

because the need is there. And we think it'll continue to be there in Tennessee for a while. Our challenges are very real.

Kelsey: When I spoke with Chris back in January, it was actually the first day of the new legislative session in Tennessee. And first up on the docket was a bill that would limit transgender students' ability to play sports and maintain their gender identity.

Chris: I mean, it doesn't use the word transgender, it doesn't say, hey, gotcha, trans kids can't play sports. It says you have to play on the team consistent with your original birth certificate. And in Tennessee, since right now, you can't change the gender designation on your birth certificate. That really puts trans kids in a rough spot. Even though a huge number, I mean, this is not a huge number of the kids who want to play sports in our state. But it is, it says to every trans kid in the state, whether they play sports or not, you are less than I mean, this is a stigmatizing attack on trans youth. And you should never use the law for such purposes.

Kelsey: If you're like me, you might find yourself wondering what this advocacy actually looks like on the ground. And apparently that really means spending a lot of time up there on Nashville's capitol hill, taking notes about what's going on, what lawmakers are saying and doing during sessions. In a lot of ways, the TEP is acting like a mitigator between the government and the people, specifically the LGBTQ community and its allies.

Chris: Well under non COVID times, I'm there a lot of the time, and we have a lobbyist who's there even more of the time. We'll be monitoring and doing our days on the hill virtually this year. Because ethically, I can't ask anyone to go down there and expose themselves. But yes, we have people who are monitoring the committee's in person, under normal circumstances. We have our lobbyists who works those bills. We are doing action campaigns, as the bills are moving through the committees and onto the floor. We fight them every step of the way. We work with organizations who bring business voices to bear. We organize clergy voices against these bills, you know, the media response as a part of it. But a lot of the work that I have done traditionally in again and non COVID times is not only to be there, but to be traveling around the state, trying to get people from every part of Tennessee to fight the bills. Because as someone who lives in Nashville, most of the legislature doesn't really care what I think because of the political difference between Nashville and a good chunk of the rest of the state. You know, when they hear Nashville, they click off the box and say, okay, liberal. What they need to hear are the voices from people in Johnson City, Murfreesboro, Jackson cookeville. You know, Martin, Tennessee. So I spend a good part of the year under normal circumstances, really meeting on a regular basis with those folks. I mean, for example, before COVID we had monthly meetings in Rutherford County, we were always involved there. Now that's only an hour drive for me. So that's pretty easy. But Rutherford County is one of the fastest growing parts of the state. Murfreesboro is the sixth largest city right now. But Rutherford County, I think is maybe the fourth or fifth largest county in the state. So it's important to be in places like that, because we've got to have people from Rutherford County contacting their own state legislators, because that's who they care about hearing

from. So we believe, you know, the potential is there. To organize in any part of the state. I'll give you another example. I don't know whether you've heard of Morristown have friends from Hamblen county up in East Tennessee. It's a small, smaller county in January 2017, they also faced an anti marriage equality resolution in their county commission. They organized a lot of people in red, and they beat their resolution to and one of the reddest parts of the state. So organizing in these places gets you wins at the local level. And it helps you at the state level as you put your strategy together against this awful legislation.

I don't think you can take tactics from the coasts and plop them into Tennessee, you might be able to use some of them. But it is not a given that just because we're working on LGBTQ issues, we can do it the same way that they've done it in Los Angeles and New York, or Chicago or wherever. So I start with the assumption that there is a regional difference. breaking that down further, what does Southern mean? In Tennessee, it also means Appalachian for part of the state, rural for part of the state and delta for part of the state. And those are important in terms of religion, you know, no state is a religious monolith. But we are one of the few states, maybe three or four that are over 50%, white evangelical Protestants. And that subgroup of the general population in the country is one of the most anti LGBTQ. Not every evangelical and of course, younger evangelicals are changing. But our religious ways, our food ways, our music ways. I mean, if you look at the kind of music that was founded here, not only in East Tennessee, Nashville, but also in Memphis in the Memphis area. Yes, we play an important role in southern music, Southern food. I mean, Dolly is the paradoxical symbol of our state, who represents the

old traditions in music, but new ways of getting along and loving your neighbor. I mean, she is the best of Tennessee in many ways. She's not the only person who's the best of Tennessee, but she's one that people anywhere in the country, maybe even the world would get automatically. We're lucky to have her. I'll just put it that way. I think a lot of Tennesseans would lose hope without a symbol like Dolly. But we are Southern. In the way we think about family and the way we think about religion, whether we are religious personally or not. The way we think about food, the way we think about what constitutes neighborliness, our percentage of gun ownership in us. I mean, yes, all those things contribute to what counts now as a definition of Southern I think I mean, geographically, yes, we're Southern. But so is Miami in Miami and Tennessee couldn't be more different culturally. Yeah. Right. I mean, Miami is far more Southern literally than we are. But in terms of the way symbolically people think about the South very different.

Kelsey: This is a big point for Sanders, this idea that the way we approach progress, especially for the LGBTQ community in the South, is very unique to its place. And I think that's incredibly important to remember, not just looking forward but looking back as well. Because if you think that LGBTQ activists haven't been working hard here all along, then you're wrong. They've been here; it just looks different. Has looked different. These big cities up north and out west are their own thing. But, like Chris says, Tennessee is also its own thing. Each region is its own thing. Even each town. And there are some heavyweight factors in Tennessee as well, like religion.

Chris: Because religion plays a role in our politics, we have found it beneficial to have strong connections to faith communities. We respect anyone, regardless of their faith, or whether they have no faith at all. I mean, everybody's welcome to volunteer and work with TDP. But we have organized a number of clergy over the years to help oppose these anti LGBTQ bills. And we found their voices are very important. And interestingly, in 2019, when we organized clergy, we organized so many that it caught media attention. And it was that tactic that caused Taylor Swift to take notice and make her contribution and give us some notoriety that year. She thought that was smart. I mean, I don't think she's originally from Tennessee, but she lived a good chunk of her life in Tennessee and maybe moved when she was a child. And she absorbed the culture and knew what was going on. And she thought that was smart. And I'm glad she did. But again, you know, we respect anyone, regardless of your religious beliefs or no religious beliefs at all. We're just setting realistically to engage in Tennessee, we need to do that.

The big foundations, the big donors in our country who have fueled LGBTQ work, have only recently discovered the South. Now they are discovering it now. Because we're all that's left, I guess, as a sort of frontier. They are but years of lack of investment. Coupled with, you know, voter disenfranchisement, and on and on and on, have really left us in a tough spot. So if you're in another state, stop those stereotyping jokes, move to sympathy and solidarity. And give encouragement, and whatever form that takes, I mean, whether that's advocate on our behalf, or, you know, invest in the south, or whatever it is.

Kelsey: But progress isn't just about making sure that people on the outside start to change their perspective. Making progress is also about making sure that the people here are wholly invested in their community.

Chris: The best activists I've seen in this state have always said, I love my city. And I love my state. I mean, they they mean it. And more than the place, I mean, you can love the hills or the rivers or whatever. And, and that's important too, because our environment certainly needs protecting in the state. But you must love the people and you must feel like they're [worth] fighting for. And if you're going to do statewide advocacy, you've got to travel the state. traveling the state is far more in part important than attending out of state conferences on activism. And advocates can get in the trap of, oh, I've got to go to this fabulous training that's taking place in Houston. Next, that that's all bullshit, I'm sorry. You if you aren't studying your state, if you are not getting on the road, and really learning about what is hurting LGBTQ people, or women or the African American community in Tazwell, Tennessee, or Martin, Tennessee, or wherever, you're not doing your job, you've really got to learn. But you've also got to give encouragement, and you've got to help organize those who want to be organized. And the great thing is, LGBTQ people are in every part of the state and allies are in every part of the state just waiting to be enrolled in the in the movement.

Kelsey: Though the Tennessee Equality Project has been around since 2004, Tennessee still has a long way to go when it comes to protecting and celebrating the LGBTQ

community. And although that's precisely what makes the TEP so crucial, it can also sometimes feel like being up a creek without a paddle.

Chris: Well, you know, we lose in the legislature sometimes, and it hurts a lot. It hurts that your state government is coming at you. And I would say to anyone who wants to get involved. I'm not inviting you to go on. Hi. You know, and watch rainbows and waterfalls, I mean, I wish we could, no. But there's some rough stuff, and you will have to face occasionally some ugly things. But there is so much joy in fighting for these things together with people who are in your town, but friends that you never knew you could have across the state, the best people are members of our community, mothers of trans kids, in the most rural, the most suburban, the most urban parts of our state. And when they come together, it is so affirming. And you will gain so much whatever issue you want to take on in Tennessee, you will gain so much from those connections, and feeling the encouragement of fighting together. You will lose sometimes, but you can bear it with the great people you know who are fighting with you.

People are rightly, extremely frustrated, and disgusted. And you can do two things. When you're disgusted, you can look away and go. Or you can look harder. And if you want to be an advocate, sometimes you've got to look harder, and be courageous enough not to look away and not just throw your hands in the air. To survive. We all have to look away once in a while and throw our hands in the air. I mean, we need to give outlet to our response. But if you want to make change in a state like Tennessee, where you're not

gonna get by election an automatic change, you have to look and study and we need people Who can be passionate, but not look away?

if we don't start working, organizing, jumping in when we can, we won't get anywhere else, we'll stay where we are. And I don't think most of us want that. So don't ever feel like you're too late. Jump in when and where you can where you're comfortable. Realizing though, again, that things are going to be ugly. You might have to take breaks for self care because of that. But jump back in when you're able, because you're needed. That's that's the message I would want anybody to know. If you're in Tennessee, we need you. The equity Alliance needs you. Planned Parenthood needs you. I mean, all these organizations need you. Someone needs you. I guarantee it.

Kelsey: I want to thank Chris Sanders of the Tennessee Equality Project for speaking with me. You can find ways to volunteer with or donate to the TEP at tnep.org.

Appendix D

Episode 4: The South's Got Somethin to Say

Kelsey: On January 31st earlier this year, country singer Morgan Wallen caught national attention and scandal when he was caught on camera saying the n-word while walking home in Nashville. The video leaked only a couple days later, and the industry response flooded in. His current singles were taken off country radio, he was stripped of his eligibility for the major country awards shows, and he indefinitely lost his recording contract with his label.

Even after all of this, Wallen, who had just put out an album on January 9th and was arguably one of the biggest acts in country music at the time, stayed at the top of the charts. At the time I'm recording this now, Wallen's album has been at the top of the Billboard 200 chart for nine consecutive weeks. It seems his actions didn't deter his audience.

So what's important for us now is to consider how we think about music and musicians in Tennessee. How do we think about art and artists?

I use this example from Nashville and from country music because country music is one of the South's biggest exports, and Nashville specifically is considered the country music capital of the world. This Morgan Wallen story is a pretty emblematic one for country music but also the industry as a whole. And we can't sweep this stuff under the rug. But even though we can't and shouldn't deny all the bad aspects of country music, we don't

want to let it overshadow the people in the genre who are working to make positive social change. There are a lot of other great people making country music and also a lot of other types of music as well.

That's something that can be hard to know, though, even growing up down here.

I primarily grew up on country music, and we're not just talking like my parents played it in the car. There was always music playing at my house. For the most part, I grew up listening to 90s / early 2000s country. We also listened to a lot of what people call classic country, the Willies and the Dollys and the Waylons, Cash. And then, as I was getting to be 6 or 7 until right about the time I became a teenager, I was very invested in the country music that was playing on the radio, you know, the current hits of the genre. But then I stopped.

So, for some backstory on why I quit listening to country music:

In 2015, there was this scandal called Tomato-gate, also referred to as salad gate. Essentially, this radio big shot and consultant named Keith Hill got caught at a convention saying that radio stations should be careful not to play too many female artists and instead focus on the big-name male artists who were at the time guys like Luke Bryan and Blake Shelton. Hill said those male artists were the salad; female artists were just the tomatoes.

This obviously created an uproar and plenty of backlash, even from people like Rush Limbaugh. But there's a reason I noted that he simply "got caught." Plenty of people in the genre say that kind of stuff all the time. Men make patronizing songs about women, and they get airplay, and airplay is still sacred territory in country music. But women have to fight tooth and nail to get heard at all. So to my young self, this was all particularly unappealing, and I thought, whether consciously or not, that I couldn't continue loving something that did not represent or acknowledge me.

But that right there shows my privilege and hints at the troubled nature of country music in the first place. Country music has always been so white and so straight and so conservative that, because those were all qualities of my youth, I never questioned it.

Yet there have always been people pushing those limiting and discriminatory boundaries of the genre. Historically, Charley Pride is perhaps the most prominent example. Pride was a Black man from Sledge. Mississippi, born on the cotton farm where his father was a sharecropper. Having spent time as a baseball player for the Memphis Red Sox and in the Army, Charley Pride turned to country music, the music he taught himself to play by sitting in front of the radio with a guitar as a child. With the late 1966 release of his song "Just Between You and Me," Pride became one of the biggest acts in country music up until about 1984. Between 1969 and 1971, he had 6 straight number one singles. And between 1966 and 1984, a span of 18 years, 51 of the 54 singles he released made it to the top 10 of the charts.

Pride's legacy is largely unmatched when it comes to industry stardom within country music, but he also stood on the shoulders of another incredibly important Black man in country music history: Mr. DeFord Bailey. Bailey was one of the most important performers of the seminal country music show, the Grand Ole Opry, from 1926 to 1941. In fact, he's even credited with changing the program's name from the WSM Barn Dance to The Grand Ole Opry. He played harmonica and toured with all sorts of early country music stars like Uncle Dave Macon and Bill Monroe. His musical stylings were largely shaped by growing up in what he called Black hillbilly music, also known as the African American string band tradition. And the African American string band tradition was actually one of the biggest influences on the formation of country music as a genre.

Now, the conversation about Black artists in country music is still a very modern and intense conversation. Even beyond discussions that question what constitutes country music like with the release of Lil Nas X's "Old Town Road," the mere presence of Black folks, especially Black women, in the genre puts the racism and misogyny of country music on display.

Mickey Guyton is currently the only Black female artist signed to a major country label. She just made history as the first Black woman nominated for a Best Country Solo Performance Grammy. Her 2020 tracks "What Are You Gonna Tell Her" and "Black Like Me" garnered her a lot of attention within the genre and outside of it. The latter of the tracks is Guyton's personal version of the country music "3 chords and the truth

standard" as it details her experience being Black in this country and alludes to her difficulty breaking into the country music industry. Here's a clip of the song: [audio]

Despite being on Capitol Records since 2011, it took her until 2015 to release her debut single "Better Than You Left Me," which despite initial interest and airplay only reached 34 on the country music charts.

It's more than obvious to state that Mickey Guyton faces backlash both for being a woman and for being Black. Yet she has made it clear that those components of her identity will absolutely be a focus of her music, and her activism is a key part in the ever-so-slowly changing face of the genre. Still, she faces constant racism and harassment, and when she spoke out about that Morgan Wallen incident, she received such a heightened amount of hate that she left social media for a few days. Yet what she was doing was pointing out that it isn't surprising considering Wallen's record with problematic behavior or even considering the country music industry as a whole. She was terrorized just for speaking up.

Even in the face of all of this, Guyton continues to be a voice for the underrepresented in country music specifically, and her activism is getting attention from the Grammys and other prominent music forces. She'll even be hosting the Academy of Country Music Awards in April with Keith Urban.

These artists are only a handful of folks who have been historically integral to the genre and advocates for progress in the country music industry. And while country music is a well-known and crucial example of Southern music, a lot of other genres have important roots and communities in the South, and I'd even go so far as to say that the American South is the birthplace of American popular music.

[audio] This is from the 1995 Source Awards where Andre 3000 of Outkast, in the midst of the East Coast/ West Coast debate, stood up for the Southern hip hop scene.

I mean just think about the influence of OutKast, Goodie Mob, Lil Jon, Arrested Development (the group not the show), and so on.

Or the more recent importance of Atlanta trap music with Future, 21 Savage, Gucci Mane, Lil Baby.

Think about the importance of the Delta blues on country music and rock and roll. Jazz that was born in New Orleans. All the blues and jazz and rock and roll in Memphis. And then back in Middle Tennessee, there's a big hip hop community in Nashville that a lot of people don't even know about. Historically speaking, too, there've been the Fisk Jubilee Singers whose music became internationally acclaimed and saved Fisk University from dire financial straits, when the historically Black university struggled financially in the years following its founding in 1866.

There's also, of course, the Jefferson Street Music Scene, which was a crucial place for Nashville rock music, and subsequently American rock music, roughly from the 40s to the 60s. It's where giants like Jimi Hendrix and Little Richard got their starts, and I'll encourage you now, if you're ever in the area, to visit any of the numerous museums and historical sites in Nashville and learn more, like the Jefferson Street Museum or the new National Museum of African American Music.

So all of this got me wondering. Clearly musicians and artists are all creators and therefore creating some sort of living archive of their work. And there are organizations and museums too. But since music and the arts are such crucial forces within the state and generate a lot of attention and tourism, I wondered what the government was doing to protect and encourage all the different forms of art down here in Tennessee.

Bradley Hanson: Well, my name is Bradley Hanson. I'm the director of folklife at the Tennessee Arts Commission in Nashville. But we work all across the state. I've been in that job since 2015.

Kelsey: According to their website, the mission of the Tennessee Arts Commission is to cultivate the arts for the benefit of all Tennesseans and their communities. Their vision is a Tennessee where the arts inspire, connect and enhance everyday lives.

Bradley: The basis of being a folklorist is being deeply curious about cultures, your own and others. Often, it means being comfortable with people who are much older than you,

listening closely, asking good questions. And that if you can, if you can take that and end up in a position where you're surrounded by cultural communities that you're that you're consistently interested in, then he, you know, you're great, you're golden, because that's, that's the that's the, the meat of the work, you can take it and turn it into documentary films, or podcasts or festivals or concerts, but it starts with fieldwork. That's what defines this, this, this discipline is, we don't gain knowledge. I mean, this is an oversimplification. But the knowledge we seek is not in libraries might end up in libraries. But first, it's with the people.

Kelsey: Though the idea of the government having some sort of artistic provisions doesn't seem at all radical to us now, the idea of an arts commission is still fairly recent, all things considered.

Bradley: We recently I guess, three years ago, four years ago, celebrated the 50th anniversary. So it was founded in 1967. And it might be a little hard for people like us to imagine. But there was a time when the role of government in society was viewed a little more broadly, maybe than it has been in recent decades. The National Endowment for the Arts, the Federal version of an arts agency was founded only in 1965. So in the Johnson administration, as part of the Great Society, the idea that we would have a country where the federal government supported arts. And I don't know the precise mechanisms. But shortly within years, you know, the states started to create their own versions, because they could get funding from the NEA. Part of what the NEA did was, was plant seeds across the country for other arts Commission's. So the Tennessee Arts Commission came

about 1967. I have the mandate right here in front of me the law, but essentially, the mandate and this is important, was to stimulate and encourage the presentation of the visual, literary, music, and performing arts and to encourage public interest in the cultural heritage of Tennessee. So the cultural heritage piece is where the folklife program can really claim a authorization in the mandate. You know, it's it's it's law that we preserve and educate and advocate about cultural heritage, now, the folklife program itself. folklife programs were also more or less created at the encouragement of the National Endowment for the Arts, beginning in the late 70s. So 65 into the late 70s, you started to get more interest in traditional arts around 1976, the Bicentennial, there were all kinds of movements in the federal government and otherwise to protect and preserve American vernacular culture, folk life. And Tennessee had one of the first state folklorists. In the late 70s, the person did not stay in the job long. And then the whole thing went dormant until 1984, when Robbie Cogswell took the job. And he had it until 2014. So he was the long term, he wasn't the very first. A lot of people say that he was the first and then annoys him because there was one before him. But he was essentially the first state folklorist. Across its history, the Arts Commission has been a granting agency. They've done other things. we convene conferences, we've we've put out publications, we've put out curriculum for schools, there are special projects that they've done throughout the years. And we could always propose any any number of special projects that fit our mission. But the consistent thing is the grants. And my predecessor Roby really got the grants program going for folklife.

Kelsey: But, of course, grants mean money. And although you might think "eh well can't the government just, ya know, make more money for itself," commissions like the Tennessee Folklife Program have to get their money somewhere.

Bradley: And here's an interesting thing, in some states, there are politicians who might not see the value in using taxpayer money to fund the arts. Hard to believe I know. In Tennessee, one of the creative ways that we have been able to have a very steady solid funding mechanism is through the sale, especially license plates. So believe it or not every license plate that is sold in the state of Tennessee, pretty much, there might be a few exceptions, some portion of that license plate goes to us. And it's already granted out. And it's it's upwards of $5 million a year. None of that is a tax, no one has to buy, especially license plate, it's a choice. So none of that money is taxpayer money. And as long as that funding, that funding channel is preserved, we're in very good shape. And other states have done that. No one has done it as successfully as us our overall annual budget is eight or $9 million, and five, five and a half of it, I think, comes from the sale of those specialty license plates. So it's significant. And one, it, it makes us sort of entrepreneurial, in the sense that we want to sell more of them. And we work, every organization that gets a grant from us, whatever scale, we have some encouragement, and, depending on the size of the grant, a requirement that they promote the sale of those plates. And so you'll see in the Nashville Symphony program, you'll see an advertisement for the special license plate. And that's because of us. And that's because that's where they're getting a lot of their money. So for a southern state, especially Tennessee is really well positioned. I do think our legislature has been supportive of the agency and of that

funding mechanism, there always are interests that want to take some of that money for themselves and do this or that as these things go, but it's been very well protected. So if if everything else got stripped away, we would give grants, and we would give grants to the to the most important cultural institutions, as it is we have very robust set of activities that we do, and I'm sure we could use double the money, but we're okay. We're, especially through the pandemic, I think the agencies is doing very well.

Kelsey: So clearly–in case you haven't figured out yet–grants are a pretty big deal, but if you're like me, you might be a little confused on how the process actually works.

Bradley: So we have many grants programs, maybe too many in some ways, but they all have a purpose. But the basic grants or project grants, you apply for a project, and you have to be a nonprofit organization or an entity of government to do this. This is, on the one hand, a very wide, these categories are wide open, if you're one of those things, if you're not one of those things, it's not wide open. And so that's a whole nother concern is helping organizations that are more informal, become formalized, so that they can apply for grant money. And we're not unique in that way. And that's, that's typically how grants are given to entities of government or nonprofits. But we have money that's earmarked for rural counties money that's earmarked for urban counties, we have an arts Access Program, that is specifically for arts programming that targets specific categories, ethnic and racial minorities, military aging youth, we have a wide variety of arts education programs, that I don't even quite know all of them myself. There's so many. In folklife, we typically work with the rural arts projects and urban arts projects, and then some

operating support. But when I say we have 60 grants in folklife, it's across four categories. Most of them are in rural or urban project support, meaning they can apply for up to about $9,000 in an urban County, and $15,000. In rural county, there's more money earmarked for rural, these are matching grants means they have to have a one to $1 match, which is another barrier for some organizations. You know, if I want to apply for nine, I've got to have nine in the bank or be able to raise nine. So that's the basic way that you know and so the types of programs, a lot of festivals in folk life, contests, fiddle contests, we fund HoLa Hora festival, we fund the Native American Indian Association powwow for 30 years. We fund the Chinese New Year in Nashville. We fund the Grandmaster fiddle competition, I'm just listing things that come to mind but a lot of old time traditional music crafts, and then a lot of the new immigrant traditions, to the extent that they've been able to become anchored to a nonprofit organization like HoLa Hora Latina in Nashville, I mean Knoxville, excuse me, and the Hispanic Family Foundation in Nashville. and several others I could give you a listing of and as a kind of a background on that. There's a there are two people that work in folklife myself and then another person always, that other person used to be a woman named Dana Everts Bain. She was an assistant. It's not the right term, but she was a partner to Robby Cogswell. My predecessor, her background was in, her dissertation research was in Mexico. She's a Spanish speaker. So when she came to Nashville to do this work, she started what was called is called the Latino and immigrant initiative. She did survey field work, to, to locate artists, venues, art forms and events in Latino and immigrant communities all across the state. And she did incredible work, a lot of which is somewhat referenced and documented on our website, there's a wealth of it in our archive, but she was able to bring

many groups into the grants program. I mean, talk about starting from nowhere, and then getting a group into a formal grants program where they're getting government money, and matching that money and leveraging their own resources. And we're building on that work. She did it for 10 years or so she retired A few years ago, but it continues. I mean, it's strange to talk about all this now after a year being at home. But in our in the real times. We're out there a lot traveling to go find these people find these groups and try to get them into the grants program. We don't, I know in folk life, we're very proactive. If we see that we have 55 applications. We don't want there to be 53 next year, you know, we're growing the program and we're actively coming across look at this event in Jackson, Tennessee, get them in the grants program. And it works.

Kelsey: For the folklife department, it's important to stay engaged in the community so that they're aware of more people each year who will benefit from grant funding.

Bradley: There's a snowball effect. And obviously, you have to have a starting point. But if you can find, you know, if you see a flyer for one event, or if you know of one nonprofit, and you find a really good sort of cultural insider at that nonprofit, they'll lead you out. And then it becomes almost endless. I mean, one of Dana's big, not regrets, but just a reality was she could, you know, no one could do all the work she wanted to do. No one could follow up on all the folks that people told her about. It's amazing what's out there, and what will unravel. Now, Facebook's incredible, and the internet's incredible. We do a lot of Evangeline Mi is the name of the of the woman that's in that job now, and especially during COVID. We have this kind of game or this belief that if we can imagine

it, we can find it, we can almost manifest it. And we have an apprenticeship program. This is different than the grants program. This is for individual artists, a traditional artists applies with an apprentice to pass on an art form. And I could talk a little bit about that. But we'll often think of an art form. I don't want to give it an actual example. But let's say this is kind of halfway joking. But barbed wire maker. If we say there's got to be a barbed wire maker in Tennessee, you search till you find one. And you do they're out there. These things, you got to sometimes go to the depths of the Internet, and maybe newspapers.com. But we have found just incredible things. We've worked with shoe cobblers, hat makers, Chair makers, barrel makers, basket makers, musicians of all kinds. needlework, the traditions are incredible. And that program was created in my time, specifically to try to help rare and endangered traditions. That's the terminology we use. Not every tradition is as rare or endangered as the next. But some of these traditions have one person, one person in the state left that does them. And we've worked with them. So I mean, you know, I'm also lucky that there's been all this work done before I ever showed up. But you could drop somebody down. And this is how these early folklorists did it, they show up in town, go to the post office, or go to the grocery store and say, you know anybody around here that does woodwork. And you are off?

Kelsey: So with all this talk about finding artists and creators and how much money is earmarked for rural and urban communities, I was a little concerned and started to wonder how the department itself prioritizes diversity.

Bradley: Well, you know, I'll say, first that we we do we, we say that we will, okay, and we believe in it in all these programs, but that doesn't mean you accomplish it, you know, you can go out with all the right intentions. But there are still barriers, barriers that are built into again, we can find the coolest thing in the world, the coolest event of some, you know, maybe brand new immigrant community. And if they don't have a nonprofit, or they don't have an entity of government, we can take photos and get to know them. But we can't connect them to our resources yet. So when you reach a certain level, everybody's included, right come apply for a grant. But not everybody can get to that level. And it's a difficult, it puts us in a difficult position. We have program directors at the Arts Commission in all the art forms. I've mentioned the literary arts, performing arts, visual arts, so I work in folk life, but there are others that work in other areas, and everyone has their own style of how they they do technical assistance, as we call it. I can only talk about how we approach ours in folk life. We don't form nonprofits, you know, we're not equipped to sit people down and say, become a nonprofit. So you can apply for funds from us. There are other agencies that do that. I'm not necessarily state agencies, but other nonprofits that help people become nonprofits. We have started to do a little bit of that I've never started a nonprofit, I don't really know how to do it. I mean, I've I know pieces. I don't really know the order of the pieces, but I have helped people get going with that. So that's one thing that we we do. I think what we do well in folk life is we keep track of all this. I mean, if I have a list of organizations that have never applied for a grant from us, that we stay in touch with, we check in year after year, periodically see what they're doing. Are you ready to come into our program? What can we do to get you in? have you achieved your nonprofit status? All of that is just kind of being trying to be

aware of what's out there. But how do you know what you're missing? I can't say that we're totally inclusive, because there are things happening that we don't know about. I can say though, for the first time, for example, the Kurdish community, which is really large in Nashville, they've applied and and two years in a row. So we're now working with the Kurdish community. That was a community for years. We tried to get into the grants program. Now they're in. You know, it's not this cutthroat, kind of, well submit an application, and we'll see, you know, we're there on the background, building scaffolding building relationships, we're not perfect at it. But it's a part of our it's a part of our value system. And I'll say, in the apprenticeship program, every year that we've done it, we've had an immigrant artist, or you know, first or second generation Tennessee, and, of course, African American, Native American, Anglo American, we just don't accept otherwise. One thing that we don't do is put out a call for applications, and then sit around, it doesn't work. I mean, and I know other organizations struggle with this, but we actively recruit, we actively search out. traditions that are going to be that are going to add something totally different than what we've ever done before. And that reach into areas of the state where we've never been before, or our art forms that we've never had before. And our program has grown, it's been noted for its diversity, again, it could be more diverse, and it will be in time. But if we just sat back and opened up a call for applications, it would not be diverse, it would not be diverse, because it would not be as diverse. These are not hard applications, but they're not easy. They're they're mostly done online. But we allow people to handwrite them, which is amazing that we allow that we fought for that, we'll get on the phone, and you can dictate your answers to us, we'll type them up. Part of equity and inclusion is, in our belief system, and again, I mean, myself

and evangelist and other folklores is to, yes, lean toward people. But I mean, lean toward people do what you got to do to get them in the program. Because you know, they'll succeed. You know, I wouldn't bring someone in who wasn't going to have a good experience and being able to do the project, it's Can I get them over that threshold of the application process. So we go, we go above and beyond, I can say, maybe maybe in a way that's different than some of our colleagues. But it's worked for us. And I've always felt like if there was ever any, you know, funding individual artists is something that state agencies have gotten away from, because it's just, you never know, if that artist does something that gets in the news. It's just better to fund nonprofit organizations, because that puts a barrier between your state agency and the actors and in the process. So we had to fight hard to get our agency to agree to pay these people individually. And but I always believed that once they saw the artist and the diversity and the diversity of art forms, and the success, they would absolutely love it. And that's been the case. And so the program has been funded at higher and higher level.

I think that from taking a broad perspective without talking about specific cultural practices, there's a strong sense of heritage in Tennessee Heritage's. And that's a big container that can be filled many ways, but the containers there. And so if we can make our case and show that fiddle music, and you know, Honda and woodcarving are all intricate parts of Tennessee today. That goes a long way works, it works. It's a compelling argument and people get it, who might not be who might not ever think about Honduran wood carving, or, or or or Panamanian, dressmaking, or any of these kinds of things that we have funded. And we put them on an even keel. You know, think about the

press release. You know, when we we have an apprenticeship program, we put out a press release, everything's there on a list. There's something powerful about a list, when there are things on that list that are you know, Buck dancing, blues, gospel, wood carving, Panamanian dressmaking, right, Todd trees, embroidery, Palestinian embroidery we have funded, it puts them on kind of an even keel. And hopefully what, and we say this in our press releases, this is what Tennessee looks like today. This is a picture of Tennessee. And that's, we do an exhibition every year typically, of these artists photographs that we take, we invite them all there. Most of them come, it's not mandatory, because it's in Nashville. But you'd be amazed, you wouldn't be amazed. But some people would be amazed to see how these artists respond to one another, when they realize they're all doing the same thing in their own ways, which is perpetuating these traditions that are crucial to their identity. One thing Another point that I try to make that helps get to this is that folklife is not history. It's not of the past. Some of it's very old, but we work with people who are alive and traditions that are alive today. And therefore the work that we do is about the future. It's not about the past. So we're we're invested in what Tennessee looks like today, what it will look like in the future. We keep that at the forefront of what we do. And that means both preserving help trying to preserve coopering, which is barrel making one of the oldest traditions in the state in some ways that is directly through one family. But also, Manuel Delgado is a third generation luthier guitar maker but also a variety of other stringed instruments whose grandfather started the business in Mexico City. He's now in Nashville and is a major figure. So we try to subtly but directly show what this date looks like today. And if that goes somewhat against your, your, the general you person in the world's preconception of what a tourist

tour or you know, a heritage tour through Tennessee, what will that include? Well, that's that's not what we do. We were doing something a little different than prepackaged stereotypical versions of Tennessee heritage. heritage is an important word, but it can be loaded with all kinds of connotations. So we try to do that we have the mechanism to do it in that program and that apprenticeship program and we have the mechanism to do it in our grants program to accept we got people have to cross that threshold of being organized. And that's you know, you can look at the That's sort of an imposition of what the dominant culture thinks you ought to be able to have to do to get public funds, is fill out paperwork and become a nonprofit and fill out an application and compete in a process. Maybe there's a better way, maybe there's a much more inclusive way. But we don't have that way yet. And we try to meet people where they are. But get them get them through the door.

I mean, I can say good things about our agency. It's not, it's far from perfect. And it's, you know, we are a government agency, but we're, you know, terms of gatekeepers. Of course, we are gatekeepers. And and we represent a gatekeeping kind of process, you've got to fill out this application, hit the submit button, that's the first gate. But we're kind of in or out in the middle of it, you know, we pride ourselves and I can honestly say that we're constantly on the phone, no, no group that can, is eligible to apply should ever not be able to apply for lack of access to the staff. Because we'll we'll spend hours with you on the phone to get that application in. Once you read, you know, meet, meet the minimum eligibility requirements.

Kelsey: So what happens once a group meets the eligibility requirements and applies? Their application goes before a panel. Panels are groups of six people who score and select the eventual grantees. Qualified people with expertise in say rural arts or something similar can apply to be on the panel and serve for a range of years, from 2 to 3 years, up to 6. Panelists are selected on their professional, geographical, and demographical range. It's important that any given panel is well suited for interpreting that year's batch of applicants.

Now, groups can apply for up to $100,000 a year, but that doesn't necessarily mean they'll get it. These grants are what's known as matching grants, like Bradley mentioned earlier, so if the groups don't have a way to come up with the money, they won't be awarded it. Oftentimes, groups will apply for smaller amounts that they will actually be able to match.

The process is, of course, not without its challenges. But though Bradley deals with those challenges, he also recognizes that there are some special advantages to working with this commission in Tennessee.

Bradley: I do think that you know, historically, when Americans think of folk culture, they might think of Appalachia, they might think of the south and that's not fair. There's folk culture everywhere. And and their hat, you know, the Midwest, the New England, the West everywhere, there are rich legacies of folk culture, but it probably has been for a variety of reasons. More foregrounded in the, in the, in the south, you know, if you look,

for example, you know, the one cut off that purist folklorist, look at is the introduction of electronic mass media. You know what, what started to affect regional, super sub regional musical traditions was radio. You know, one thing they were, of course, traveling music troops and tent shows and vaudeville and Medicine Show All kinds of things that cut across regions and brought music from here to music from there. But electronic mass media really did it. And musical traditions were rapidly transformed. Radio came much later to the south in terms of its its saturation of the population. So the the kind of myth of isolation, that the mountain people were isolated till 1987, you know, or whatever, whatever the myth is, well, there are certain sociological truths to that in in industrialization, mass media. And, and maybe there are other intangibles that, that maybe it's in rural areas more than urban areas that people have, it's almost like the past is closer to them than it is for some people. It doesn't feel as distant in certain places for any number of these reasons we've mentioned. And I think there's a lot of that in Tennessee. And not just in not just in the mountain, east, you know, the West is very rural middle, Tennessee has a great sense of history. And so that probably does lend itself to a program like mine. But I've got to do the other thing, which I mentioned, which is to not make this about the past. We're not preserving the past, how do you even do that? What does that mean? You know, we're preserving something that's here. Now, we're not doing Renaissance revival. You know, that's, we're doing things, we're working with traditions that almost in every case, the continuity is unbroken, doesn't mean they haven't changed, the traditions haven't changed. But that thing has been passed. It's not a revival of something that died out. It's a it's a, it might be down to one person, but these are

things that are here now. And I say that these things are not important. Because they're old. They're old, because they're important.

Kelsey: I want to thank Bradley Hanson for speaking with me. You can find out more about the Tennessee Arts Commission's Folklife Department at tnfolklife.org.

Appendix E

Episode 5: Family Trees

Kelsey: In 1951, Middle Tennessee State College's first official mascot made an appearance in the Midlander, the college's yearbook. That mascot, who had begun to be incorporated into college events in 1950, was Nathan Bedford Forrest. Now, it's important to know that Forrest wasn't just some mascot; he had been a real person. In fact, Nathan Bedford Forrest was a Confederate general and a founding member of the Ku Klux Klan, a group committed to violent intimidation of Black folks. He even served as the Grand Wizard, or the leader, of the group. And he had amassed a fortune as a slave trader.

Now the college was founded in 1911 , more than thirty years after Forrest's death. And when he became the` mascot, it had been more than 60, almost 70, years since he died. So as he became a prominent symbol on campus, so did other Confederate imagery, especially the Confederate flag. When Olivia Woods became the first full-time Black student in 1962, this marked the beginnings of change on campus. The college would soon receive university status and officially change its name to Middle Tennessee State University in 1965. But what was also happening, especially with the small but growing number of Black students on campus was the resistance toward Forrest's legacy. The image of an ambiguous Confederate general remained as the mascot, but in 1968, the Forrest mascot was officially brought to an end. . .supposedly. Because the following mascot was a St. Bernard dressed like an infantryman named Beauregard, presumably referencing another Confederate general. Then they changed his name to Lord Byron.

Then they tried Old Blue. Then in the 70s there was another mascot which was just a general on a horse with the focus on the horse. And then eventually it got phased out and there were some more changes and somewhere along the way we got to the current mascot of Lightning. Keep in mind that the official school seal also had Nathan Bedford Forrest on it up until 1978. Even after over fifty years of protest, the Forrest name is still on the JROTC building on campus, despite ongoing cries for the name's removal.

So what's important for us now to consider is how we think about the question of race in Tennessee. What parts are we highlighting and giving airtime?

There's a really interesting Vox article by Jemar Tisby from 2019 about the choice he made as a Black man to live in the deep South that eloquently states, "As long as there has been oppression, people have resisted it." Which is what I really want to focus on here. Because, for example, when those of us in the Middle Tennessee area hear about that MTSU history with Forrest, we often hear only the horrible details. And like I gave them in opening part of this episode, the details are often posed to make you ask, "what the hell?" As you should. And I want to be clear, I am, in no way, advocating for the downplaying of reality. Because people should absolutely know these things. But we also need to stop leaving out the details of the folks who have resisted. Because progress means recognizing the contributions Black folks and other people of color have made to make Tennessee a better place for us all.

For example, if you're from the area, you might know some of these details about MTSU, but you likely haven't heard of Sylvester Brooks, a Black man from Memphis, TN who was attending MTSU in 1968 when he wrote a piece for the campus magazine, *Sidelines*, titled, "'Dixie': What Does It Mean?" It was so impactful that it created months of controversy on campus.

Sylvester Brooks became an influential leader in MTSU's Black student movement back in the late 60s/ early 70s, one of many similar movements that happened across the U.S. at that time. MTSU's Gore Center actually recently held a True Black exhibit in the library on campus that highlighted the numerous contributions of local Black leaders and students, especially Sylvester Brooks.

And that's just one example of historical resistance against racial injustice.

In the Southern part of Middle Tennessee, tucked away up on Monteagle, is the original site of the Highlander Folk School, founded by Myles Horton, Don West, Jim Dombrowski and others. Their first focus was organizing unemployed and working people and they stood against segregation in the labor movement.

It was their dedication to ending segregation that served as an indelible force in the early Civil Rights Movement. They helped lay the groundwork for many of the key initiatives in the movement, like the Montgomery bus boycott, the Citizenship Schools, and the founding of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. You might recognize some

of the people who passed through the School: Diane Nash, Marion Barry, Rosa Parks, James Bevel, Martin Luther King Jr.

The Highlander Folk School was pivotal not just in Southern progress but national progress as well. And though the government shut them down, they persevered and have continued their efforts for justice in Appalachian, Deep South, and immigrant communities.

In the broadest of terms, these are examples of Tennesseans fighting the good fight for racial equity. And there are so many examples, some we've already discussed like Fisk University and the Fisk Jubilee Singers. Fisk, the oldest higher education institution in Nashville, dating all the way back to 1866, was originally founded to educate freed enslaved folks after the Civil War. Fisk educated famous students like Congressman John Lewis, Ida B. Wells, W.E.B. Du Bois, and more.

Middle Tennessee is also home to three other incredibly important Historically Black Colleges and Universities: American Baptist College, MeHarry Medical College, and Tennessee State University.

And when we look to recent years, especially at 2020, we'd be remiss not to mention groups that are actively fighting racial injustice, police brutality, and voter suppression. The People's Plaza is a group that, starting on Jun e 12th, 2020 as part of the national response to the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, occupied the space known

as the legislative plaza outside of the TN State Capital Building in Nashville. They occupied it as an autonomous zone, reclaiming it and naming it Ida B. Wells plaza in honor of Wells's role as a freedom fighter. They originally declared 3 goals: 1. Defund the police, 2. Demilitarize the police, and 3. Remove Confederate symbols across the state. Even beyond those original goals, they have developed a mutual aid network and held virtual anti-racist education events.

There's also another incredibly important group called The Equity Alliance that advocates for justice and opportunity for Black Americans and other communities of color. The Equity Alliance was founded in 2016 not long after the presidential election with the intent to encourage voter engagement in communities of color, out of frustration towards social injustices and police brutality.

Here's a clip of co-executive director Charlane Oliver discussing the origins of the organization: [Audio]

And back down here on my own campus of MTSU, the struggle for racial justice continues. Because Nathan Bedford Forrest's name still stands on that building. And for that matter, the Rutherford County courthouse is dedicated to him. These issues that we face on my campus and in my town directly reflect the struggles we're facing as a region and as a state but also as the South. And though we have to make sure we are talking about these injustices and taking the time to educate ourselves on history , we have also got to make sure we are looking out for those people who have been doing the work and

putting in the time to fight the racial injustices that have for so long been rooted in Southern soil.

And it doesn't always look like sit-ins or rallies. Sometimes it also looks like reclamation of identity, and I want to introduce you to someone whose work in my local Rutherford County community has proved invaluable in understanding the history of Black folks in this area.

Mary Watkins: Okay, first of all, I'll just say my name is Mary Patterson Watkins. And I've lived in Rutherford County all of my life. And and I did I mean, I just grew up here. I mean, I did some traveling not that much. But I've lived here in Rutherford County all my life and I have lived in Murfreesboro. And when I got married, I moved to Murfreesboro. And then when my father passed, I moved back out here with my mother on her homeplace and everything. So I've been here since 2001. So that's this is just where I am. And that's where I've been all my life. And with that being said, You know, I am the president of the African American Heritage society. I went to school I here where I'm at now we have what we call Bethel school with a Bethel school, to Holloway High School, and from Holloway high school, I went to Middle Tennessee State University, and I've gone to other places, Tennessee State, I've taken some classes at Tennessee State. I've taken some classes at UT Martin, in Martin, Tennessee. And, but most of, you know, of course, my living I've always stayed here. And I worked in Nashville for 23 years, at the

for the state at the Clover Bottom developmental center. And then when they closed the school, then I transferred to Riverdale High School. And that's where I retired from.

Kelsey: As a former educator herself, Mary Watkins recognizes the impact that her education had on her journey. But for her, her own path to education wasn't a simple one.

Mary: Yeah, education, all my boys, they did graduate from MTSU. And I pushed education, because I know it made a difference in my life, of going to school to get an education, even though it was hard for me, because like I said, coming up, my father, what they my parents were sharecroppers and so was their parents because that was the way of life for African Americans back in the day. And the only role model we had was, was teachers, because that was one of practically, only the profession that I knew, you know, coming up was a teacher, because we weren't able to with that what no African American police or there was no African American firemen. There was no African American. That was, I remember when my brother got sick or something a doctor came to our house or African American doctor, but we didn't have all those different people in our life coming up and everything but in the cottonfields we used to have stay and pick cotton, and, and everything. And I remember where Siegel farm I used to pray and ask for Lord, please let it rain so I could go to school because we did not have that foundation in the elementary and that's where the foundation is built. And I tell people all the time, you don't get to high school and not be able to read. It happened way down somewhere else. You know, and that's where the nine of us you know, we had some deficits. It was more of our environmental thing. Not cognitively wise, it was a environmental thing.

Because of the fact we couldn't go to school, we had to stay out pick cotton you know, in the summertime, we chopped the cotton, we didn't in the summertime, we didn't have to stay out of school, because we chopped cotton in the summertime. But when we got ready to pick it, it was during the school time you start when school started right the last of August September to DC to January. I mean we were picking cotton you know, let's The weather was bad and we couldn't pick it was raining or something we would get to go to school Other than that, we had to stay out of school until all that cotton was picked and and you know, it's sometime you know, we have so many acres time you get through, pick it in and then you look back it's all white again, you have start all over again. And most time we picked it at least three times. So and you think that's why we didn't get a good education during elementary school. You know, I prayed and I did I wanted to in the time that I did go to school. I mean, I just worked hard memorize, I didn't want to be embarrassed, you know, we just stand up and do spelling and stuff, you know, whatever. And sometime I couldn't pronounce the words, but I could spell it, you know, I would try to sound it out. Because I didn't want to be embarrassed. A lot of the time I was out spelling that was the other kids that were school every day, because they didn't pick God. You know, one time, they did let school off six weeks, but they realized everybody didn't have cotton. So they cut that out. So they didn't have time when you could stay out, you know, where they would have that, and everything, but I just didn't want to get embarrassed. So I would work two or three times as hard as they did. So but then as I went on and went into high school, I got to go to school year round, because my dad wouldn’t make us stay out of school as much once you got to high school, and everything. And then like I said, when I went to elementary, then I went to high school,

so once I got that, you know, and I stayed out two years before I went to college. And I found myself doing the same thing that my parents were doing: day working, cleaning, domestic work, I don't know if you know what that is going cleaning people's home, and babysitting. And that's what I done. And I did it all the way through high school, I stayed out one day a week to do something like that, because my parents didn't have money, you know, to do certain things to, I did it to pay for my lunch, for special doing, for graduation to pay for my gown, my picture senior pictures, I pay for those through the work that I did staying out of school and babysitting on the weekend. So and then from that when I graduated from high school for two years, like I said, I stayed out before I went to college. And I said, you know, they told me to make sure I got my high school diploma, you know, but here it is, I got it. But I'm doing the same thing that my parents are doing. And when I finished at the time, we couldn't get factory, we couldn't do factory work that came in later on. Because I remember my sister, my older sister was start working at a factory, you know, and stuff. But at that time, you know, you couldn't even do that. And and that's another thing when I go into the schools, and that's the first day they go on, they asked me, when do you start? How were you when you got into art? Well, I let them know, because my parents were sharecroppers I tried to explain to them what that was. And we didn't have all the technology and stuff that they have now. We we didn't have, I remember when we first got a TV and everything got a TV. So we didn't have a lot of that stuff coming up. So we had to entertain ourselves, but I believe it's something that's in our family, you know, you have gifts and talents, you'd be surprised at some of the things that you do. It's been handed down and you don't realize that until, you know you start doing research and and stuff and I look at my father he could draw you

know, I had a couple of siblings that could draw to but that's how we entertain ourselves. We would look at you know magazines or different things like that and we try to duplicate it and and all that kind of stuff. We will make cars out of wood we could sell like everything. Those handsaws, we get a piece of wood we make a car and I see some of those cars that we made, I said we could have been reached a long time ago. You see in magazines now, where people do that stuff, making it out of wood, and stuff and these things selling for $30, probably more now, you know, and we were making those things when we were really young, and everything cuz we had to entertain ourselves because we didn't have all of this. And we didn't sit around in house and play those games and stuff in the summertime, we wasn't in cotton and cotton and working in the garden. And so we were actually outside playing in the yard building houses, and all that kind of stuff, driving around on our knees going to one house to supposedly to another visit and our neighbors, you know, and all that kind of stuff. So it was nine of us, like I said, it was nine of us. And then when my older siblings got out, it was still like five of us, you know, right there at the same age, you know, we were still doing this stuff, and, and everything so and that's the guy we got into that art. So we start using that. And then when I got into school, I started doing that to teachers. Sometimes one my homeroom teacher made me mad because she found out I could draw, I had to help with the bulletin boards, you know, I want to go into PE. You know, I could play ball do all that. And Matter of fact, I did play ball. After I got out of school, I didn't play in high school, I played in doing PE and stuff I was could really play basketball. And the lady wanted me to be on the team. But I didn't have transportation and stuff. Because I live in the country, you know, to stay after school to practice and do all that. So I couldn't do that. And everything, but that's

how I got into art. And I loved it so well. And everything so and when I got out, and I always wanted to be a teacher, I wasn't the smartest person in the world. And I wanted to be a teacher. But I said, God, that's what I say, God works things out for you. I wanted to be a teacher, that's all I ever wanted to be because that's all I ever saw. And I babysit it all the time. And I used to play with the babysitter, but I would just play games and do stuff with him draw and all that kind of stuff. So when I got out of high school, and that's what I went to mtsu. So as I went into the art department, so that's how I got into art. But I was so far behind, I was the only African American in the art department at the time when I went because there was only a few of us in 1966, that was just very few African Americans that were at mtsu during that time, so I was the only one in the art department for a while before some other African Americans came in, and everything. So I was so far behind, because we did not have it in our school, you know, and everything. So I had to catch up even in there to know how to actually draw one item in comparison to another item to me, draw my thing was was drawing, not looking at the size something else and compared to something else. So I had to to do that. And we took all different as in when I first went in, you take all kinds of art sampling, you know, drawing, painting, we took jewelry making, we took pottery, which I ended up really loving pottery on the wheel and stuff. So that's how I really got into it. And then after, like I said, When I graduated from college, I didn't actually teach art, per se, but I use art within my in special ed, because a lot of stuff that you ordered out of catalogs and stuff you had adapted to fit the child's need the students need. So I knew how to do that, because of what we had done coming up making stuff. So I could adapt, that adapt that material to fit to fit that individual person's need. I knew how to break stuff down. And, and everything and I use art with

students. Even if they couldn't use or have a brush, I taught them how to use the elbows, how to use their hand to you know, to do art, rather than if they couldn't hold because some of them longtime their fine motor skills wasn't good that I hand coordination. So I use my art within my teaching and in everything and then when I got out, when I retired then that's when I really got into my art and really start doing it. That's when I started getting into doing the art camps and and all that.

And after that, I became a consultant for the Rutherford County school system for up until 2014, so I have, I've retired completely since 2014. And now I just do volunteer work. Like, say, the president of the African American Heritage Society, I work with the seniors, African American voices of the past and present. And those are seniors, African American seniors that are 65. And up. I meet once a week with them at Patterson center. And we usually I usually participate in about three art camps in the summertime there at Patterson and also at Bradley Academy Museum. Of course, this past year, because of what took place. I wasn't able to do that. But I did do a couple of activities with the school, city school system. During Black History Month, last year, in February, we were able to do a couple of programs before all of this, this virus kicked in and everything. So I haven't done anything other than the senior program since then.

Kelsey: This senior program she's talking about is separate from her role as the African American Heritage Society's president, but it still encompasses one of Ms. Watkins' biggest passions: genealogy. What started as an outside program called "Wisdom of the Elders" was continued as "African American Voices of the Past and Present" Ms.

Watkins is responsible for the genealogy component. She helps the seniors put their life experiences into paintings, and she also goes out to churches and cemeteries, working to gather names and other valuable information.

Mary: John at the archives, I don't know if you know him at the Rutherford County Archives. He's also a professor at MTSU. He teaches that MTSU , but he's also the director of the Rutherford County archives. So I have taken a few books that I've done there and what the seniors have done, for him to have on record just in case down the line. And somebody have used one of mine, where when I first started, before I got involved with the seniors, and everything, there are some people that was coming in researching some of the same people that that I had done. And he has shared that with them to give them a springboard. So they don't have to start from the very bottom, they can take mine and add to it, because there was some family members, you know, that was doing it. So it does, it does benefit, you know, doing stuff like that. So John does have some, and I have some here. And when I do that, I do it separately. And you know, I don't do all of it one time. So like, on my father's side, you know, he has a mother, he has a father, I don't do both of those at the same time, I split them up, I may go on his mother's side for one semester. And that's what I do that with the seniors, it's easier to do that, research you one of your your parents on the mother's side, and then the next semester, you go towards the father side. Now it's not in depth like it is because that could be a long drawn out thing to do that research. But we do it enough. So we can have something to present at the end of that semester. Okay, so they're working once, half a semester and another for another semester, and then the, then after that, then they'll go to

their mother's side, they will do the same thing. So I have four books, and I don't keep it you need to keep that stuff updated. Because stuff changes, people are being born, you know, your family keeps growing. So I've got to go back and amend and add to those. And my end result is I want to put all of those in one book, you know, when I do out of those just put it all in one book, but I was still having separate, separate it, so people will be able to follow it. But to have one book, and that's my ultimate goal is to do is to do that. And, yeah, and like I said, it's a long process. And, and I use ancestry.com. And I'm always going on there where I couldn't find stuff, I go back to see if they have added if they have found some more information, and all that kind of stuff to add to it. So it's a really ongoing process, you know, in doing that, but I love doing that. And I encourage people to do that. Because, you know, the younger generation, they will have no idea, you know, from which they came and and reason why and I to I hate it because I got involved so late, because a lot of our information have already gone to the grave, you know that I didn't get that information from my parents, and they used to tell us this person is kin to you. But they never told us how. And I didn't think it was very important at the time, I just knew that they were my cousin. But then after I got in, started doing the research and everything. Now I want to know. And then some of I have found out on my own simply because of the research that I've done. And I can make the connection as to how they're related to me and use it Oh man, I go for about eight generations. On my research that I've done, all of my great grandparents, believe it or not, when I say you know, great grandparents, all of my great grandparents was enslaved. So that's, you know, that's not you, when you look at when I say that, that's not that's not that much. You know, for me, I think I will be back to fourth generation, when I think in terms of

that from the, you know, from the people that was enslaved, and everything so, but I mean, it's a learning experience. And like on one side of my family, I have found the person who would have had them enslaved and it's not very far from where I live. Because usually I tell people when I teach the class, if you still in that same area, where you were born and where your parents were born. Chances are if you were a slave and not everybody were slaves here in Rutherford County, you know, there was a lot of that was free, how they gain that freedom of whatever. I do not know But most likely, the your people that had you enslaved is you can trace them within this community. I have found one, and I'm almost sure I found the second one. And everything because this is where they were born, you know, and you trace that name. Most of the time, they kept the name of that slave master. Sometime they changed it because they want to get away from it. And they changed them changed it. And then some of them stayed stay with it.

Kelsey: Like you just heard her say, genealogy is important to her because it helps people to know from which they came. But, interestingly enough, it was her other love–for art–that got her into the business of genealogy in the first place.

Mary: Well, how I got started in it, my great aunt had passed. And I used to pick her up and take her to church and all that. So when she passed, they did like a foreclosure on her house. And they had set all of her stuff out on the street when they were cleaning the house out. So I went back one day, cuz I said, well, I like pictures, and you know, pictures, tells a story, and especially if they had old pictures and all that, so I went by, and I went in, and I talked to the people. And I asked him if I could get you know, old

pictures and all that. And they say, yes, but when I pull up in front of a house, there was a, by me being an artist, there was an old painting, it was in ink or something. And it was sitting there not many times I've been in her house, I had never noticed it before. But it was there where they had put it on that only for the trash man to pick it up. So I got that, and I was looking at it. And it had on that L Murphy was the name the artist has signed, his name is L Murphy. 1893. So I that's how I got started with the genealogy and I said, I would just really love to know who this L Murphy is. And David, this drawing that he had done 1893. So that's when I came in, I got stopped researching it. I didn't have ancestry on my computer, I was going to the library. And it was about four summers, I would just go there, spend my time, picking out all the L Murphy's everybody that had an L in their name in Rutherford County that was born during that time. So and it took a long time to do that. And then that's how I actually got into it. And I was talking to my mother about that. And I just started doing all the Murphy's. I mean, the Murfreesboro Murphy's, you know, I've learned so much, Hardy Murphy, I knew more about his family, and I did my own, I tell people, because I spent all their time trying to find who this L Murphy was. And then by doing that, some of the research that I was doing, my grandparents name would pop up. And that's when my mother said, You know what, she said, I certainly wish you could do some research on my family and stuff. She was in her 80s then before [?], she's I really would love to, for you to you know, do something on my family, and everything. So that's really how I got started into the genealogy. And I said, You know, I hated I didn't before then, because the fact my parents' generation on my father's side, they were already gone. And then here it is my mother, you know, she, her side, she was only pretty of that generation, the oldest one left. So all that information

will last. So you just have to go back and dig and stuff. And that's really why I got into it. And I wanted to put it in a book form the best I could and whatever. One in our family reunions, I did that. And so I sold those, you know, and I did it in a hurry. It wasn't a lot of but it was enough to give people an idea cuz they didn't know either. So I just did that and put the book together and sold it at the cost at the family reunion. And everything, you know, whatever. But before that I didn't think about it. We started family reunions back in my mother's generation, I think it was around about 1979 that older generation decided they want to start having family reunions and we would get people together. But I didn't think in terms of that genealogy. We would have them write stuff down. So then after that I started like a big tree and I will put it up on the wall when we had the family reunion and what I didn't have there. I will have people to think And based on who they fell under within that, but I didn't think about that as being what I'm doing now. But it really was, and everything, so I started long before I realized what I was actually doing. And then when I started, you know, families or your family may do that to where they write in Bibles. And of course, my mother would write stuff in Bibles long time ago, but our house burned when I was a senior in high school. So we lost all that information from that. But my great aunt, once I was talking about that went and got stuff, I got her old Bible, and I went through, she has a lot of stuff written down. I said, I didn't even look at that. When I start really putting books together and doing that genealogy. I did look at that Bible. It couldn't say miss a word to just by looking at that Bible, and everything because they did that. They want to save that, but they didn't realize that and neither did I. I didn't think in terms of that, until I started doing research. And I tell people now when I teach that, to make sure they find Oh, Bibles and stuff like that their parents cost a lot of

them they did, right, they didn't they, when people got married, when they were born, when they died, and all of that a long time, they would put that in Bible. So I tell people to make sure they check those if they have any of those around.

Kelsey: I'll admit, when she told me this it kind of blew my mind, this idea of such prolific record keeping that's been happening under our noses.

Mary: Yeah, they hit those in there. My grandmother, or my great grandmother, when I was standing, I found that slave home. She's got her death in that my mom told me, she said when I was about 12 years old when she passed, and actually, in that Bible, she was 11 years old, when her grandmother passed, and it was written down in that Bible, who had the body everything, but it didn't put, the only thing I hate, it didn't put it away, she was buried. And I cannot find that I'm going to have to write to vital statistics here in Nashville to see if they have records on her. Because we do have a cemetery here on this place. But we don't know who was buried there. My mom showed us where it was, she said, Never disturbed land there. Because she know that some you know, it is a cemetery, but she never told us who was buried there. And she probably did not know because she left this property. I think when she was about 12, when she was young, when they lived here during the Depression, when she moved, they moved away. So she really don't know who's there. But I just feel like you know, my grandmother may have been buried there. You know whatever cuz she died in 31. And my grandfather owned this land, I think of 1912. So he may have buried her that she just don't know who's there. So

Yeah, you know, one thing you know, that we have down south, and I guess it may be everywhere, cuz a lot of the people of North, left the south cuz, a lot of my dad's people, you know, there was eleven of them. He's the only one that stayed on the farm. They went to Nashville, Chicago, Detroit, because they wanted get away from that farm life in the cotton field and all that. They just left but my dad never left. He, he was a tendent, he would work the land for the white people, he would stay on the land, he gets a certain percent. We had to pick cotton, and all that kind of stuff. And it affected our education. Because we had to tend to land in order for him to live where he lived. Yeah, that's how he paid is like you say you pay in rent, what that was in, in part that was his rent that he was paying by working the land and, and and everything but the genealogy have made me people I think if you get into it, you gonna realize how we are the same even though we may look different from our colors and stuff like that, but you'd be surprised I did my DNA, the makeup of my DNA, you know, European because we came through there to get here. You know, I have a lot of my dad is Irish. I thought he had a lot of Irish in him because he was really fair complected a matter of fact, there was 11. And out of the eleven, nine of them was real fair complexion, that hair and everything it was there was only two of them was probably my complexion. And my dad was where the sun didn't get to him. He was white. He was literally white. We used to laugh when he put on shorts in the summertime, cross his legs, you know where the sun hadn’t got to him. He was he was practically he was white. So I thought maybe he had any Indian in him too. But it didn't show up. My mother always said that she was her great great grandfather was Cherokee Indian, but he wasn't full blooded because they how they came to Tennessee. During my research, I found out when they ran them off of there in North Carolina, well

they came this way and they call it the Trail of Tears. So the Butlers and reason why I feel like they did and that's what my mother's name was. That was but that was a missionary Butler on the trail of tears. And even now in 1933 when I checked the Indian census that was Butler still living on the reservation. So that's how they came through. And they came through while to heal. There was two. They stayed of our Blackfox I don't know why you weren't aware Blackfox Elementary is that's Blackfox was an Indian. Was that right that they stayed there for coming from North Carolina. A lot of them died on the way because they kept running them off the reservation and everything. So they came that way they stay there for a little bit. Then they they when they got ready to leave this area they have, they went Old Nashville Highway they have that marker steel band or the Trail of Tears marker, but they had a toll gate there. And if you didn't have money to pay the toll, you could go there. So then someone spent and came this way They came to Iraq there. I don't know if you know, for me with Walter Hill, they came that way and turn with through Leanna. Well, that's where my, the Butlers Oh my mother's people, that's where they kept, they stayed, someone stayed there, they never left. They didn't continue to route to Oklahoma, Nevada at the on the reservation where they are now, they did not continue that route. Some of them stayed in different places along the way. And that's why there's other African Americans here that have Indian, you know, the Cherokee part, the Indian in their, in their genes in their DNA is because of that. And on my father's side, the people that have done that DNA, they do not have that Native American in their blood. So that's why I know it my mother knew part of the story that they actually did have Native American in their, in their DNA. And also, my grandfather may have told you that to on that same side that I said that on my grandmother's side. She was Alford,

before she married my grandfather, which was a Butler. And on the African side, that's why I found the slave owner of her father. And he was brought here and not 1820 with a real effort. When he was 10 years old, he came through here, he was 10, where they brought him from Virginia And you know, a lot of time they got a lot of land because they fought in the Revolutionary War or something like that. So they gave him land. So William Alford came to this area, out here in Walter Hill. And then he stayed and reason why. And then somebody in his inner circle was my great grandfather's father, because I have Alford shown up in my DNA, and they're white. And I've contacted lady in South Carolina. And then there's some right here in Murfreesboro, I looked at the telephone book, and a lot of is buried out there in the Evergreen cemetery. And then some are buried in the cemetery the Alford cemetery out here and walk hill on Jefferson Pike, and I've gone tried to find it. The last record I saw was at was 1974. Somebody actually recorded the headstones that was in that in that in that grave. And that's why it's another thing because with the industry and stuff, they have disturbing a lot of these graves, and they have built subdivision all down on Jefferson pike. And John Lowe said he tried to find it too. So I've been out tried to find it, but we can't find it, because they have built up so much around it. And everything. And the people living there have no idea. I've knocked on doors, they have no idea, you know, whatever where it is or anything like that, and I haven't been able to find it. And now when I found it, they said that was about four or five headstones with Alfords on it. And then there was about 15 that was Indian, she could see where they were buried, but it had no headstones. So for some reason, I feel like that's probably where my great grandfather probably was buried. Because that was his last known area where he lived that I can find you was in that area. And so that's

another thing I'd like I said, I did my DNA, and my DNA is just like a rainbow. You know, and we have this thing about each other. But you'd be so surprised how we are connected. And we don't even know it, of whatever you know, because of we look at our complexity, but when you remove that we really all the same. And if you're in this era, you know you are really, you'd be surprised how indirectly or directly that you are tied together. And I found that out by doing my genealogy, and seeing all these different people that are showing up. I got 860 something fourth cousins and up. Think about that. 800 and that's all the sides together on my dad's side and my mother's side, that's 800 according to the ancestry, that 860 something people.

Kelsey: To Ms. Watkins, finding out the varying components of her DNA is interesting and makes her feel more connected to her community. But she also recognizes that's not a feeling everyone shares, for one reason or another. Still, she looks to genealogy as a way to empower people whose family histories were not otherwise being told and also as a way to unite people moving forward.

Mary: If we could see each other through children's eyes, when you go into the school, how they just embrace each other, they don't care, whether you're Chinese or African American, whatever they just All together now that kind of stuff and I see it when I go into the schools because I go into the school, especially during February or career day, they have me to come in and set up and you see how these children just interact and huggin and going on, they're best friends and stuff like that. So when I think when they get older, and I looked at him, I said, I want to be like that when they get older. And it's

been taught to the children because they don't, kids don't see that, they don't, they may know why your skin is brown or something like that through curiosity, mine this color of whatever, and they may see it that way. But they don't see that hate and stuff that people have, and everything that stuff is being taught to them, because when they get older, then that's when they may see that, but not in every case, some case, you know, they still the best of friends forever, you know, but then some is being taught within the family, you know, that, you know, you are on this side of track, and this little other side of the track, you don't, you know, you don't do this, and now and everything, so, but it's, it's being taught, but we just got to have to accept that that's just the way it's going to be, you know, or whatever. And we just need to love each other accept people for who we are. And that's what I try to teach my kids, you know, I don't care, cuz I lived in what they call the project. You know, that's where they look at, you know, you live that people look at people differently, I look at people differently. That's what I was, even when I was in school, when I was teaching, you know, where you live doesn't define you. You know, just because I'm living in the projects that I did, you know, like I said, I came from the cotton field, I live with my sister got married, living in the projects, and I was living a good life, I didn't have to get up and worry about making a fire in the stove, and all that kind of stuff. You know, she just touched the button she had heat, had running water, because you know, it's time we didn't have running water. And I was living a good life, you know, I had walked to school to test you, because I wanted to be better your destiny hasn't been set, it's up to you. To determine what that is don't let because I was born here. This is because I'm living here my parents would have this that doesn't define you, it's up to you to work hard, and chase things, you know, make it for the better, you know, and,

and everything. So you know, and that's what I try to teach my kids, just because you're here now you never know what's gonna happen, just like what's going on. Now, how many people they show these people in these food lines. A lot of those people never ever pictured themselves as being in the food line, begging for food. Because they were up here, and they felt like that's what they were going to be forever. Just keep moving and moving. But you never know what's going to happen to change your life. And everything. And now here you are, you don't know who's in the food line with you. And everything. How many people that are out of jobs, who's drawn on employment, home how many people never, they probably never thought that they would be on food stamps to be able to survive, because they you know, they was beyond that, but you never know. And that's what I tried to my kids never looked down on a person because of where they live what they have. Because wouldn't take but just one thing to happen. And you could be in that you'll be in that same situation. So you accept people according to who they are, you know, their character and everything, look at that. They do something wrong, don't follow them, you know, because they are doing wrong. Lo ok at what they are doing. Now they you know, I don't want you to when they going in, you know they're wrong doing things you shouldn't be doing. Don't follow them. You know, with that, but never look down on people because of where they live or what they have. And that that is another thing with my children because of the fact nobody gets where they are on their own. And I feel like I'm obligated to give back. That's the reason why when people asked me to sit up art when people asked me to donate some art, when we do this and all that, to give my time because I feel like I should give my time back. Because I do not get to be where I am on my own. There was some sacrifices made by somebody else. Whether it

was my parents, my grandparents, and God knows my great grandparents, that sacrifices they made, they had to be some strong people cause I cannot imagine them coming out being enslaved and be able to survive, you know, and I always tell my kids, I always wanted them to give back. Because of the fact it was given to me. And the shoulders that the people, you know, I'm standing on a lot of people's shoulders, you know, whatever, and so are you, you gotta give back, everything, don't come with a price. You know, money's not everything, I get more satisfaction of doing stuff and seeing how grateful the people are for the things that I do. That's why I get my reward from is because of the fact that I'm able to give back to these young people and see how they react, how they are so excited about it, that's where I get my joy from, you know, and we have to learn that we everybody's obligated to give back because I don't care who you are, you do not get where you are on your own. Somebody made some sacrifices, and we just have to do that. And I know, you know, down south, and I think, you know, they probably that way, I'm thinking they're that way everywhere, you know, cuz there's good people everywhere.

Kelsey: Though her area of expertise is certainly painting and visual arts, she likes to dabble in other creative areas as well. She recently put together a poetry book that showcases 10 of her paintings paired with 10 of her original poems. She’s also gotten into playwriting. But at the heart of all her work is the hope to share people’s stories.

Mary: I know, a lady told me, you know, you supposed to they say you figure $35 an hour on your pain is that that's what your pain is a word, you figure out that kind of way. But I don't do that. I just say you could have it for this, or whatever. You know, it just depends on my days, how much you know, I will sell that piece for or whether I need the money at the time, I'll put it that way. But I just I just like to really I just like to give back. And I do little booklets on different people. You know, if I see somebody that's interesting, I've done a little book on this man called Apple John he, I paint a picture of him and and he used to go to square and he was African American used to try the peddle apples to make a living and, and I never all we all called him was Apple John. So I paint a picture of him. And I did his genealogy research on him. And I put this book together on him. So that's the thing I really want to do. That's why I say that, you know, rather than you being the president, I'd rather spend time doing a lot of stuff like that, writing up stories on different people. And I did one on that L Murphry where I did the research where I found that picture, I did a little booklet on him. I did one on Apple John, I did a couple of people that go to my church, when I'm working MTSU and Lewis Teague in the camp, he was there in the science department where he mixed up all the different chemicals, I did a little booklet of him, I like to do stuff like that. So if the African American hair side ever get a place, that we can put these things up, that we can educate young people when they come in, and tell them about, you know, how that came about, about our history and stuff like that. So that's what I really, you know, want to more really want to do, if not everything, to share that with people, especially for those young people, because a lot time they have no clue, you know, they see me And when they they don't know the story, you know, by how you came up, how African Americans survived

are coming through, you know, being enslaved and all that. But to let them know how we came here, because I think it's very important, because a lot of times, people had no idea and I didn't either, but I started getting into it. And looking into genealogy and everything I know, I'd never thought about it had no idea, you know, as for where we came from, you know,

Yeah, so the African American Heritage society, we were, you know, doing research and stuff and different things will pop up, you search for one thing, and you will find something else. And that's how we got into the Hidden Figures. And this William Green made this green book what it was a travel guide for African Americans, when they would travel from one place to another cuz couldn't stay. We can stay in, in the white facilities back there did and in everything. So he made this green book for every town, or whatever. So when people travel, they would find somewhere to stay. They couldn't stay in a regular motel so they could stay you know, in these places use that to what so they could find a place to stay overnight when they were traveling, and all that kind of stuff. So got that on that calendar. The Keeble, you know that his bus is down there in the van and the state capitol. You know, he came from Murfreesboro. He I think he moved to Nashville. I know he was here when he was 19. You know, he was raised up here. And William Key he's that doctor that he's from Shelbyville, he was born here. And then his, the guy that had it was he was enslaved with he had wheeled him to his cousin in Shelbyville. So he went to Shelbyville he came a self taught veterinarian. Mary Ellen Vaughn is on there, you know, because of the fact of what she does. How great is that? That everybody seemed to her. She came from Alabama, by way, Tuskegee you then

went to Tennessee State and up in Murfreesboro. She spent her life in Murfreesboro. She started the Union paper. She had a school for African Americans that Vaughn street I found out, you know, right. Only Vaughn street over there off of Highland was named after her. They did that because they told her house down when they built the projects there. So that she took they took her house down and she moved on State. But she had a school where she taught adults so they could read and write so they could be able to vote. And she was a nurse, she wanted to improve health in rural areas. So she was a Commonwealth nurse that worked at the health department. So we did actually why we did the marker for her then we had the Holloway High School but those people in there, there was a Mr. Turner Peebles he was in Smyrna. You know, he was the had him a shoe shop, he could make shoes, he was good at leather work and he repaired shoes and stuff. So he was able to do that. It was aanother lady. Her name was Lottie. She was Lytle. She was the first African American received her law degree, you know, from, you know, from Tennessee and stuff like that. Just different things that we are finding out. Callie House, she fought for reparations. She was from Murfreesboro. She lived on State Street, she came. Her last name was Guy before she married this house man. Her and her sister married brothers. And everything you know, and Vanderbilt got an endowment in her name. I put ever so we didn't know we know that was Vaughn Street. But we didn't know the story about Vaughn about her. The older people did. And I remember the paper but she had already died and somebody else took it up. Ms. Pearlie Mae Wade a way to get it, I knew it when she had it. But I didn't know anything about Mary Ellen Vaughn, and she's the one that started the Murfreesboro union. So it's just different things that we're finding about people that was actually born here, and they may have moved away. But

this is where they were born. So that's what our Hidden Figures, we just named it. You know, like the astronauts, you know, those all those African American, those women. But with the handle, we didn't have any idea that those people were that smart, and work behind the scene there and in the space, during the time of the space, when it came about that working out those mathematics, those problems. We didn't have anything, we didn't know anything about those ladies. And they call them the hidden figures when they brought it out and made the movie and everything. So that's what we call our counter because we started investigating, finding different things out. So that's what we call the calendar that we are doing this time for the as a fundraiser, and everything. So that's why we came up with the Hidden Figures for that calendar. And but there's a lot more, you know, a lot more. But that's all we could put on there. At the time. You know, I'm putting up with that some more, I don't know what we're going to do. For the next one, we say we're going to do one every other year, the first one we done was the center of the churches that was 100 years old. Our older we call the century calendar. And we think we came up with 36 African American churches that came up not some of them during right after the Civil War, some ours we got 1875 that we were organized. So we have those churches in our first calendar as a fundraiser. And we did really good. So then we came up with this one, so not next year, but year after next in 2023 we'll have a calendar of something else that we want to you know put on there to sell so it's an educational tool, as well as sort of like a souvenir you can use it but you need you know, keep use it as an educational tool, because we write we have something of our own that about each one of those people that are on that calendar to let you know about them.

It's important for us because like I said, we stand on the shoulders of so many people those people have done so much and we are where we are because of what they've done and what they want. went through. So they paved the way for us and we want to do something for the generations to come after us, you know, we want to leave something, you know, a pretty I would not just pass through, you know, I remember my teacher, tell us in high school, you know, what are you? What are they gonna say about you, you don't want your leaving to be in vain here, you want to do something, to to give back not for people to, you know, get all this recognition and stuff, you just you just want to do something that's worthwhile to leave something, you know, you just don't want your living to, to be in vain. You just want to leave something here, for people, you know, to use to be alone, you know, you know, for the ever, that's just the way I you know, I feel about it, that you can't put a price tag on everything, you know?

Kelsey: I'd like to thank Mary Watkins for speaking with me. You can look up Mary Watkins Art on Facebook and Instagram and check out the African American Heritage Society of Rutherford County on Facebook as well.

And before you go, I want to say thank you for tuning in to *Reckon With It* and thank you to all the folks who spoke with me and helped me piece this project together. I certainly do love my community.

And if I dare say it, I hope you have learned something that you will take with you and maybe even that you see Tennessee in a new light. And remember that with knowing better comes doing better. Take care, y'all.

Appendix F

Interview Questions

Abdou Kattih

1. What is the Murfreesboro Muslim Youth? When and why was it begun?
2. What are you proudest of that MMY has accomplished? What are common projects for the group? Can you discuss the goals of the group?
3. Do you consider the organization Southern? Yourself?
4. What do you consider the benefits and difficulties of having MMY in Tennessee/ the South?
5. Is there anything else you want people to know about MMY or its mission?

Chris Sanders

1. What is the Tennessee Equality Project? When and why was it begun?
2. What are you proudest of that the TEP has accomplished? What are common projects for the group? Can you discuss the goals of the group?
3. Do you consider the organization Southern? Yourself?
4. What do you consider the benefits and difficulties of having the TEP in TN/ the South?
5. Is there anything you want people to know about TEP or its mission?

Gregory Reish

1. What is revivalism? When and why did the movement begin?

2. What has revivalism accomplished? Can you discuss the goals of the group?

3. Do you consider the movement Southern?

4. What do you consider the benefits and difficulties of revivalism? Is the movement inclusive? Diverse?
5. Is there a key takeaway you want people to understand about revivalism?

Bradley Hanson

1. What is the Tennessee Arts Commission? When and why was it begun?
2. What are some common projects for the Tennessee Arts Commission? Can you discuss its goals?
3. How does the Tennessee Arts Commission highlight Tennessee's uniqueness?
4. What do you consider the benefits and difficulties of the governmental project? Is it inclusive? Diverse? What efforts is this governmental sector making to promote and protect diverse Tennessee communities?
5. Is there a key takeaway you want people to understand about the Tennessee Arts Commission?

Mary Watkins

1. What has driven you to become so involved in the community? What are some examples of the work that you do?
2. Do you consider yourself Southern? What impact does the South have on the work that you do?
3. Who/what are some of your greatest inspirations and motivations?
4. If you could make sure people understood one thing about your work, what would it be?