

RAISING A NONVIOLENT ARMY:
FOUR NASHVILLE BLACK COLLEGES AND
THE CENTURY-LONG STRUGGLE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS, 1830s-1930s

By

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To Dr. L.M. Collins,
the embodiment of the HBCU teacher tradition;
and
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INTRODUCTION

Relying heavily on public memory and popular media, most histories of student activism in the modern Civil Rights Movement begin with the February 1, 1960 sit-in protest by four black North Carolina Agricultural & Technical College students (Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair, Joseph McNeil and David Richmond) at a Greensboro, North Carolina Woolworth store. A series of independent student demonstrations however, had already occurred in several cities across the South during the late 1950s including Tallahassee, Florida in 1956, Atlanta, Georgia in 1957 and Nashville, Tennessee in 1959. While Nashville's fledgling sit-in protests in the fall of 1959 may be more aptly characterized as experimental rather than an attempt to mount a sustained direct-action campaign against lunch counter segregation, several of its student leaders emerged as veteran-activists who played prominent roles at the founding conference of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in April 1960.

Earlier that spring, scores of Nashville college students, the vast majority of whom attended Fisk University (1866-), Meharry Medical College (1876-), Tennessee State Agricultural and Industrial College, now Tennessee State University (1912-), and American Baptist Theological Seminary, now American Baptist College (1924-), planned, organized and executed one of the most disciplined direct-action campaigns against segregation. Not only did the participation of the city's black university students help to achieve the earliest desegregation of lunch counters in the South, their successes served as a model for the wave of nonviolent student activism that followed their home-grown protests. As a result, the names Diane Nash, John Lewis, Marion Berry, James Lawson and Cordell Tindy (C.T.) Vivian are synonymous with nonviolent student activism. Even so, many historians relegated the successes of Nashville student activists in initiating the one-two punch of a sit-in campaign and an economic boycott of

the city's downtown district in the spring of 1960 to the footnotes of Civil Rights Movement historiography until the publication of David Halberstam's *The Children*¹ in 1998.

Despite being the training ground for several of the nonviolent student movement's most dynamic leaders and the attention it received after *The Children*'s publication, Nashville's story has been limited to just that—a story. While existing studies alluded to the exceptional nature of Nashville's nonviolent incubator that was led by the Reverend James Lawson, the process by which these students emerged as ground-breaking civil rights activists remains unknown.² Therefore other important factors that contributed to the success of Nashville's "nonviolent army" beyond its unwavering commitment to nonviolence have yet to be seriously examined.

Historians have neglected to explore the role of black colleges in encouraging an activist mindset among its students. This dissertation explores the role of black universities in Nashville as intellectual, social and cultural centers of educational-turned-public activism. As a case study of Nashville's Fisk, Meharry, Tennessee A&I and American Baptist colleges, it examines the historical role of these institutions in the struggle for civil rights. This study examines Nashville because it was the home of several of the nation's most influential black colleges—each with a uniquely different character. Founded by white missionaries, Fisk quickly emerged as a private liberal arts college. A medical and dental school, Meharry was an outgrowth of Central Tennessee College's broad academic program offerings. Established in the early-twentieth century, Tennessee A & I was a public college while American Baptist was a church-supported seminary.

¹ David Halberstam, *The Children* (New York: Random House, 1998).

² See Ernest M. Limbo, "James Lawson: The Nashville Civil Rights Movement," in *The Human Tradition in the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Susan M. Glisson (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006) and Wesley C. Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart: SNCC's Dream for a New America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

While now-defunct colleges may be discussed to provide context, these four institutions were chosen as its principal foci because of their successful and continued operation as well as the mid-twentieth century direct-action protests of its students. Most histories of black education in the South begin with the arrival of northern white missionaries who traveled to the war-torn region during or after the Civil War to establish schools for slaves-turned-freedmen. This study challenges the orthodoxy of such an approach by focusing on Nashville's history of independent black schools during the antebellum period as its contextual starting point.

Shaped within the context of Tennessee's larger history as a relatively modest slaveholding state, perceptions of Nashville's delicate racial harmony dated back to the antebellum period when Middle Tennessee slaves suffered less harsh conditions than their Deep South counterparts. The state's swift and resolute defeat early in the Civil War further helped Nashville become a haven for runaway slaves who sought refuge and freedom in Union Army camps. They soon after served as the basis of the student body of freedmen's schools. These learning centers however, were not the first for black Nashvillians. Nashville began its extraordinary history of independent black education almost three decades before the first shot was fired in the Civil War. In most instances, the historiography of black education merely alludes to the tradition of black clandestine education during the antebellum period. It has long been established however, that a tradition of black education in America stretches back into the colonial period.

Written in 1915, Carter G. Woodson's *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861*³ was among the earliest comprehensive studies of black education before the Civil War. Woodson's strengths lie in his ability to reconstruct the complex and varied colonial approaches to race, religion and to slavery. Published more than three quarters of a century later in 1991, Janet

³ Carter G. Woodson, *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1915).

Cornelius' *When I Read My Title Clear: Literacy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South*⁴ joined Woodson's study among the few comprehensive works on black literacy during the slave period. Cornelius chronicled the evolution of black literacy from its eighteenth century realities when it was supported in the awakening periods, through to the tenuous fight for its existence in the face of nineteenth-century white resentment and violence. In both histories, it is clear that the widely-held perceptions of slave literacy as illegal and totally prohibited do not hold true in all or maybe even most situations. The most widely-shared white attitudes towards black literacy, whether for free or enslaved-blacks, were conflicted ones. They were positions complicated by white feelings of religious obligation to educate and recognize the brotherhood of man on one hand, and white fear of slave rebellion as well as the potential demand for black equality on the other.

Although generally accepted as seminal in nature, Henry Allen Bullock's *A History of Negro Education in the South from 1619 to the Present*⁵ was not so much a history of black education in the South during the colonial and antebellum periods as it was a narrative of postwar education. Even so, many of its conclusions were either widely accepted before its publishing or viewed as undocumented assertions. It was not until James D. Anderson's 1988 monograph, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*⁶ that many of the burning questions Bullock left unanswered were addressed by a study steeped in primary research. Anderson argued that despite the centrality of education in the black South, ex-slaves who envisioned an educational system supportive of their emancipation and, by extension, of their participation in American life, soon discovered that their children would be forced into industrial schools funded by white northern

⁴ Janet Cornelius, *When I Read My Title Clear: Literacy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1991).

⁵ Henry Allen Bullock, *A History of Negro Education in the South from 1619 to the Present* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967).

⁶ James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

philanthropists. Designed to help whites maintain control over blacks through racial accommodation, Anderson suggests that white purposes for black industrial education conflicted with the desire of blacks to use their educational opportunities to train black teachers and professionals.

At the time it was published, Anderson's study was characterized as revisionist, yet its groundbreaking contentions have been reinforced by the subsequent works of other historians including Heather Andrea Williams. Published in 2005, Williams' *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom*⁷, asserted that literacy had long been viewed as a agent of not only liberation, but also of self-determination among black slaves as well as freed people. Braving the penalties for breaking laws prohibiting slave literacy during the antebellum period, the pursuit of education by blacks during the postwar period was still viewed by most southern whites as subversive. These arguments help to redress the seeming absence of black self-determination from early institutional histories of Fisk and Meharry colleges in particular.

Written in 1934, by C.V. (Charles Victor) Roman, *Meharry Medical College: A History*⁸ was not so much an institutional history as it was the history of the school's relationship to one of its most august sons and dedicated teachers. The narrative is an intermixing of important landmarks and people, interspersed with the author's personal recollections and musing about the purposefulness of the school. Almost half a century later, James Summerville published his *Educating Black Doctors: A History of Meharry Medical College*⁹ in 1983. Free from the personal entanglements which riddled Roman's account, Summerville offered an institutional history which exposed Meharry's strengths and weaknesses against the backdrop of wider

⁷ Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

⁸ Charles Victor "C.V." Roman, *Meharry Medical College: A History* (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1972).

⁹ James Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors: A History of Meharry Medical College* (University, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1983).

realities in African-American life. Together, both histories chronicle the compelling history of Meharry as the nation's leading producer of black doctors for a century. Yet, they each fail to fully explore the school's role at the forefront of black medical care in the South or the many ways in which the service of its alumni, offered black southerners the first promise of access to healthcare as a civil right.

Written by Joe M. Richardson in 1980, *A History of Fisk University, 1865-1946*¹⁰ was composed in the same tradition as Summerville's *Educating Black Doctors*. Despite being by all accounts a "top-down" study, Richardson's *A History of Fisk* was also groundbreaking. In addition to filling the obvious void in the historiography of black education, Richardson offered the first substantial glimpse into the world of black teacher tradition. While not his focus, Richardson also incidentally demonstrates the connection of black higher education to the development of a black professional middle class through the lens of Fisk's role as a liberal arts teacher-training center. The result should have been a narrative of black self-determination but Richardson gave considerable credit to the role of both northern white missionaries and white philanthropic funds in the school's history. Hence, no single white institution played a more important role in this narrative than the American Missionary Association (AMA).

Despite the more than twenty-year gap between the publishing of the two books, Richardson's subsequent works on the American Missionary Association, *Christian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Association and Southern Blacks, 1861-1890*¹¹ (1986) and *Education for Liberation: The American Missionary Association and African Americans*,

¹⁰ Joe M. Richardson, *A History of Fisk University, 1865-1946* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1980).

¹¹ Joe M. Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Association and Southern Blacks, 1861-1890* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986).

*1890 to the Civil Rights Movement*¹² (2009) co-written with Maxine D. Jones, extends his earliest claims about the centrality of the interracial AMA in the history of black southerners. *Christian Reconstruction* convincingly argued that the AMA made critical contributions to black education, but readily acknowledged that the AMA's primary goal of securing the freedom and full-citizenship of blacks was cast against a backdrop of white paternalism that pronounced black inferiority. Its sequel, *Education for Liberation*, is somewhat of a continued vindication of the AMA's shortcomings. The work focuses on the AMA's successes in the field of black education despite the organization's struggles with gender, class, and racial inequalities.

Together, these educational histories offer the basis for the existing discourse on the education of black southerners. Each of them points to the centrality of black education in the struggle for freedom and equality. Richardson's contentions are employed in this study to reveal the ways in which black education not only builds on the longstanding desire of blacks to receive an education, but also rests upon black self-determination. As the intellectual centers within or of the black community, black colleges are the core of the black professional and middle class. Even so, the place of black colleges in the narrative of the civil rights struggle has been all but lost in modern movement historiography. Dominated by the "Great Man Theory," early civil rights studies depicted the movement as a top-down entity with charismatic personalities. These early histories which focused on the actions of these all-powerful leaders as they orchestrated the actions of scores of ordinary citizens-turned-activists, were replaced by more interpretative studies of how and why the grassroots movement took place.

It is unsurprising that the first generation of scholarship on the modern Civil Rights Movement focused almost exclusively on the role of charismatic ministers who were perceived as its leaders. Despite the tendency of studies during the late 1960s and early 1970s to focus on

¹² Joe M. Richardson and Maxine D. Jones, *Education for Liberation: The American Missionary Association and African Americans, 1890 to the Civil Rights Movement* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009).

the civil rights struggle as primarily a political movement, the violent deaths of several of the movement's beloved activists, including most prominently, the assassination of Dr. King, elevated its ministerial leadership to god-like status in popular culture. Social historians struggling to piece together the history of this dynamic movement of loosely-connected protests spread over the vast black South and beyond, became enthralled in the cult of personality that has become part-and-parcel of the movement in the wake of the demise of a character like King. Even when grassroots studies began highlighting local community leaders in the late 1970s and 1980s, the histories of these men and women who claimed no ties to powerful national civil rights organizations, failed to challenge widely-accepted themes of movement historiography.¹³

At the helm of this new movement was Aldon Morris' *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*¹⁴, which despite its sociological framework, helped to pioneer the analytical study of the movement beyond narrative form. Among the study's most enduring contributions to modern civil rights historiography was Morris' placement of the black church at the epicenter of the modern movement. Arguing that African-American churches across the South served as the source from which the black community's economic, social and spiritual strength derived, Morris pointedly observed that the black church systematically used its institutional strength to advance the cause of black civil rights. Morris contended that the black church's charismatic ministerial leadership as well as the establishment of Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) was central to this effort—contentions which would seem like moot points to today's audiences. However, many of those who accepted this paradigm largely did so because of Morris' work.

¹³ See Steven F. Lawson, "Freedom Then, Freedom Now: The Historiography of the Civil Rights Movement," *The American Historical Review* 96, No. 2 (April 1991), 456-471 and Charles W. Eagles, "Toward New Histories of the Civil Rights Era," *Journal of Southern History* 66, No. 4 (November 2000), 815-848.

¹⁴ Aldon Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: Free Press, 1984).

An analytical narrative of the establishment, development and scope of the SCLC and its principal figures, Adam Fairclough's *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.*¹⁵ helped to reinforce Morris's now widely-accepted thesis. In his efforts to retell the story of the modern movement as more than the story of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Fairclough moved beyond the looming presence of King as its charismatic leader, to the SCLC's wider evolution over time as the most critical civil rights organization of the modern movement. He argued that behind King's charismatic personality stood a decentralized leadership base, whose paradigm would be exported to various southern locales through SCLC local affiliates. Fairclough pointedly employed the Nashville movement as evidence of this phenomenon, arguing that its successes were due in large part to its SCLC affiliation through the Nashville Christian Leadership Conference (NCLC) and that as such, the SCLC helped to nurture the independent local movements that together constituted the modern Civil Rights Movement.

While his thesis is plausible, other important factors also contributed to the success of local movements in general, and the Nashville movement in particular. Despite the considerable energy both he and Morris give to situating African-American churches as the single most important institution in the organization and ultimate success of the modern Civil Rights Movement, they recognize that the black church was not the only important institution in the black community. Fairclough's examination of the Nashville movement similarly situates the black church, by virtue of the NCLC, at the epicenter of the city's civil rights struggle. As a result, the role of black educational institutions and black colleges in particular, remains mostly cursory in their analyses of the Nashville movement. Morris' analysis limited the fundamental importance of black colleges to its communication networks and more obviously, its student

¹⁵ Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987).

body as a viable protest populace. Similarly, Fairclough argued that the historical role of black educators as intellectual leaders in their communities changed during the early modern movement citing “the preachers took over from the teachers.”¹⁶

Their conclusions however, fly in the face of William Chafe’s *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Freedom*¹⁷ a community-based study of the local movement in Greensboro, North Carolina that spanned three decades. As one of the first studies to consider post-World War II political and protest activities of returning African-American soldiers, *Civilities and Civil Rights* essentially traces the beginnings of the Greensboro movement to the 1930s and 1940s. He emphasized the importance of the black church as well as black civic and educational institutions in shaping the formative ideas of black activism. Centered on the protest of the “Greensboro Four,” Chafe argued that the city’s black student activism was rooted in the long-held traditions of black educational and civic activism.

Chafe convincingly traced the impartation of activist ideas from the city’s all-black Dudley High School and pointedly noted that “colleges provided not only a source of pride for the community, but served as a rallying point as well.”¹⁸ He argued that two black colleges—Bennett College, a privately funded institution for women, and North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College, a state-subsidized black college—deserved special consideration. Despite his revelations about the conflicted nature of black college administrations who depended on white philanthropic and/or federal support, the role of Bennett and North Carolina A & T in shaping activism among black students in Greensboro could not be over emphasized according to Chafe’s assessment. Frequently criticized for “double talk,” Chafe asserted that black college presidents (especially those of public schools), constantly felt the uneasiness of their position as the leaders

¹⁶ Ibid., 13.

¹⁷ William Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

¹⁸ Ibid., 20.

of black institutions dependent upon public funds controlled by white boards. Even so, under the presidency of Dr. David Jones for example, Bennett College stood as a “model of racial strength.” Similarly, Dr. T.D. Bluford, the “conservative” president of A&T College publicly discouraged protest on campus but privately supported a student’s 1947 bid for state assembly.¹⁹

The looming tensions between the administrators, faculty and students of black colleges during the modern movement are alluded to by Harry Lefever in his 2005 publication, *Undaunted by the Fight: Spelman College and the Civil Rights Movement*.²⁰ A study of Spelman College activism (as well as that of the wider Atlanta student movement), Lefever’s work offers several noteworthy additions to the existing treatment of student activism, namely: illustrating that the contributions of Spelman students and faculty were diverse in show and meaning, but shared a concern for social justice and the improvement of human rights; and that the Spelman administration, faculty, social and religious leaders, parents and even other students had varied responses to student activism. If Lefever’s study has any shortcoming, it is that it lacks a full-exploration of the complex and immensely personal dimensions involved in student activism. These issues receive a more evocative discussion in Cynthia Griggs Fleming’s *Soon We Will Not Cry: The Liberation of Ruby Doris Smith Robinson*²¹ (1998), a biography of Spelman College activist and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) leader Ruby Doris Smith Robinson. Despite being a biographical study of just one student leader, the book’s language and vibrant narration not only reveal the complicated nature of Robinson’s activism, the work also offers a reader invaluable insight about the difficulties other student-activists faced because of their commitment to the movement.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Harry Lefever, *Undaunted by the Fight: Spelman College and the Civil Rights Movement* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2005).

²¹ Cynthia Griggs Fleming, *Soon We Will Not Cry: The Liberation of Ruby Doris Smith Robinson* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998).

Despite the growing body of work on the modern Civil Rights Movement, obvious questions remain about how and why some students became activists as well as about the role of the black college in student activism. A comprehensive study of the complicated and sometimes multifarious nature of student activism during the modern movement is in this light, long overdue. Decades of “black-church-centric” studies of modern movement activism in general and even of student activism in particular, have towered over civil rights historiography. Recently, however, there have been signs that the role of education in the black experience is being reconsidered by historians. The recent work of Adam Fairclough, whose *To Redeem the Soul of America* steered historians away from arguing for the central place of black colleges in the narrative of black activism for the last two decades, seemed to embrace the importance of black educational institutions. While stopping short of acknowledging the underlying conflict between his earlier thesis (which advocated the supremacy of the black church in black activism) and those of his newest books on black education, *Teaching Equality: Black Schools in the Age of Jim Crow*²² and *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South*²³, Fairclough readily acknowledged the indispensable role of black educators and black schools in the education of black southerners. In *Teaching Equality* for example, Fairclough gave considerable attention to the multi-dimensional responses of black college administrators and faculty to student activism. He also passionately defended black accommodationism among black administrators who acted as what Glenda Gilmore' dubbed "double agents."²⁴ Still, Fairclough's characterization of the black college was much less than revolutionary. Maintaining that black

²² Adam Fairclough, *Teaching Equality: Black Schools in the Age of Jim Crow* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2001).

²³ Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

²⁴ Fairclough, *Teaching Equality*, 16.

colleges were “hardly models of democracy,” Fairclough at least acknowledged that they “were not nearly as autocratic as some critics charged.”²⁵

In *A Class of Their Own*, Fairclough came closer to acknowledging the extraordinary role of black teachers in the success of black educational efforts, and by extension, to the centrality of black education in attacking racism and dismantling segregation. Fairclough concluded however, that “lacking political power, black educators... exaggerated the power of what education could accomplish.”²⁶ Further, he concluded that the fact “there was no simple cause-and-effect relationship between black schools and the civil rights movement” remains irrefutable.²⁷ The latter contention is precisely what this study seeks to debunk.

As a graduate of Fisk University, I acknowledge my deep connection to the valuable place of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) in the history of black education both at home in the United States and across the African Diaspora. This study, however, was not born out of the desire to paint the HBCU as more seminal than it was. Introduced to the long tradition of Fisk student activism while I was a coed, I remained intrigued about the role of HBCU student activists in the modern movement in general and in the Nashville movement, in particular. When I embarked upon this study, I initially envisioned a social history of student activism in the modern movement. I wanted to understand the motivations for their activism in the face of strong opposition from many of the most important persons in their lives. How did they manage relationships with their detractors who sometimes included family members, friends, schoolmates and school officials? Why did they make and maintain their commitment to the cause of civil rights at the risk of their lives? Such a study is undoubtedly still needed.

As students at the city’s black colleges, it seemed obvious to me that such a study should begin with understanding the place of black colleges in their development as student activists. I

²⁵ Ibid., 38.

²⁶ Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 24.

²⁷ Ibid., 388.

increasingly found it difficult, however, to make a case for the importance of the black college in the narrative of civil rights. Decades of historiographical orthodoxy that characterized the black college at its best, as breathing grounds for black accommodationism and at its worst, as the pusillanimous pet project of paternalistic whites, made such an assertion impossible without a full-length study of the role of black colleges in the struggle for civil rights.

A historian is traditionally expected to spend weeks, if not months, dredging through the archival resources of selected libraries to emerge with a study that reflected the availability of sources. In the most fortunate instance, a researcher might stumble upon a treasure trove of never-seen-before sources. In many ways, the history of black colleges and universities remains an unmined jewel. Hopefully, renewed interest in early black educational and civil rights histories will inspire a new generation of historians to uncover more about the form and function of black colleges as important organizing centers in the black community. Even so, as with all research endeavors, this type of study offers its share of challenges. Many black college libraries, like the schools with which they are associated, suffer from a dearth of funds. Despite the general willingness of black college librarians to be helpful to researchers, inadequate funding hampers the processing and/or digitizing of collections, which often limits access to archival materials.

In the case of this study, traditional archival sources were sometimes unavailable. Student publications such as newspapers were either not yet published, published sporadically and/or unpreserved. At Fisk, where records were generally well-preserved, there were vast periods of time when student publications were unavailable. Some records of professional and/or personal correspondence were often lost, while others remained unprocessed. Such was the case of Tennessee State presidents William J. Hale and Walter S. Davis, whose available records in the Tennessee State University Library Special Collections are scarce to none. In the case of American Baptist, the school holds no archives, largely leaving the preservation of its history to the Southern Baptist and National Baptist U.S.A. conventions. Perhaps most precariously,

Meharry Medical's archives were closed for renovations while I was writing this study.

Organized in thirty-year periods, the study's structure is mostly chronological—although there are a few departures from this model in order to accommodate topical and/or contextual needs. It draws on a vast array of source materials, including the archives of the four colleges that are its focus. The Special Collections Archives of the John Hope and Aurelia Franklin Library at Fisk University has proven especially indispensable. Any seeming over reliance on its collections are a *cause* of the preeminent place of Fisk in the history of American education as well as a response to the realities of available resources, instead of an *effect* of any intent on my part to concentrate unduly on Fisk. Fortunately, the dearth of institutional sources was in many instances, compensated by the archives of its religious affiliates and a host of newspaper archives. I introduce important personalities either in the body of the work or in explanatory footnotes to offer readers a context for understanding this changing cast of characters in the history of Nashville's black colleges.

The first objective of this study revived the connection between the prohibition of reading and/or writing among blacks during the slave period to the deep-seated desire of blacks for educational opportunities during the postwar period. By demonstrating how the long-standing limitations and/or denial of educational opportunities to blacks both free and enslaved, helped to shape the conception of education as the path to self, familial and community betterment as well as to racial advancement, it reveals the relationship between education and black empowerment. It contends that the correlation between the two grew in the decades that followed, especially as the pursuit of education against tremendous odds became increasingly identified as a form of activism in the black experience.

Building upon black conceptions of education as activism, the second objective demonstrated that blacks were not *tabula rasa* unto which white educators inscribed their purposes for education. It argues that blacks incorporated their views of black educational

activism into their educational experience, thereby directly influencing the formative character, mission, and history of black colleges. Up until now, the achievements of black colleges have been chiefly characterized by the contributions of its white founders, teachers, administrators and philanthropists—an approach which ignored the role of blacks in ensuring black college successes. By shifting the focus of black college historiography from white aid, this study also discourages characterizations of black colleges from the context of white limitations and/or proscriptions on their form and function as activist centers. This study argues that more so than anything else, the narrative of the black college is a narrative of black self-determination.

The role of educational activism and black self-determination in the development of black colleges serve as the basis to the study's third objective, which demands the recognition of the black college as an important activist-center in the history of the black struggle for civil rights. Existing modern movement historiography has made it difficult, if not impossible, to argue for the centrality of the black college to black activism of any kind, even that of its students. This study argues that the examination of black colleges as important intellectual, social and cultural centers around which the black community organized disallows these institutions from being summarily dismissed as passive agents of white manipulation.

By weaving together the causal factors of black college activism that are both exceptional to Nashville's black colleges, as well as representative of the larger narrative of black college activism, the overarching objective of this study is to create a place at the center of the narrative of civil rights for black education in general, and for the black college in particular. In doing so, its aim is not to supplant the black church; however, it at the very least begs that a reader consider the seminal place of black colleges as centers of black activism. It suggests that black colleges were not merely critical to the development of an activist-mindset among black student activists during the modern movement, but were also and more importantly, fundamental to black activism long before modern movement activism.

The story of why and how the black college emerges as a catalyst of black activism unfolds in the decades before the Civil War. As such, chapter one explores the history of black education in Nashville during the antebellum period. It argues that the city's thirty-year tradition of independent black schools before the arrival of the first white missionary helped to shape black expectations for their educational experiences separate and apart from white Protestant ethos. It argues that as teachers in clandestine schools, blacks sought to offer a generation of black students more than academic instruction classroom; they sought to imbue them with self-esteem and racial pride. Because those teachers and the generation of students they produced not only assumed influential positions in black communities including black Nashville but popularized their black educational experiences, the narrative of black education in antebellum Nashville constitutes the foundation of black Nashville as a leading educational center and long before its emergence as "Black Athens."

Chapter two chronicles the formal establishment of Nashville black colleges that emerged in the postwar period. It argues that these schools were a natural outgrowth of the city's thirty-year tradition of independent black education rather than merely a product of white missionary ethos. In turn, the success of black colleges such as Fisk University (1866 -), Central Tennessee College, later renamed to Walden University (1866-1925), and Meharry Medical College (1876 -) should be attributed to white missionary and northern philanthropy as well as to black self determination. The uniquely shared institutional missions of these black colleges are complicated by the long, complex, and changing relationships between the white teachers and their black students, who like black students across the wider South, endured the region's challenging conditions as well as the tumultuous nature of the times, alongside their white missionary benefactors, administrators and teachers. Eager to recognize the role of whites in ensuring the success of white-administered black schools, the reluctance of students to challenge

white authority over black schools is inextricably linked to the personal relationships they share with these schools' white founders and early teachers.

The limitations of black acquiescence are explored in the third chapter, which chronicles the failure of Nashville's New South advocacy to improve the lives of its black citizenry. It argues that despite the city's claim to the sobriquet "Athens of the South," white Nashvillians were not concerned with securing educational opportunities for blacks. The fight for black education amid the violence of the Reconstruction period depended on the ability of these schools to maintain the fragile balance of northern white philanthropy, black self-determination and local white paternalism. Black demands for protection and education were as lofty as they were practical given that the first generation of black college graduates began venturing into the dangerous backwoods of the South to provide much of the earliest educational and medical services for black southerners. Despite the improvements in the quality of black life that the first generation of black college graduates secured via their service, black economic developments and social advancements were not "new" enough for black Nashvillians. Once directed at the white South, black student resentment at the limits of the New South's policy to transform black life, increasingly shifted towards white administrators and teachers. This transformation, I argue, threatened to undermine the fragile balance that allowed black colleges to survive.

While the divergent pedagogical views of W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington are well-established, chapter four employs these towering figures and their respective ideologies as a point of entry to explore black higher education in Nashville at the turn of the twentieth century. While DuBois' relationship to Nashville is expected because he was a Fisk alumnus, the relationship of Washington to the city is less anticipated. Hence, the totality of Washington's role in the founding of the city's first public black college was until this point, virtually unknown. Additionally, this chapter connects the establishment of the school and the development of its mission to its founding president William Jasper Hale, a black self-taught teacher and argues for

the relationship of World War I and the Harlem Renaissance to the students' growing spirit of the "New Negro." Paying careful attention to the Fisk student rebellion of 1924, it explores the "changing of the guard" at these schools from its white missionary founders to a new generation of white administrative leadership of black schools. This new guard was not only out of touch with the growing demands of black students; their aloofness also hastened the dissatisfaction of black students experienced with white paternalism.

When Central Tennessee College and Roger Williams University closed in 1929, the schools' absence drastically altered Nashville's educational complex. Chapter five explores the enduring legacies of these colleges first, through its legendary lists of distinguished alumni. Then through its strong ties to Roger Williams, reveals how the establishment of American Baptist Theological Seminary in 1924, demonstrates that American Baptist assume Roger Williams' mantle of black theological training. It contends that American Baptist's successes were owed in large part, to the contributions of pioneering black college alumni and administrators from across the South, whose educational histories are explored in order to suggest that it was highly improbable that these experiences were not formative in the creation of its institutional character. Likewise, by detailing the efforts of Fisk University President Thomas E. Jones to recruit scores of black academics to the Fisk faculty and staff, it challenges the widely-believed notion that Fisk was only transformed into a center of racial activity under the headship of Charles S. Johnson. In doing so, the chapter climaxes with the limits Jim Crow placed on black educational progress. When Fiskites and the wider black South keenly felt the loss of Dean of Women Juliette A. Derricotte at the hands of medical racism (long before the practice had a name), they demonstrated the awareness of the Talented Tenth that their fate was cast with the black masses. It was a fate they hoped to take charge of once they were led by progressive and race-conscious black presidents.

CHAPTER I

BEFORE BLACK ATHENS: BLACK EDUCATION IN ANTEBELLUM NASHVILLE

As the home to several of the American nation's oldest and most distinguished historically black colleges and universities, Nashville's late nineteenth century repute as the "Athens of the South" is unquestionably owed in no small measure to its copious opportunities for both white and black higher education. New South proponents increasingly touted white colleges such as Vanderbilt University (1873-) and George Peabody College for Teachers (1875-1979) and Fisk University (1866-), a black school founded and funded by Northern missionaries, as evidence of the city's commitment to educational and cultural progressiveness. By the early twentieth century, however, Nashville's New South idealists increasingly drew on these schools as well as an extended cohort of other local schools including several black colleges such as Roger Williams University, formerly known as Nashville Normal and Theological Institute (1866-1929), Central Tennessee College, later renamed to Walden University (1865-1925), and Meharry Medical College (1876-), as evidence of the city's social and cultural distinctiveness. These schools, like many educational centers across the post-war South, became part and parcel of the campaign to reconstruct the mind of the South.

However, as Don Doyle has pointedly noted, the city's distinction as an education center "was more an outgrowth of Nashville's recent collaborative role during the war," than an "educational complex built on antebellum precedents."²⁸ Despite offering measured support to white Northern missionaries in the wake of the Civil War, the efforts of New South proponents to develop black education have been characterized as merely supportive rather than truly

²⁸ Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Raleigh: University of North Carolina, 1990), 30.

collaborative in nature. Nashville was no exception to this rule, as southern reformers relied heavily on the success of northern-sponsored institutions to demonstrate their commitment to an educational campaign for both blacks and whites. Consequently, most histories of black education in the South begin with the arrival of northern missionaries who traveled to the war-torn South to establish education for slaves-turned-freedmen. They extol the sacrifices of northern missionaries who often abandoned their lives of relative comfort to venture into the Deep South to serve as teachers in black schools and demonstrate that the success of these educational endeavors was due in no small measure to the leadership of northern missionaries.²⁹

It is therefore, predictable, even easy to suggest that white missionaries created educational opportunities for southern blacks. But such an assertion is largely one-dimensional since it does not acknowledge James D. Anderson's research on how the freedmen's educational movement was undergirded by black "self-reliance and [the] deep-seated desire [of blacks] to control and sustain schools for themselves and their children."³⁰ Such a contention has particular resonance in the case of Nashville, where the history of black education began decades before the arrival of the first northern missionary and similarly, almost three decades before the shots that began the Civil War rang out. At a time when even rudimentary instruction was exceptional for most white children, free and enslaved blacks in Nashville joined together to provide educational opportunities for black children through a string of independent, black-operated, and black-owned schools.

Dubbed "native schools," the narrative of the clandestine black educational centers

²⁹ See Joyce Hollyday, *On the Heels of Freedom: The American Missionary Association's Bold Campaign to Educate Minds, Open Hearts, and Heal the Soul of a Divided Nation* (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co., 2005); William H. Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001); Jacqueline Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern Teachers and Georgia Blacks, 1865-1873* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

³⁰ James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 5.

unfolded against a consistently shifting backdrop of local, state and national race relations and involved the intricate amalgamation of black agency, secrecy and white patronage and/or complicity. There is perhaps nowhere that this history is clearer than in the case of Nashville where white opposition, violence and even hysteria—despite regularly causing the temporary closure of native schools—never permanently derailed black educational efforts. Their story is also one of extraordinary commitment, sacrifice and determination. But it is not only a story of black triumph over tremendous odds. Nor is it merely a testament to their willingness to fight racial inequality through self-determination. It signals the central place of education as social insurgency in the black community long before the coming of white missionaries with their protestant ethic. It demonstrates the conceptualization of education among blacks as the best means to both personal advancement and to racial uplift as well as a call to the service of others.

By chronicling the process of how education by-and-for black people in Nashville unfolded in the decades preceding the Civil War, this chapter hopes to demonstrate that the victories of northern whites were won on the educational battleground that black Nashville had begun to till decades before their arrival and independent of northern philanthropic and missionary support. These schools serve as the earliest indicator of the desire among black locals to secure educational self-sufficiency. Their thirty years of operation also created an incubator for the city's black teacher tradition. Black educators before the Civil War sought to offer a generation of black students more than academic instruction; they sought to imbue them with self-esteem and racial pride. Those teachers and the generation of students they produced, not only assumed influential positions in black communities including black Nashville, they popularized their black educational experiences. For all these reasons the story of black education in antebellum Nashville constitutes the foundation of black Nashville as a leading educational center and as "Black Athens."

I'll Make a Way: Alphonso Sumner Lays the Groundwork for Black Education in Nashville

In his *A History of Colored School of Nashville, Tennessee*, white northern missionary and Fisk University theology Professor H.S. Bennett noted: “Very little that is noteworthy occurred in the founding of Fisk School. The battle for the education of colored children by white missionaries from the North had already been won by [the] Rev. J[oseph] G. McKee, who had the honor of being first on the ground in Nashville, and of bearing the brunt of the opposition to the opening of colored schools.”³¹ It is difficult to believe that Bennett penned these words in the face of the longstanding history of self-determination in the education of black Nashville, a history which began three decades before McKee opened his school on October 13, 1863. Sometime in March of 1833, Alphonso M. Sumner, a free black barber whose violent expulsion from Nashville would later lead him to Cincinnati where he was an abolitionist and served as publisher of that city’s first black newspaper, founded a clandestine school for black children. Sumner belonged to black Nashville’s small elite class of mulattoes, free blacks and quasi-independent slaves who, as historian Bobby Lovett observed, had “special relations with Nashville elite whites [who] frequently looked the other way when these privileged Negroes bent the racial rules.”³² As the black barber of an exclusively white male clientele, Sumner was probably regularly privy to private conversations among whites on the issues affecting all Nashvillians.

Whether or not Sumner was customarily silent when rendering his services, Quincy T.

³¹ H.S. Bennett, “Fisk University,” in *A History of Colored School of Nashville, Tennessee*, ed. G.W. Hubbard (Nashville: Wheeler, Marshall & Bruce, 1874), 21.

³² Census records as early as 1839 and 1840 list A.M. Sumner as “school teacher.” See Greater Cincinnati connections, “Directory of Cincinnati Colored, 1839-40,” <http://www.cincytristate.com/1839-40%20Cincy%20Blacks.html> (accessed January 8, 2009); The USGenWeb Project. “1840 Cincinnati City Directory For Colored Citizens” <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ohhamilt/dir1840cinticol.html> (accessed January 8, 2009); Bobby L. Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780-1830: Elites and Dilemmas* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas, 1999), 34.

Mills' characterization of "shaving time" as occasions where "white men sat in the barber's chair and submitted to the sharp straight razor at the hands of black barbers" offered free barbers like Sumner a particularly important place of power and privilege.³³ Such a "place" was however, not without ambiguity. It is plausible that despite the power he wielded over the life and death of each patron that sat in his chair, Sumner knew the limits of such power. In fact, it is very likely that when Sumner did speak in the presence of whites, his responses were both solicited and measured in order to preserve most obviously his business, but also to protect his life and ensure the welfare of his family and community. Even as a privileged free black entrepreneur, Sumner and others like him knew that no matter how close their relationship to the white world, their fate rested with the rest of the black community.

While there are few primary sources that chronicle Sumner's life and work in Nashville, one can understand the gravity of his choice to open this school for free black children given the context of times. Across the nation, thousands of white Americans had been swept up in the tide of evangelism known as the Second Great Awakening. Adherents of this emergent Protestant doctrine stressed personal salvation in places such as Tennessee, where the great revival was popular and planted deep, permanent roots. In addition to bringing people closer to God and their frontier neighbors, the awakening had important (and perhaps unintended) consequences for American social life including antebellum reforms such as abolitionism.

However, the rise of abolitionist sentiments were fragile and whites began a particularly violent reign of terror following Nat Turner's 1831 uprising in Southampton County, Virginia, the era's bloodiest slave rebellion. Turner, who was a black preacher, had been taught to read by one of his master's sons. His religious conviction and religious leadership of other slaves who looked up to him, was arguably in part, due to the zeitgeist of the age. Their inclusion in the

³³ Quincy T. Mills, "Razors, Rights, and Paradoxical Publics: Black Barber Shops and the Civil Rights Act of 1875," (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, Atlanta Hilton, Charlotte, NC, December 11, 2008).

worship experience exposed many slaves to the Bible and these slaves increasingly identified with the oppressed peoples in biblical stories.³⁴ Similarly, the antislavery character of Methodist and Baptist doctrines, which in particular drew many slave converts, allowed their churches to meet their slave membership's call for black ministers who "combined African heritage, their common experience as slaves and elements of biblical teaching to fashion a distinctly African American brand of Protestant Christianity."³⁵

Ministers like Turner not only exposed other slaves to these biblical stories; they provided these stories as "a powerful motive for slaves to gain literacy."³⁶ In the wake of the Southampton uprising, such sentiments may have resonated with sympathetic whites in the North, but in the South, white fears of future protest among blacks led to increased restrictions on all blacks, both free and slave.³⁷ Less than 700 miles away from Southampton, and only two years following Turner's infamous showing, Sumner founded his Nashville school for free black children on March 4, 1833, the same day Nashville's Andrew Jackson was sworn in for his second term as the nation's seventh president.

It is plausible that the uneasiness caused by the Southampton affair was felt locally. Given those realities, Sumner was likely to have "gauged their [white customers] sentiment about blacks in general" and concluded that, "if things were done quietly, most elite whites would not oppose free Negro classes."³⁸ Elite men of color like Sumner depended on their privileged place as leading blacks as well as the paternalistic sympathies of white Nashvillians in order to anticipate that they would turn a blind eye to a school for black children, a venture that was

³⁴ Janet Cornelius, *When I Read My Title Clear* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 17, 19.

³⁵ Barry Hankins, "The Second Great Awakening and African American Religion," in *The Second Great Awakening and the Transcendentalists* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 68.

³⁶ Cornelius, *When I Read My Title Clear*, 17, 19.

³⁷ James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Slavery and the Making of America*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 115.

³⁸ Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 34.

provocative anywhere in the South. Such “understandings” were however, not made without restriction. Sumner’s school was no exception, as whites allowed it to operate with “the understanding that none but free children should attend.”³⁹

James P. Thomas was among the first students of Sumner’s school. The son of white judge John Catron and Sally Thomas, a slave woman turned laundress, he recalled that, “the authorities allowed [the] school to be kept for teaching the children of Free persons.”⁴⁰ Even so, there is evidence that there were at least a small number of slave children among Sumner’s earliest pupils and some even had the permission of their owners. Sumner began as the school’s sole teacher but his professional commitment soon led to the hiring of other free blacks as teachers including Daniel Wadkins, whose role in black education in Nashville would eclipse Sumner’s in the coming years. By 1836, the school’s student population rose from 20 to about 200 under Sumner’s and Wadkins’ leadership, a number that was achieved in spite of dangerous outbreaks of cholera and smallpox that temporarily forced the school’s closure for months at a time each year.⁴¹

That year, an even more formidable challenge to the school’s operation emerged when Sumner was accused of writing and sending two letters “containing important information to two fugitives” living in Detroit, Michigan.⁴² While there is no evidence of Sumner’s involvement either as a way to supplement his income or even as an act of goodwill, Wadkins recalled that the intercepted letters were used as proof of Sumner’s involvement and “in consequence...Sumner

³⁹ Daniel Wadkins, “Origin and Progress Before Emancipation,” in *A History of Colored School of Nashville, Tennessee*, ed. G.W. Hubbard (Nashville: Wheeler, Marshall & Bruce, 1874), 3.

⁴⁰ See James Thomas, *From Tennessee Slave to St. Louis Entrepreneur: The Autobiography of James Thomas* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1984) and John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *In Search of the Promised Land: A Slave Family in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Thomas, *From Tennessee Slave to St. Louis Entrepreneur*, 31.

⁴¹ Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 34; Thomas, *From Tennessee Slave to St. Louis Entrepreneur*, 31.

⁴² Wadkins, “Origin and Progress Before Emancipation,” 4.

was nearly whipped to death, and compelled to leave the State never to return.”⁴³ Thomas, who also recollected the incident, characterized Sumner as a “fine scollar,” [sic] who was “taken out by what was termed the slicks and whipped pretty near to death. The leader of the gang,” Thomas remembered, “was a son of the most distinguished Jurist in the state.”⁴⁴ Whether or not Sumner was guilty, the whipping he received at the hands of the white vigilante group was bad enough to convince him to flee Nashville for Cincinnati, Ohio where he established a new life of community activism.

Nashville’s connection to black Cincinnati can be traced back to the earliest days of the secret, loosely organized network of people and the hiding spaces they used to guide slaves to freedom through the Underground Railroad. Hundreds of black slaves escaped overland from Tennessee. The waterways of the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers, which had brought Nashville’s founders to the region, similarly provided a means for slaves to escape to Cincinnati on steamboats. The “railroad” worked for Sumner. Once in Cincinnati, he joined ongoing education, antislavery and social reform efforts of the black community and soon became an important leader.⁴⁵

If Sumner’s hasty departure is not evidence enough of the threats and challenges facing free black education in antebellum Nashville, consider the fact that Amos Dresser, a white missionary who was at the time a theological student, suffered a similar fate just one year before Sumner. When Dresser stopped in Nashville to sell Bibles in 1832, a vigilante committee arrested him for possessing anti-slavery tracts. His prosecutors contended that he had distributed some of the abolitionist literature in the state, for which he was stripped naked and received twenty lashes

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Thomas, *From Tennessee Slave to St. Louis Entrepreneur*, 32.

⁴⁵ Nikki Marie Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom: Cincinnati's Black Community, 1802-1868* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005); William Cheek and Aimee Cheek, *John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom, 1829-65* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 79, 46n.

on the public square before a “goodly” crowd.⁴⁶ Dresser’s treatment was legal due to a new 1831 state law that gave local courts the “discretion” to punish abolition agitators by “jailing, whipping, standing in the pillory, death—and [for which] no appeal was to be allowed.”⁴⁷ Ordered to leave the city within twenty-hours, Dresser “shook the dust of Nashville from his feet,” fleeing Nashville in fear of losing his life.⁴⁸

These incidents not only resulted in nearly fatal consequences for Sumner and Dresser, they demonstrated the violent lengths to which Nashville whites could go when they perceived a threat to their authority and way of life, despite their paternalistic tendencies.⁴⁹ The beatings also signaled the beginning of increasingly difficult times for black education in Nashville. Sumner’s school closed for two years in the aftermath of his exile. In 1837, voters defeated an attempt by the mayor to consider the possibility of a black school. The city’s free black population felt so much white opposition to the idea, that they “were intimidated [and] thought it best to wait ‘until the storm blew over.’”⁵⁰

Riding Out the Storm: Nashville’s Native Schools, 1838-1857

Hailed as “the father of Negro education” in Nashville, Daniel Wadkins was one of only two blacks to continuously teach in the year’s following Sumner’s forced departure. His students remembered the educational experiences of his clandestine native school well into adulthood.

⁴⁶ For accounts of Dresser prosecution and punishment see Amos Dresser, *The Narrative of Amos Dresser* (New York: American Anti-slavery Society, 1836); James Gillespie Birney, *The American Churches, The Bulwarks of American Slavery* (Concord: Parker Pillsbury, 1842), 9; Benjamin Lundy, *Life, Travels and Opinions of Benjamin Lundy* (1847; reprint, New York: Negro University Press, 1969), 188; Will Thomas Hale and Dixon Lanier Merritt, *A History of Tennessee and Tennesseans: The Leaders and Representative Men in Commerce, Industry, and Modern Activities* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1913), II: 299; Chase C. Mooney, *Slavery in Tennessee* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1957), 16-17.

⁴⁷ Mooney, *Slavery in Tennessee*, 14.

⁴⁸ Hale and Merritt, *A History of Tennessee and Tennesseans*, 299.

⁴⁹ Benjamin Lundy, the famous Quaker and abolitionist, recalled that while visiting Nashville in the 1830s, only shortly before the attack on Dresser, that he only narrowly escaped the same fate. See Lundy, *Life, Travels and Opinions of Benjamin Lundy*, 188.

⁵⁰ Anita Shafer Goodstein, *Nashville 1780-1860: Frontier to City* (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 1989), 51; Wadkins, “Origin and Progress Before Emancipation,” 5.

“Mr. [Wadkins] gave out each word with such an explosive jerk of the head and spring around the body, that it commanded our profound respect,” recalled former student Ella Sheppard. “His eyes seemed to see every one in the room, and woe be to the one who giggled or was inattentive, whether pupil or visitor, for such a one constantly felt a whack from his long rattan.”⁵¹ As native school owners and operators, Wadkins and Sarah Porter Player somehow educated both free and slave Nashville blacks, effectively managing along the way their relationship with white Nashville elites, securing additional teachers, locations and supplies as well as avoiding white violence.⁵²

The next period of free black education in Nashville began in 1838, a year after the mayor’s failure to gain public support for free black schools. “There were no more schools until January 1838,” recalled Wadkins, “when the most energetic free colored citizens got up a petition, which was signed by a number of leading citizens, asking permission to have a school for free children only, and to be taught by a white man.”⁵³ The proposal’s intentional proscriptions of slave pupils and black teachers made it easier for whites to support. Soon thereafter, a free black man hired and paid John Yandle, a white man of Wilson County, to be the teacher.

Yandle operated the school for about a year on McLemore Street, near Line Street, before operating for the same period of time on North High Street, again near Line Street. The school had an average of thirty students “who learned to read and write, and something of arithmetic and geography.” While he received the assistance of Daniel Wadkins and eventually quit teaching to

⁵¹ Ella Sheppard Moore, “Before Emancipation,” (N.p: American Missionary Association, n.d.), 7-8

⁵² See Bobby L. Lovett, “Tennessee Manual Labor University,” in *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, eds. Carroll Van West, et al. (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, 1998), 938-939; Wadkins, “Origin and Progress Before Emancipation,” 4- 6; Wadkins’ own narrative demonstrates that Sarah Porter began teaching in her school in 1841, one year prior to him joining her as his assistant and that her school continued in various locations until it was forcibly closed in the same year as his. See Franklin and Schwenger, *In Search of the Promised Land* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 35.

⁵³ Wadkins, “Origin and Progress Before Emancipation,” 5.

pursue better paying work, Yandle's initial decision to teach free blacks was a courageous and possibly dangerous one, which Wadkins noted, drew threats of violence "more than once."⁵⁴

Wadkins, who had served as a substitute teacher to Sumner before assisting Yandle, similarly served Sarah Porter Player, who had opened a school in her Broad Street home in 1841. Player was free but her husband was a slave who belonged to "an excellent family of white people, whose slaves enjoyed every privilege that free people enjoyed." A "woman of some education," Porter relocated the school the following year to the home of a supporter, hiring Wadkins as her assistant.⁵⁵

After serving the school for about a year, during which time the school's enrollment noticeably increased, Wadkins founded his own school in 1842 in the house of a supporter on Front Street (then called Water Street) near to the city jail.⁵⁶ In doing so, Wadkins assumed the mantle of leading the educational efforts of black Nashville over the course of the next decade. As someone who had long been in the trenches of the struggle for black education, Wadkins knew the undertaking was a dangerous one; he responded to the challenges cautiously so he would not meet a fate similar or worse than met by Sumner.

Described by Ella Sheppard Moore, who later became a Fisk Jubilee Singer, educator and community leader, as "a typical 'John Bull' in appearance and an 'Uncle Sam' in vivacity," Wadkins was already an old man by the time Sheppard was his student. Still, her choice of these two distinct caricatures, recreate an image of Wadkins as a white-bearded short and stout man whose liveliness was apparent to his students.⁵⁷ Lovett assuredly characterized him as "an

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Carter G. Woodson, ed., "Documents: School for Free Negroes and Slaves," *Journal of Negro History* V, no. 1 (1920), 117. Despite mistakenly referring to Porter Player as "Sallie Player," Woodson's description is most likely of "Sarah" Porter Player.

⁵⁶ Woodson, ed., "Documents: School for Free Negroes and Slaves," 117.

⁵⁷ Moore, "Before Emancipation," 7-8; As personifications of their respective nations, Uncle Sam and John Bull became popular during the nineteenth century. Portrayed as a stout, feisty man, John Bull is represented as "a bluff, kindhearted, bull-headed farmer" who is usually is shown in a suit made out of the

unskilled free Negro laborer, [who] was known as a man who readily accommodated the [white] ruling-class members' conservative racial attitudes."⁵⁸ But Wadkins' conciliatory approach may have been wise given his struggle to keep his school open amid the tenuous nature of black and white power relationships in Nashville. He kept his school in operation despite moving six times between the years of 1842 and 1856. "He taught a large day and night or evening school," aided sometimes by bakery owner Joseph Manly and barber shop owner George Barber.⁵⁹ A move to a residence on High and Crawford streets in 1853 signaled the beginning of increasingly intermittent stays for Wadkins' school as he moved once each subsequent year, operating next at the Second Colored Baptist Church, and then in private homes on the corner of Line and McLemore and in another residence on College Street.⁶⁰

Two plausible reasons may account for Wadkins' frequent moves. First, demand for his services steadily increased. His school's enrollment steadily grew from thirty-five students at the time of the school's founding to fifty students in 1844 to sixty students by 1855. Second, Wadkins wisely moved to "avoid public scrutiny" of his school.⁶¹ Hence, Wadkins probably had mixed feelings when an 1850 editorial in the *Nashville Union* proclaimed "Until yesterday we were not aware that there were several schools for free negroes in the city and all of them in a flourishing condition." In as much as the editor's "genial notice" of the schools reflected the sentiments of paternalistic whites who were sympathetic to the cause of black education, it must

British flag. See Ebenezer Cobham Brewer, *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable: Giving the Derivation, Source, Or Origin of Commom Phrases, Allusions, and Words that Have a Tale to Tell* (London: Petter and Galpin, 1870), 462 and E.D. Hirsch, Jr., Joseph F. Kett, and James Trefil, eds., *The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, Third Edition, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), 318-19. Similarly, "Uncle Sam" is a figure who "stands for the government of the United States and for the United States itself." His initials are the abbreviation of United States and he is typically "portrayed as an old man with a gray goatee who sports a top hat and Stars and Stripes clothing." Hirsch, et al., *New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, 354.

⁵⁸ Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 35.

⁵⁹ Wadkins, "Origin and Progress Before Emancipation," 5; Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 35.

⁶⁰ Wadkins, "Origin and Progress Before Emancipation," 5.

⁶¹ Ibid.

have also attracted the attention of white opponents.⁶² Therefore, it is very probable that Wadkins (and other black teachers) also instructed native school students and their families to be discreet about details of the school's operation and even its sheer existence. Students for example, may have been advised to keep a low profile on Nashville streets by concealing their writing tablets, papers and books and warned not to bring undue attention to their selves by walking in groups through city streets."⁶³

Despite Wadkins' efforts, serious challenges to his school as well as his personal safety emerged in 1855. "A number of citizens, about a dozen in all," he recalled, came to his home and told him "not to teach that negro school another day; if negro schools are taught, it must be done in Illinois, Indiana, or some other free state, and not here among the slaves....Able lawyers had been consulted," claimed Wadkins, who said the school was legal. They responded that, "the neighborhood objected" and warned that if Wadkins continued to operate the school, he "must look out for the consequences."⁶⁴

Wadkins closed his school and it remained closed until 1856 when he briefly reopened it on College Street. Only seven months later, the city's police captain told Wadkins that "he was ordered by the City Council to close the negro school, and it must not be taught another day [because] they were in possession of a great many facts that convinced them that the negroes contemplated a general insurrection, and there was great excitement, not only in Nashville and Tennessee, but throughout the South."⁶⁵ This order effectively closed free black schools in Nashville until, as Wadkins observed, "the Federal troops took possession of the city" during the Civil War.⁶⁶

⁶² *Nashville Union*. September 20, 1858. Quoted in Anita Shafer Goodstein. *Nashville 1780-1860*, 152; Franklin and Schwening, *In Search of the Promised Land*, 35.

⁶³ Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 35.

⁶⁴ Wadkins, "Origin and Progress Before Emancipation," 5-6.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

The “great excitement” of whites in Nashville, across the state and the South to which the police captain referred, was the insurrection panic of 1856. Fueled by the nagging fears of whites, which remained as vestiges of the slave uprisings of Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey and especially that of Nat Turner, “wild rumors of an all-embracing slave plot extending from Delaware to Texas, with the execution set for Christmas Day, spread throughout the South.”⁶⁷ Despite acknowledging these rumors as “exaggerated reports of excitement in Tennessee,” the December 20, 1856 issue of the *Nashville Union and American* acknowledged that “there is no doubt that the negroes had talked of insurrection, and of fighting their way to a free state.”⁶⁸

While some historians including Charles Drew have since concluded that, “the fright of the white community was probably groundless,” many whites were convinced of the rumors’ truth.⁶⁹ The racial climate in Nashville that was tenuous at best, soon turned ugly. Nashville blacks were increasingly subjected to the “violence and the gratuitous meanness of poor whites and of the city’s watchmen.” They must have known that they could never expect white men, no matter how patrician their nature, “to become their public champions.”⁷⁰ Consequently, white supporters of black education stood by while white gangs intimidated local blacks, including Wadkins and Porter Player who was also forced to close in 1856, probably as a result of white harassment.⁷¹

The events surrounding the scare signaled the beginning of a wave of dramatic changes in Nashville’s race relations. Soon after, the city council instituted a series of severe restrictions on black life. The new codes ordered that “there shall be no school for Negroes,” prohibiting their

⁶⁷ For a more information on the 1856 scare, see Harvey Wish, “The Slave Insurrection Panic of 1856,” *The Journal of Southern History* 5, No. 2 (May, 1939), 206-222 and Charles B. Dew, “Black Ironworkers and the Slave Insurrection Panic of 1856,” *Journal of Southern History* 41, No. 3 (Aug., 1975), 321-338; Wish, “The Slave Insurrection Panic of 1856,” 206.

⁶⁸ *Nashville Union and American*, 20 December 1856; Dew, “Black Ironworkers and the Slave Insurrection Panic of 1856,” 321.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 322.

⁷⁰ Goodstein, *Nashville 1780-1860*, 156.

⁷¹ Wadkins, “Origin and Progress Before Emancipation,” 5- 6.

instruction by either blacks or whites. The ordinances also included a \$50 fine for “any white man found teaching blacks” and ordered that “there shall be no assemblage of Negroes after sundown for the purpose of preaching; and no colored man shall be allowed to preach to colored people, and no white man after night.”⁷²

Officials hoped the new codes would derail two decades of work begun by black educators in Nashville. “The fear of the North and its antislavery leaders only heightened Negrophobia in Nashville,” observed Bobby L. Lovett, “thereby placing the privileged Negroes under suspicion and forcing the elite whites to tighten the controls on any privileged blacks rather than run the risk of alienating the white masses in times of crisis.”⁷³ Meanwhile, the frenzy characterizing the period presented challenges in Nashville and across the South; the yet untold conflict between the North and South would produce the most salutary changes for black education in Nashville.

Emancipation Changes Everything: How the Civil War Challenges Education by-and-for Black People

On December 18, 1856, an editorial in the *Nashville Daily Patriot* declared, “The free Negro population of this country, although it may contain meritorious individuals, is a class, corrupt, vicious and degraded.”⁷⁴ Yet, despite these caustic comments, the door for free black education slowly reopened between 1859 and 1861. In 1859, William Carroll and his wife, who were the parents of James C. Napier, a former Wadkins student who would later become black

⁷² See City of Nashville Ordinances, November 17, 1836-September 29, 1865. The ordinance also included the following provisions: “The mayor of the city has the authority to employ additional policemen, for day and night, and for the next thirty days,” and “Free persons of color are prohibited from removing themselves from other counties and residing in this city.”

⁷³ Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 37.

⁷⁴ *Nashville Daily Patriot*, 18 December 1856.

Nashville's "most powerful politician and its most influential citizen,"⁷⁵ hired Rufus Conrad of Cincinnati to start a new school for blacks. It is likely that Conrad knew Alphonso Sumner, since both resided in the same community near Cincinnati's Harrison Street and it is possible that Conrad was hired on Sumner's recommendation.⁷⁶

Napier recalled that the school had only been opened for two or three months when a white official suddenly arrived and told Conrad, "I have been authorized by the powers that be in Nashville to send these children home, to close the doors of this school and give you just 24 hours to leave this town."⁷⁷ The school never reopened.⁷⁸

As did Dresser and Sumner before him, Conrad left Nashville for Cincinnati. Additional free Nashville blacks, including the family of William Carroll moved to Cincinnati soon after, where their children became students of Conrad again. Conrad reemerged as a leading figure in black Cincinnati, where he later served as president of the Colored Orphan Asylum before later serving as a member of the board of directors for the city's school and by the 1870s, as pastor of Harrison Street's The Disciple Church.⁷⁹

Nashville's black schools remained closed until after Federal troops occupied the city in 1862. That same year, assisted by J.M. Shelton and his wife, Daniel Wadkins was able to re-start his black educational efforts. He opened a school in the First Colored Baptist Church, successfully operating there for eighteen months, before moving to High Street. There, Wadkins, "assisted from time to time by Miss Ode Barber, Mrs. Mariah Patterson and Miss Selina Walker"

⁷⁵ Herbert Clark, "James C. Napier (1845-1940)" in *Profiles of African Americans in Tennessee History*, eds. Bobby L. Lovett and Linda T. Wynn (Nashville: Annual Local Conference on Afro-American Culture and History, 1996) 94.

⁷⁶ Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 37.

⁷⁷ Woodson, "Documents: School for Free Negroes and Slaves," 116.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 265, 53n; Rev. B. W. Arnett "The Benevolent and Charitable Societies of Cincinnati, Ohio," Cincinnati: 1874. From online collection African American Perspectives: Pamphlets from the Daniel A. P. Murray Collection, 1818-1907, in American Memory, Library of Congress, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aap/aaphome.html> (accessed January 12, 2009).

taught about one hundred and fifty students. Despite the school's success, it, as well as eight other Nashville schools owned and operated by black teachers, was closed upon the opening of the Fisk Free School in 1865.⁸⁰

The closure of all of Nashville's independently owned and operated black schools had to be a tremendous blow to the countless black teachers who sacrificed to keep them open from 1833 to 1865; the thirty-two year span of their on-again-off-again history. Their existence represented a "considerable achievement of the antebellum decades," observed Anita Shafer Goodstein, "especially when their existence and dogged maintenance are contrasted with the skimpy provision made for poor white children."⁸¹ Goodstein's assessment is especially telling given the narrative of white education during the same period. While there had been a longstanding history of private tutorials to those that could afford it, educational opportunities for Nashville's poor whites remained restricted until the mid-nineteenth century despite the passage of laws regarding public education for whites in Nashville as early as 1829. Slow to support public education, local whites generally reproached public schools as "poor" and rendered laws for their establishment as little more "salutatory exhortations."⁸²

With little faith in public education's efficiency or economy, Nashville officials did not make their "first stride towards a more efficient system" of a public education system for white children until more than a decade after Alphonso Sumner first opened his native school.⁸³ Leading this effort was Professor J.H. Ingraham, who in 1848, reported that an "intelligent and highly respectable gentleman" was hired to operate a free school for whites. The school had as much as seventy students, yet Ingraham determined that there were as many as 1,500 school-aged children in the city, some of whom were enrolled in private schools; but the vast majority of

⁸⁰ Wadkins, "Origin and Progress Before Emancipation," 6.

⁸¹ Goodstein, *Nashville 1780-1860*, 150.

⁸² William Robertson Garrett and Albert Virgil Goodpasture, *History of Tennessee: Its People and Its Institutions from the Earliest Times to the Year 1903* (Nashville: The Brandon Printing Co., 1903), 300.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

which, “get along as they can, move away to other cities which are better provided with schools, or suffer their children to grow up in ignorance and vice.”⁸⁴ Not until 1855 were plans for Nashville’s first permanent public school realized when the Hume School was opened at the corner of Eighth Avenue (Spruce Street) and Broad.⁸⁵

With the emergence of Nashville’s public schools, white educational opportunities grew for both rich and poor whites alike well before the Civil War. But for many blacks in Nashville, it was the changes brought on by the Civil War that would most notably extend educational opportunities to them. It is ironic, though, that the coming of emancipation would spell the end of the earlier efforts at Nashville education by-and-for black people. While they were undoubtedly disappointed by the closure of their schools, black teachers were probably not surprised. By the height of the Civil War, the arrival of white Congregationist minister Joseph G. McKee offered black teachers a glimpse of the looming threat white missionary education posed to Nashville’s native schools and black teacher tradition.

As the first Northern missionary to offer free education to black children in Nashville, McKee was probably surprised to find that black Nashville had an already established tradition of education. Nashville’s native schools, as a rule, required tuition. But McKee’s missionary funding allowed him to offer his classes free of charge, offering the opportunity to receive an education to a number of black students who may not have been able to afford it otherwise. Viewed as an expansion of black educational opportunities, McKee’s efforts were welcomed by the Reverend Nelson G. Merry, pastor of the First Baptist Colored Church, who permitted McKee to operate his free school on the church’s ground floor. Shortly thereafter, Wadkins, who had previously operated his school in the church, reportedly vehemently objected to McKee’s

⁸⁴ “Report Upon A Proposed System of Public Education for the City of Nashville, Respectfully Addressed to its Citizens, by Prof. J.W. Ingraham, 1848.” Quoted in John Egerton, *Nashville: The Faces of Two Centuries, 1780-1980* (Nashville: PlusMedia, 1979), 102.

⁸⁵ Garrett and Goodpasture, *History of Tennessee*, 300.

presence.⁸⁶ But Wadkins' history of black education in antebellum Nashville gives no record of it, leaving historians to offer conjecture on the extent of and the reasons for his opposition. It is not difficult to believe that he did attempt to thwart McKee's attempts to establish his school. Perhaps he took exception to the content of McKee's lessons or perceived McKee's attempts as patronizing or as an attempt by whites to take control of black education in Nashville.

What is certain however, is that even with Wadkins's long and impressive record of teaching, he must have found it difficult to compete with the fact that McKee's classes were not only free, they were being offered in Nashville's oldest black church which called many of the city's most distinguished blacks its members. The matter sparked what has been characterized as "an unsightly brawl," between Wadkins and Merry, who was an advocate of McKee, but was probably more accurately a struggle for influence over the future of black education. Using his long-standing influence in the community, Wadkins was able to secure enough support among the church's membership to force the end of McKee's classes at the church.⁸⁷

Wadkins' success however, was short-lived. While he and the city's other black teachers probably recognized that white missionary efforts presented a threat to the viability of their schools, jobs and educational traditions, they were powerless to stop them. Led in part by McKee, the founding of the Fisk school spelled the end of the history of Nashville's native schools. Still, the history of black education in antebellum Nashville pointedly demonstrates the desire for black education among free black and enslaved persons alike. Nashville blacks, indeed, much like nineteenth century blacks held in bondage across the American South actively sought educational opportunities to learn. Even in a state where slavery was deemed moderate, and in a community where paternalistic whites had a fairly liberal attitude towards privileged free and

⁸⁶J.W. Wait, "Mission in Nashville," in *Historical Sketch of the Freedmen's Missions of the United Presbyterian Church, 1862-1904* (Knoxville, Tenn: Printing Dept., Knoxville College, 1904), 2-3; John Cimprich, *Slavery's End in Tennessee, 1861-1865* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1985), 77.

⁸⁷ Cimprich, *Slavery's End in Tennessee*, 77.

quasi-slave blacks, education for blacks was generally either non-existent or was limited to the occasional sympathetic instruction of white owners. With little to no provision for black education, free blacks single-handedly created provisions for free and slave blacks, by founding schools for local black children.

Stony the Road We've Trod: Nashville's Black School Teacher Tradition Redefines Impossibility

Missionary, educator and feminist Virginia Walker Broughton was only one of the many successful graduates produced by Nashville's antebellum black schools. She recalled, "[b]efore the late Civil War, Virginia [Walker Broughton] attended a private school, taught by Professor Daniel [Wadkins], and was reading in the fourth reader when the new day of freedom dawned upon the race and brought with it the glorious light of education for all who would receive it."⁸⁸ Named after her father's home state, Broughton proudly declared that she was "born of honorable parents who had secured their freedom at great cost." Her father, Nelson Walker "was an industrious, intelligent man, who, early in life, hired his time from his master and thereby was enabled to purchase his own freedom and also that of his wife." Together with his wife Eliza Smart Broughton, "they began to build up a home and rear children who could enjoy the privileges of education that only very few of our race could enjoy at that time." The training Broughton received in Wadkins' school was not only a privilege; it was an advantage that paid off when she attended the Fisk Free School in 1865 as an advanced student. Ten years later, after "consecutive years of faithful study" she graduated from the College Department of Fisk University in May 1875.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Virginia Walker Broughton, *Twenty Year's Experience of a Missionary* (Chicago: Pony Press, 1907), 7.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 8; Jessie Carney Smith, "Virginia E. Walker Broughton" in *Notable Black American Women*, Book II (Detroit: Gale Publishing, 2003), 57-60; See Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "The Feminist Theology of the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1890," in *Religion and American Culture: A Reader*, ed., David G. Hackett (New York: Routledge, 2003), 267-288.

There is little doubt that the success of antebellum black-owned and operated schools in Nashville was due to the sacrifice of the students' parents. Still, these schools also owed much of their success to the courage and dedication of black teachers who continuously tried to navigate the changing positions of local whites. With sympathetic whites vacillating between being supportive, seemingly indifferent and/or oblivious to their existence, black schools were high-risk enterprises. It was dangerous to operate these schools amid a white community that was not at all hesitant to demonstrate its opposition through acts of violence. White hostility forced the schools to move often and to operate in secret. "Broken up time and again," wrote Anita Shafer Goodstein, "the schools' persistence is testimony to the stubborn determination of parents and teachers [as] ... there is no evidence of financial or political support ever offered by the white community."⁹⁰

As the principal source of stability for these schools, teachers like Wadkins and Porter constantly struggled to escape "the lynx-eyed vigilance" of those opposing black education.⁹¹ In doing so, native schools not only represent black Nashville's earliest attempts of black self-determination, they point to the formative nature of these teachers' in shaping the character of Black Athens. Long after she had been a student in Wadkins' school, Ella Sheppard Moore could still vividly remember her educational experiences. "He used the old Webster blue back spelling book. Each class stood up against the wall, head erect, hands down, toes straight. I recall only three classes: the Eb, Ib, Ob class; the Baker, Maker, Taker class; and the Republication, Replication class. They spelled in unison in a musical intonation, swaying their bodies from side to side, with perfect rhythmical precision on each syllable, which we thought grand."⁹²

Sheppard Moore's recollections of learning in Wadkins' school as "grand" were probably

⁹⁰ Goodstein, *Nashville 1780-1860: Frontier to City*, 150-151.

⁹¹ Henry Allen Bullock, *A History of Negro Education in the South: From 1619 to the Present* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 25.

⁹² Moore, "Before Emancipation," 7.

not unlike those of other former students in Nashville's native schools. In addition to helping students like Sheppard Moore excel academically, Wadkins' instruction methods reflected early efforts of black teachers to incorporate discipline, deportment and pride into their lessons. Wadkins's own carriage, commanded the "profound respect" of his students—students who would increasingly assume positions of influence in Nashville and across the South during the post-Civil War period. Sheppard Moore, for example, was a student in Wadkins's school up until 1856, before her father fled with her to Cincinnati. More than a decade later, she returned to Nashville where she attended Fisk and received international acclaim as a member of the world-famous Jubilee Singers. As the first black instructor at Fisk, her influence on several classes of Fiskites mirrored her national renown as a highly sought after public speaker, missionary and woman's rights activist.⁹³

Sheppard Moore was only one of a host of former students in Nashville's native schools who achieved local, national and even, international prominence. Arguably black Nashville's most powerful politician and its most influential citizen from the 1870s up until the turn of the century, James C. Napier was also famously taught by Wadkins. Napier, who like Sheppard Moore had moved with his family to Cincinnati in the late 1850s, returned to the Nashville during the Civil War. He soon after became involved in Republican Party politics and was the mentee of slave-turned-Republican congressman John Mercer Langston. Napier graduated from Howard University Law School before returning to Nashville where he was a prominent figure in local and state politics. He, along with his wife Nettie Langston, the daughter of his mentor, led black Nashville's elite circle for more than a half century. With his local influence secured through the passage of legislation that created opportunities for black professionals ranging from black teachers to black firemen, Napier used his personal savings to help establish the Nashville

⁹³ Ibid.; See Jessie Carney Smith, "Ella Sheppard Moore (1851-1914)" in *Notable Black American Women, Book I*, ed. Jessie Carney Smith (Detroit: Gale Research, 1992), 1005-1010.

One-Cent Savings Bank, one of the nation's first black-owned and operated banks and helped lead the push for the founding of Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial Normal School for Negroes. Shortly after the turn of the century, Napier's influence reached national prominence when he served as Secretary of Treasury under President Taft.⁹⁴

Long before Napier entered the banking world, Nelson Walker (the father of Virginia Walker Broughton), another famous alumnus of Nashville's native schools, served as chairman of the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company Bank. Organized in December 1865, it was the city's first black bank. The same year, Walker, a colored barber and businessman, persuaded the Tennessee General Assembly to incorporate The Nashville Barbers' Association and was among attendees at the first National Equal Rights League in Cleveland, Ohio.⁹⁵ The following year, he also helped to establish the Nashville Order of Sons of Relief Society as a benevolent organization and the Annual Agricultural and Mechanical Association to encourage freedman to draw on their occupational strengths as skilled craftsman and agricultural workers.⁹⁶

Samuel Lowery was also among the alumni of Nashville's native schools. Like Walker, Lowery was also among attendees at the first National Equal Rights League in Cleveland, Ohio in 1865.⁹⁷ His father Peter Lowery, who was a minister, ran a semi-independent black church on Harding's Belle Meade Plantation and is believed to have used his Sunday school for religious as

⁹⁴ Lester C. Lamon, "James C. Napier (1845-1940)" in *Dictionary of American Negro Biography*, eds. Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winston (New York: Norton, 1982), 470-71; Linda T. Wynn, "James C. Napier (1845-1940)" in *Notable Black American Men*, ed. Jessie Carney Smith (Detroit: Gale Research, 1998), 868-71.

⁹⁵ "Chapter XVI," *Acts of the State of Tennessee Passed at the General Assembly: Passed at the First Session of the Thirty-fourth General Assembly, for the Year 1865* (Nashville: S.C. Mercer, 1865), 86.

⁹⁶ "Chapter CLV," *Acts of the State of Tennessee Passed at the General Assembly: Passed at the Second Session of the Thirty-fourth General Assembly, for the Years 1865-66* (Nashville: S.C. Mercer, 1866), 391-393; Nina Mjagkij. "Nashville: Civic, Literary and Mutual Aid Associations," *Organizing Black America: An Encyclopedia of African American Associations* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2001), 351-352.

⁹⁷ See *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the National Equal Rights League, Held in Cleveland, Ohio October 19, 20 and 21, 1865* (Philadelphia: E.C. Markley & Son, 1865).

well as academic instruction.⁹⁸ Together with his father, the younger Lowery, also a teacher and minister founded Tennessee Manual Labor University, the only college in the state founded by-and-for blacks.⁹⁹ While he later became a noted silk culturist and successful businessman, Lowery was also noted as a pioneering jurist. Admitted to the bar in Tennessee and then Alabama in the 1870s, Lowery, with the help of Belva V. Lockwood (the first woman admitted to the Supreme Court bar), became the fifth black American and first Southern black admitted to the Supreme Court bar in 1880.¹⁰⁰

After establishing himself as a local barber and businessman in Nashville, James P. Thomas, one of Alphonso Sumner's earliest students moved to St. Louis, Missouri where he was a leading real estate investor. By 1870, Thomas remarkably had become one of the richest men in state, white or black. Over the course of the next two decades, Thomas and his wife led St. Louis' elite black community. The famous family also included Thomas' nephews John Jr. and James Rapier, also once students in Nashville's native schools. Born in Alabama, the Rapier brothers were reared in Nashville by their grandmother. Like their uncle, their father John H. Rapier was also a successful barber who had taught himself to write using a system of phonics. John Jr., eventually became a surgeon with the Freedmen's Hospital in Washington, D.C., while his brother, James was elected as a Republican to the Forty-third Congress (1873-1875) where he was one of seven black U.S. Representatives who fought for the passage of the major Civil

⁹⁸ Woodson, "Documents: School for Free Negroes and Slaves," 116; Hooper, *A Distinct People*, 257.

⁹⁹ *Acts of the State of Tennessee Passed at the Second Adjourned Session of the Thirty-fourth General Assembly, for the years, 1866-1867* (Nashville, Tenn., 1866), 45-48.

¹⁰⁰ William J. Simmons and Henry McNeal Turner, *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive and Rising* (Cleveland: G.M. Rewell & Co., 1887), 144-148; "A Colored Lawyer's Mission" Samuel R. Lowery to Practice in the United States Supreme Court—His Plan for Educating His People," (1880, February 3). *New York Times* (1857-Current file), p. 5. Retrieved January 29, 2009, from ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2005) database; Jill Norgren, *Belva Lockwood: The Woman Who Would Be President* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 107-108.

Rights Bill of 1875.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

As successful teachers, lawyers, doctors, businessman, clergy and politicians, Broughton, Sheppard Moore, Napier, Walker, Lowery, Thomas and the Rapier brothers represent the generation of black children who were educated in Nashville's black antebellum schools. The school's primary function may have been to offer them the rudiments of an education. But in addition to offering their students the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic, black teachers demanded the best of their students. They provided them with living models of black intelligence and achievement. They imbued them with self and racial pride and instilled in them a spirit of service to their communities. In doing so, black teachers nurtured a generation of "civic minded" black children who not only assumed influential positions in black Nashville; they assumed the mantle of civil rights through the creation of additional educational opportunities as well as economic and political empowerment for blacks.

The formative nature of these teachers in shaping the character of Black Athens would more and more, become clear in the ensuing decades. Their importance was not only due to their continued educational activism or even chiefly due to their pupils' positions of influence. The most lasting contributions of these schools were the lofty expectations for black education (as well as for what one could and should do with it) they created in the minds of their students. Even so, the influence of these black schools and black teachers was not limited to their students. To be sure, those blacks who did not have the opportunity to attend Nashville's native schools were watching and waiting. When white missionaries arrived in Nashville, they would be surprised to find eager students as well as an existing black teacher tradition, which had set

¹⁰¹ See Franklin and Schweningen, *In Search of the Promised Land*; See James Thomas, *From Tennessee Slave to St. Louis Entrepreneur: The Autobiography of James Thomas*, ed. Loren Schweningen (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1984).

standards by which they would soon be measured.

CHAPTER II

OF MISSIONARIES AND MISSION: THE FOUNDING AND MISSION OF NASHVILLE'S EARLIEST BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

On the heels of the Civil War, thousands of freedmen across the South flocked from the plantations of their masters to the contraband camps of the Union army. To them, the contraband camps represented freedom from oppression and served as the dawning of brighter tomorrows. Despite the many ways in which this was true, contraband camps like those in Nashville were overwhelmed and unprepared for the masses of slaves seeking refuge within its walls. Union officers and soldiers, despite their sympathy for the thousands of enslaved persons they encountered, simply did not know what to do with the throng of people who expected them to meet their needs. Once combatants, Union soldiers were now emancipators. And as emancipators, they were not only revered for their service, but expected by the freedmen to provide among other things, the necessities of food, housing and shelter. Yet, as sure as these demands overwhelmed the Union's coffers, there was one desire among the slaves that astounded them. More than anything else it seemed, the freedmen wanted to learn.

The premium blacks placed on education grew exponentially in the period immediately following emancipation. With the knowledge that the ability to read and write allowed literate blacks to better transition from slavery to freedom, masses of freedmen eagerly sought to obtain at least a rudimentary education. While the Union's occupation provided the earliest impetus for mass black education across the South, the debate over black education can be traced back to the beginnings of slavery in the Americas. Similarly, black education in various forms including academic, religious, reading, and/or reading and writing has always co-existed with a *de facto* and/or *de jure* policy of barring black literacy. By the antebellum period, a rash of slave codes

sought to restrict the power slaves tried to wield over their own lives through various types of protest—protest that was often attributed and/or connected to black literacy. Even free blacks were not untouched by state and local legislative attempts to limit or prohibit their enterprise, movement, assembly and/or educational opportunities.

In Nashville, where free, quasi-free and enslaved blacks had enjoyed three decades of independent black education through a series of native schools, blacks had long experienced an autonomy that could be envied by free blacks across the South. The antebellum period however, was riddled by attempts to curtail advancement among blacks both free and slave in cities across the South, including Nashville. Viewed as the most natural path to black self-determination, black education managed to survive clandestinely in spite of repeated violent attacks on black schools, teachers and students. But by the close of the Civil War, the coming of northern missionaries had dramatically changed the face of black education. Gone were the makeshift classrooms with black teachers like Daniel Watkins leading pupils in synchronized recitation and in its place were schools funded by white abolitionists and led by white missionaries. An outgrowth of Union contraband camps and white Protestant ethos, white teachers received the financial support of northern financiers to establish free schools for blacks. Despite initially looking upon their students as “objects” to be seized, the financial and moral support they received uniquely positioned these novice white teachers to commandeer black education in Nashville from their veteran black counterparts. In the process of doing so, whites were also empowered to take black education in Nashville to the next level--to turn their free schools into black colleges.

Consequently, instead of being a natural outgrowth of the city’s thirty-year tradition of independent black education via native schools, the history of Nashville’s black colleges and universities is presumed to have primarily evolved out of white missionary efforts instead of out of black determination. In turn, the idea that the success of black colleges such as Fisk University

(1866 -), Roger Williams University, formerly known as Nashville Normal and Theological Institute (1866-1929), Central Tennessee College, later renamed Walden University (1866-1925), and Meharry Medical College (1876 -) should be attributed to white missionary and northern philanthropy is not a novel one. In fact, having witnessed the sacrifice of these whites first-hand, many of these schools' black students felt a sense of indebtedness to their former teachers; and naturally, none were more eager to recognize the role of whites in ensuring the success of their white-administered alma maters than the black students themselves.

By the mid-twentieth century, the students of four Nashville black colleges—Fisk, Meharry, Tennessee State and American Baptist—stood at the helm of the struggle for black higher education in the city. As the Nashville “quartet” of black colleges, these schools would also serve as incubators for civil rights. This chapter explores what if any correlation exists between the early history of Nashville’s oldest surviving black colleges (Fisk and Meharry), and the unique role these colleges would play in raising a nonviolent army to fight for civil rights. In order to do so, it traces the evolution of the sense of mission at these colleges from their beginnings as freedmen’s schools, offering a wide range of educational instruction to their re-constitution as institutions of higher education, offering advanced study and professional degrees. Further, it conceptualizes how the cast of institutions and characters, which emerge out of this larger history shaped to differing degrees, the purpose and function of black higher education in Nashville. As such, it lays the groundwork for examining the uniquely shared institutional missions of the colleges as a product of the schools’ long-held sense of commitment to both scholarship and to service.

Additionally, it attempts to conceptualize the beginning of the long, complex, and changing relationships between the white teachers and black students of Fisk and Meharry. Students in Nashville’s earliest black colleges, like those across the wider South, endured the region’s challenging conditions as well as the tumultuous nature of the times, alongside their

white missionary teachers. This chapter contends that the connection and sense of obligation that these students felt to their white administrators and teachers was a likely outgrowth of their shared experiences. Ostracized by southern whites, northern white missionaries struggled to secure adequate food, clothing, and shelter in the postwar South alongside their black students and their students' families. This chapter does not attempt to suggest that their experiences were identical to black southerners, but instead, points to the ways in which the struggles of blacks and white missionaries often ran parallel to one another. These shared realities help demonstrate the ties between white missionaries who struggled to eke out a living by teaching black students in the postwar South, and the black families who not only struggled to sustain themselves, but also to be able to afford white instruction. Together, they huddled together in makeshift classrooms and banded together against rising white hostilities and violence against black education. The highs and lows, joys and sorrows, successes and setbacks of institutional building were theirs, together.

Those Who Dared: Joseph G. McKee and the Coming of the Northern Missionary

A native of Anahilt, Ireland, Joseph G. McKee has been hailed as the first pioneer white missionary and teacher in Nashville. McKee, who had migrated to the United States as a teenager, studied theology at Westminster College in Pennsylvania before becoming a minister of the United Presbyterian Church.¹ He trekked thousands of miles over Nebraska's prairies as a missionary and contemplated joining his uncle in India, where he was working as a missionary for the Irish Presbyterian Church. The outbreak of the Civil War however, offered McKee previously unforeseen opportunities for missionary work among the freedmen. "Why go to India

¹ James McNeal, "Biographical Sketch of Rev. Joseph G. McKee: The Pioneer Missionary to the Freedmen in Nashville, Tennessee," in *Historical Sketch of the Freedmen's Missions of the United Presbyterian Church, 1862-1904* (Knoxville: Printing Department of Knoxville College, 1904), 9; Janet S. Collins, *Free at Last* (1898; Reprint; Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1972), 16-17, 22. McNeal contends that McKee was fourteen, while Collins claims that he was sixteen.

to teach heathens there, when there are millions of wretched heathens at our very doors,” asked McKee, a question that was probably more so self-directed than put to others.²

When McKee arrived in Nashville in the fall of 1863, he met anywhere from eight to ten thousand freedmen in the city. Described as “a homeless, friendless, pitiable throng, suffering from cold, hunger, sickness and death,” Nashville’s freedmen community had grown exponentially in the time since the beginning of the Civil War.³ While the first contraband camp in Middle Tennessee was founded in December of the same year (and was located just two miles west of the city’s original black enclave), the Union Army also established camps of its own. Its first was established in northwest Nashville; two others were set-up the following year, one in Edgefield and a second in south Nashville near Fort Negley. Built by black laborers during the fall of 1862, the Union fortification was once the site of a “symbolic and defiant military stand” of blacks brandishing various tools as weapons to defend it against a Confederate attack.⁴ Despite their desire to bear arms in defense of the Union, the Fort Negley workers, like many blacks across the state and wider South, were refused the opportunity to fight in the Union Army. As a rule, Union officers discouraged “black flight” from plantations, until Union General Ulysses S. Grant recognized the usefulness of fugitive slaves as laborers. Accepted in December 1862, Grant’s contraband policy (which provided for the creation of contraband camps) was largely ignored by Tennessee (military) Governor Andrew Johnson until the Union Army of Tennessee recognized the usefulness of blacks as laborers who could provide the additional manpower necessary for the Union to hold Tennessee.⁵

² James McNeal, “Biographical Sketch of Rev. Joseph G. McKee,” 9-10.

³ J.W. Wait, “The United Presbyterian Mission Among the Freedmen in Nashville,” in *Historical Sketch of the Freedmen’s Missions of the United Presbyterian Church, 1862-1904* (Knoxville: Printing Department of Knoxville College, 1904), 1.

⁴ Lovett, *The African American History of Nashville*, 32, 53, 55.

⁵ Bobby L. Lovett, “The Negro’s Civil War in Tennessee,” *The Journal of Negro History* 61, No. 1 (January 1976), 37-38; Cimprich, *Slavery’s End in Tennessee*, 48-50.

In order to arrive safely at one of these camps, fugitive slaves had to find a way to feed, clothe and protect themselves and their loved ones against the potential enslavement of Tennessee's slave patrols. Yet, life in any Middle Tennessee contraband camp was nothing less than precarious. Union Army officials found themselves overwhelmed and under-prepared to provide for the flood of slaves seeking refuge from slavery and the freedom to start a new life. Described as a "miserable existence," contraband camps were overrun by disease and suffered from inadequate supervisory personnel, insufficient sanitation and medical facilities. Food and clothing rations were subject to the discretion of dishonest officials and shelter from the elements was at best, scant. Governor Johnson did not even provide tents to fugitive camp dwellers until late into the winter of 1863 and the following winter blacks complained that their children were forced to sleep in tents on dirt floor amid adverse weather conditions.⁶ It is unsurprising then, that black mortality rates were extremely high in these camps.⁷ The conditions of the surrounding urban enclaves in which as many as two-thirds of Middle Tennessee's black refugees lived were no better than their counterparts. Alone to fend for themselves, refugees looked for jobs and multiple families often shared single rooms, abandoned buildings and outhouses as accommodations. With a scarcity of adequate housing, clean water and proper sanitation, black urban enclaves quickly devolved into shantytowns littered by dilapidated shacks.⁸ Even with the distinguished service of fifteen United States Colored Troop Regiments between 1863 and 1866, Nashville blacks needed more help than the Union Army was able to provide.⁹

The arrival of McKee and the commencement of his work among the freedmen, then, could not have been timelier. On October 11, with aid from the Presbyterian Church, McKee

⁶ Cimprich, *Slavery's End in Tennessee*, 50; Lovett, *The African American History of Nashville*, 55.

⁷ Lovett, "The Negro's Civil War in Tennessee," 37-38.

⁸ Cimprich, *Slavery's End in Tennessee*, 47-48.

⁹ Lovett, "The Negro's Civil War in Tennessee," 50.

opened his free school for blacks—the first known in the city—in a Baptist Church.¹⁰ From the first day, the composition of McKee’s classes not only reflected the newfound realities of freedom for those both young and old, it demonstrated the continued shared destiny of black Nashville despite class. They came to school, young and old, some literate while others longed for their first opportunity to learn. Some had suitable attire, while others donned little more than rags. Most were noticeably dark in hue while others were considerably lighter in skin tone. By McKee’s own account, the experiences of his first day encapsulated the complex history and future of black education in Nashville. “On the first day I opened the schools,” wrote McKee, “I observed a well dressed *white* lady, as I supposed, (not having yet acquired a Southern discrimination of shades) sitting among the children. I supposed from her lady-like manner and address that she was some Northern officer’s wife visiting the school. To my surprise I soon observed her follow my pointer and name the letters. I soon discovered that she was the mother of a large and respectable family of boys who were sent north for an education as they dared not be taught in Tennessee.”¹¹ The woman, as it turned out, was neither northern nor was she even white. Her name was Jane C. Napier and she was the mother of James Carroll Napier, the early student of Daniel Watkins.

The successes McKee and his students enjoyed in classrooms did not mitigate the challenges he faced beyond its walls. After just one month in the church, McKee moved his school to Caper’s Chapel, where he assumed responsibility for its ongoing educational efforts. By the beginning of its second year, McKee reopened his school in the First Colored Baptist Church, located inside a contraband camp in southwest Nashville. But, when McKee’s school was said to have “interfered with the interests of a colored teacher in the camp,” who is believed to have

¹⁰ Wait, “The United Presbyterian Mission Among the Freedmen in Nashville,” 1; Joseph M. Wilson, *The Presbyterian Historical Almanac and Annual Remembrancer of the Church for 1865*, Volume Seven (Philadelphia: Joseph M. Wilson, 1865), 24.

¹¹ Joseph G. McKee, “Notes and Incidents.” Quoted in McNeal, “Biographical Sketch of Rev. Joseph G. McKee,” 16.

been veteran black teacher Daniel Watkins, it was disbanded the following day.¹² McKee encountered similar challenges after he began offering classes at the Mission Home in September 1864. First, the school was organized in the yard of the property, before moving into a vacant room. Operating there for only a few weeks, McKee's school then moved to Caper's Chapel despite opposition from the pastor. The pastor was overruled by the board of trustees, and classes began in the church on October 12, 1864, on the condition that the room be "vacated and swept whenever needed by the congregation."¹³ Frequently interrupted by church meetings or "for an audience that never assembled," the school eventually convened fairly regularly. McKee was soon able to hire another teacher to help with classroom instruction. With their work hailed as "true Christian heroism," McKee and his contemporaries faced a number of serious challenges, but none more critical than remaining healthy.¹⁴

Given the bitterness of Nashville's cold winters, early missionaries such as McKee were especially susceptible to sickness. McKee himself, who had described the previous winter as "the dreadful winter of 1863-4," with temperatures that reached as low as six degrees below zero, was not immune to the threat of illness.¹⁵ The additional help the teachers afforded McKee could not have come at a better time, as the fall of that year signaled the onset of health challenges that would plague him for the rest of his life. Despite his nagging health concerns, McKee was not idle. He successfully led the campaign to purchase a lot and erect a structure he dubbed the McKee schoolhouse.¹⁶ By June of 1865, at least three hundred pupils were taught in the schoolhouse. Erected with water-soaked lumber and "no small amount of Cumberland mud," the structure was a remarkable achievement for McKee, who reminisced, "we were tossed from place

¹² Wait, "The United Presbyterian Mission Among the Freedmen in Nashville," 1-3; McNeal, "Biographical Sketch of Rev. Joseph G. McKee," 10.

¹³ Wait, "The United Presbyterian Mission Among the Freedmen in Nashville," 3.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ McNeal, "Biographical Sketch of Rev. Joseph G. McKee," 10; Collins, *Free at Last*, 19.

¹⁶ Wilson, *The Presbyterian Historical Almanac*, 25; Wait, "The United Presbyterian Mission Among the Freedmen in Nashville," 3-4.

to place, sometimes our school thrown out without a day's notice, with no place to go." Once in the chapel of the schoolhouse, McKee could look out on his audience and rejoice with those who "sang with a heart almost too full to sing."¹⁷

Upon the close of the school year, Brigadier-General and Freedmen's Bureau Assistant Commissioner for Kentucky and Tennessee Clinton B. Fisk¹⁸ commended McKee and his staff for their "perseverance and patient faith with which you have steadily, through storm and sunshine, prosecuted your labors of love among the freedmen of Nashville. I was delighted beyond measure at the credible examination of your schools this day," he continued, "and to hear of your determination to increase your facilities in the coming autumn."¹⁹ For several years to come, McKee's "mission" school continued to educate scores of black Nashville students. The school's mission focused "first to those who could not obtain education elsewhere; second, to those whose families were identified with the Mission church, and third to those who desired to prepare themselves for teaching or for the ministry."²⁰ Despite boasting an enrollment of nearly seven hundred students by 1866, the next two years singled the beginning of the end of McKee's preeminence in black education in Nashville. By 1867, McKee, in declining health, resigned his posts as alderman, as superintendent of the mission and as superintendent of education for the county and fled to the North to regain his health; but it never returned. On September 25 of the following year, after "incessant and almost herculean labors," McKee died in the home of his

¹⁷ Wait, "The United Presbyterian Mission Among the Freedmen in Nashville," 4.

¹⁸ More than five years earlier, Fisk had enlisted in the United States Army on July 26, 1862 and in September of the same year, was commissioned as a colonel. A native of New York, Fisk's family migrated to Michigan as a part of the westward migration movement. Fisk's military career began when he served with the Missouri Home Guard, a private army organized to oppose the secession movement during a brief stint in the early 1860s. By the time of the Civil War, he had enjoyed a successful career as a merchant and later as a financial agent in the insurance industry. See Alphonso A. Hopkins, *The Life of Clinton Bowen Fisk* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1888).

¹⁹ Clinton B. Fisk to Joseph G. McKee, 1 July 1865. Quoted in Wait, "The United Presbyterian Mission Among the Freedmen in Nashville," 4.

²⁰ Wait, "The United Presbyterian Mission Among the Freedmen in Nashville," 6.

father-in-law in Ohio.²¹ One week later back in Nashville, cries and sobs of grief filled McKee's chapel as hundreds "literally jammed" together to remember McKee. Many blacks, one writer claimed "mourned for him [McKee] as though they had lost a father."²²

McKee's death did indeed, signal the end of an era in which he towered over black education in Nashville. His death must have been keenly felt by the thousands of freedmen for whom he "sacrificed in his effort to improve [their] conditions." Described as a "faithful friend of the slave," McKee endured the harsh conditions of the post-war South alongside the freedmen and carried the unpopular mantle of black education despite public scorn.²³ As one writer observed: "He labored in the face of the bitterest and most fiendish opposition and hate."²⁴ During his earliest days in Nashville, McKee was refused shelter "after his business [of educating blacks] became known" to local whites. As he walked through city streets, some threw stones at him while others shouted racist epithets. "There he goes, that low-lived Yankee that can find no better business than teaching niggers," shouted one white female onlooker.²⁵ Another remarked: "It's a fine pass we [whites] have come to. The time was when the niggers carried the white children's books and dinner and waited outside to bring them home. Now we (whites) have no schools and these Yankees are opening free schools for niggers."²⁶

McKee's detractors probably hoped that his death would signal the beginning of the eventual end of black education in Nashville. Much to their chagrin, even before his death, the mantle of black education in Nashville was assumed by a host of other individuals and organizations. The end of the Civil War only marked the beginning of the growth of black

²¹ McNeal, "Biographical Sketch of Rev. Joseph G. McKee," 12.

²² *Ibid.*, 13; See also Collins, *Free at Last*, 20. "When forced to lay down this grand work, so dear to his heart, thousands mourned."

²³ Collins, *Free at Last*, 16-20.

²⁴ McNeal, "Biographical Sketch of Rev. Joseph G. McKee," 11.

²⁵ *Ibid.*; McKee, "Notes and Incidents." Quoted in McNeal, "Biographical Sketch of Rev. Joseph G. McKee," 14.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

educational opportunities in Nashville. For later missionaries and their students, these opportunities meant envisioning more than even McKee imagined. To do the greatest good, those who led black education in Nashville would have to do more than offer the rudiments of reading, writing and arithmetic. To do the greatest good, the officials of freedmen's schools would have to answer the call for black teachers, preachers and other professionals and in doing so, they unknowingly laid the foundation for the city and region's New South's campaign.

A Worthy Mission: The Founding and Failure of Tennessee Manual Labor University

As McKee's nemesis, black Nashville leader, entrepreneur, veteran educator Daniel Wadkins had seen his educational ventures sidelined numerous times over the course of several decades by violence, intimidation, as well as by law and by practice. The final closure of his clandestine school in 1865 was due at least in part, to competition with McKee's free school and later, the free Fisk School. Despite the close of his native school, Wadkins sought to capitalize on the spirit of increased black educational opportunity that pervaded the postwar era. Wadkins' "highly important" mission was arguably, in many ways, an even more ambitious undertaking than his antebellum native schools. At a time when "the wildest dreams of colored education did not at first, perhaps, include the university idea," Wadkins, together with Peter and Samuel Lowery, labored to establish a college for blacks in Nashville.²⁷

By 1866, the same year as Fisk University's incorporation, black representatives from the Colored Christian (Disciples of Christ) Church and members of the Colored Agricultural and Mechanical Association began meeting in Nashville to lay out their plan for a technical college for blacks. With Peter Lowery as its president, Tennessee Manual Labor University was incorporated on December 10, 1866. Founded for "the purpose of educating the youth of the country who have no means to obtain a good practical education," its trustees were conferred

²⁷ Hopkins, *The Life of Clinton Bowen Fisk*, 112.

with the authority to conduct any business “for the education and development of the mind and body and to prepare the pupil to make a useful citizen.”²⁸ The college was designed to build on the educational experiences of the Lowerys. While Samuel Lowery was probably first educated in his father Peter’s quasi-independent native school on the Harding Plantation, both father and son received their advanced training at Franklin College, founded in 1845 and acclaimed as one of the “great pre-Civil War institutions of the South.”²⁹ Led by the school’s white owners and operators, Tolbert Fanning and his wife Elizabeth Fall Fanning, whose legendary commitment to the Restoration Movement was critical to the establishment of the Christian Church (also known as Disciples of Christ) and later the Church of Christ as separate entities, Franklin College had a broad curriculum based on religious, academic and manual training. The school’s black and white students, alike, learned the foundational skills of a variety of trades including carpentry, blacksmithing, and agriculture and raising livestock.³⁰

Drawing on their rigorous learning experiences at Franklin, the Lowerys envisioned that Tennessee Manual Labor University would provide similar experiences for its students. Even though students would work to defray the cost of instruction, the school’s founders estimated that upwards of one hundred thousand dollars was needed to begin classes. Finally, in January 1868, more than a year following its incorporation, Tennessee Manual Labor University began classes with approximately one hundred students. Nestled in the freedmen’s community of Ebenezer on

²⁸ *Acts of the State of Tennessee Passed at the Second Adjourned Session of the Thirty-fourth General Assembly, For the years, 1866-1867* (Nashville: S.C. Mercer, 1866), 45-48; Peter Lowery and John W Chanler, eds., “Charter of the Colored Manual Labor School,” in *Tennessee Manual Labor University, Incorporated December 10th, A.D. 1866. Instituted for the benefit of indigent colored youths, etc.* (Nashville: n.p, 1867), 4.

²⁹ See A.R. Holton, “Chapter 5,” *The Harding College Lectures, 1950* (Searcy: Harding College Press, 1951), 76-81.

³⁰ See A. R. Holton. “Tolbert Fanning,” *Restoration Quarterly* 1, No. 1 (1957), 32-34; James R. Wilburn, “Tolbert Fanning (1810-1874),” in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas Allen Foster (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 331-332; John Hull, “Charlotte Fall Fanning (1809-1896),” in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas Allen Foster (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 330-331; George Gowen, “Tolbert Fanning,” in *Churches Of Christ: A Historical, Biographical, and Pictorial History of Churches of Christ in the United States, Australasia, England and Canada, etc.* ed. John T. Brown (Louisville: J.P. Morton and Co., 1904), 451-452.

Murfreesboro Road, the school was located on more than 100 acres of farmland.³¹ While the delay in the school's opening was probably due to a number of challenges, perhaps none was more obvious than the struggle to secure sufficient financial support. Described by church historian Herman A. Norton as "easily the most outstanding Negro religious leader in Nashville and probably in the South," Peter Lowery's association with the school gave the fledging enterprise some much-needed credibility. Having purchased his freedom as well as that of his mother, three brothers and two sisters a quarter of a century earlier, Lowery had not only accumulated forty thousand dollars in real estate, he "had earned the admiration, respect, and support of the white business and religious community."³²

Truthfully, Norton's characterization of Lowery's predominance may have been more accurate in a more limited context, such as in the Disciples of Christ community, yet, the importance of Lowery's relationship with whites is indeed as critical as Norton declared. Whites in the wider South and even paternalistic whites in Nashville could not have eagerly taken to the idea of a black educational center for blacks, owned and operated by blacks. After all, the struggle for even the most basic black instruction had been hard fought by Nashville blacks before, during and after the Civil War and in spite of all their efforts, every single one of the city's native schools, including that of Wadkins, had been closed in the wake of white missionary and northern philanthropic efforts to found black schools in Nashville.

It is predictable then, that the founders of Tennessee Manual Labor University, many of whom were alumni and/or former teachers of Nashville native schools, experienced a great deal of difficulty in finding support for their cause outside of the black community. "White Christian

³¹ Lowery and Chanler, eds., *Tennessee Manual Labor University*, 3; Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 145; W.K. Pendelton, TMLU, *Millennial Harbinger* 39 (1868), 25-27; *Daily Republican* 24 August 1868; Herman A. Norton, *Tennessee Christians: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* (Nashville: Reed and Company, 1971), 132; *Gospel Advocate*, 12 March 1868.

³² Samuel Lowery, "A Culminating Slanderer," *The Christian Standard* V, No. 5 (29 January 1870), 35; Norton, *Tennessee Christians*, 130; Robert W. Hooper, *A Distinct People: A History of the Churches of Christ in the 20th Century* (West Munroe: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 257.

Church members gave little or no support to this new college,” observed Bobby Lovett, “and local northern white missionaries were too busy trying to raise money for their own freedmen’s schools.”³³ While the preoccupation of northern institutions is unsurprising, the Christian Church’s general lack of financial support for the college is especially disappointing considering its longstanding relationship with African Americans as well as the forthcoming conclusions of the church’s Committee on Freedmen.³⁴ Organized at the American Christian Missionary Society (AMCS) Meeting in 1870, the report the committee presented the following year recommended that the Christian Church financially support black education to redress the dire conditions in which masses of freedmen lived.³⁵

Despite the ACMS’s conclusions and the church’s largely progressive attitude toward blacks in general, the Disciples of Christ failed to wholeheartedly support Tennessee Manual Labor University. There are, however, several plausible reasons for the church’s posture. Founder and president of Bethany College in Bethany, West Virginia, Alexander Campbell was elected AMCS president in 1849; he also served as the publisher of *The Millennial Harbinger* until his death in 1866. Some church members opposed the AMCS because they considered it a “para-group,” which represented a doctrinal conflict for those who thought that there should be no organization beside the church itself. Nashville church leaders Tolbert Fanning and David Lipscomb led opposition to the society and plausibly wielded influence over some Christian

³³ Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 145.

³⁴ See Hap S.C. Lyda, “African Americans in the Movement: Nineteenth Century,” in *Encyclopedia of Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas Allen Foster (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 11-13; Hooper, *A Distinct People*, 127-130.

³⁵ Elmer Clifford Lewis, “A History of Secondary and Higher Education in Negro Schools Related to the Disciples of Christ,” (PhD. diss., University of Pittsburg, 1957), 21; *Report of the General Proceedings of the American Christian Missionary Society* (1871), 25, 33.

Church members, especially those in Nashville. Therefore, the ACMS's influence over Nashville Christian Church members would have at best, likely been marginal.³⁶

After W.K. Pendleton³⁷ succeeded Campbell at Bethany in 1866, the ACMS and the *Harbinger*, both the paper as well as the society continued to be supportive of Tennessee Manual Labor University. In an April 1868 editorial, Pendleton introduced the *Harbinger's* readers to Peter Lowery and TMLU. "Whatever of aid can be elicited in the true direction for the elevation of the colored man, by such efforts as this of Bro. Lowery's, should be heartily encouraged, by those who feel that. As our fellow man, ignorant, poor, and politically almost, in any high sense friendless, he has claims for help that cannot be put aside without a sin against the universal law of Christian charity. Nothing appears plainer than that, without education, it will be impossible to elevate the colored man to an equal *influence* in the ranks of free people."³⁸

While Pendleton's *Harbinger* was not the only Disciples of Christ affiliated publication to share Lowery's notice with its readership, its support for the college was much more enthusiastic than any of its counterparts, including the Fanning and Lipscomb-led *The Gospel Advocate*. Instead of offering any endorsement of the venture, the *Advocate* merely printed Lowery's announcement in full.³⁹ Conversely, a year earlier, Fanning wrote a protracted editorial criticizing what he perceived as an attack on his opposition to the church's missionary society organization. In order to do so, Fanning drew on the society's service record in Tennessee and condemned the work of its missionary agent Samuel Lowery. Even so, Fanning boasted that he had not only taught Lowery, he had also privately tutored Cincinnati-based teacher Rufus Conrad and called on the editors of the *Harbinger* to "set these to our credit" and taunted, "let us breathe

³⁶See Leroy Garrett, ed., *The Stone-Campbell Movement: The Story of the American Restoration Movement* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 2002), 358-360.

³⁷For biographical information on W.K. Pendleton see Frederick D Power, *Life of William Kimbrough Pendleton: LL. D., President of Bethany College* (St. Louis: Christian Pub. Co., 1902).

³⁸W.K. Pendleton, "Tennessee Manual Labor University," *The Millennial Harbinger* 39, No.4 (April 1868), 228.

³⁹"Tennessee Manual Labor University," *The Gospel Advocate* X, No.11 (12 March 1868), 246-247.

quietly a few years, and we will send you another crop of colored church missionaries, competent to enlighten your people.”⁴⁰

While the fallout between the factions dated back to the 1850s, Fanning’s criticism of Lowery could have marked the beginning of a tumultuous period, which lay in wait for the leaders of Tennessee Manual Labor University. Lowery, who was a Tennessee native and a former student of Fanning, had been sent back to the state as a missionary for the ACMS during the war.⁴¹ But, by the time of the school’s founding, Fanning no longer thought highly of Lowery. Alleging that Lowery’s reasons for returning South were not spiritual, Fanning wrote “poor Sam’s record is not what his worthy colored brethren who know him in Tennessee think it should be.”⁴² Additional criticisms were heaped upon Lowery in 1869 after *The Christian Standard*, another Disciples of Christ periodical, published a report by J.C. Power of Chicago, in which Power claimed he was supported by a handful of influential Tennessee white leaders. Charging that the school was little more than a “humbug farm...of indolent Negroes and a den of prostitution for those [members of its community] black and white” Powers condemned the school as “a deliberate swindle against the colored race by colored men.”⁴³

Power’s claims set off a heated debate between him, Lowery and the *Standard*’s editors. Two weeks later, the *Standard*’s editors reported that Power’s claims were “fully endorsed” by the persons to which he referred.⁴⁴ The following month, in a letter entitled “A Culminating Slanderer,” Lowery fired back, requesting that each of the papers that printed Power’s claims allow him to address them. Contending that Power’s claims were “villainous” and riddled with

⁴⁰ Tolbert Fanning, “Professor C.L. Loos and the Millennial Harbinger,” *The Gospel Advocate* IX, No. 12 (12 March 1867), 234-237.

⁴¹ See *Report of the General Proceedings of the American Christian Missionary Society* (1864), 15-16. Quoted in John Corneilus Long, “The Disciples of Christ and Negro Education (EdD. diss., University of Southern California, 1960), 47.

⁴² Fanning, “Professor C.L. Loos and the Millennial Harbinger,” 234-237.

⁴³ J.C. Power, “A Warning,” *The Christian Standard* IV, No. 49 (4 December 1869), 389.

⁴⁴ “Tennessee Manual Labor University,” *The Christian Standard* IV, No. 51 (18 December 1869), 404.

“unqualified falsehoods,” Lowery defended the school and its mission claiming that “it has fallen to the lot of a Chicago negro-shrieker to defame the only school sustained and encouraged by colored men in Tennessee.”⁴⁵ Citing a conspiracy to acquire the school’s property at foreclosure, Lowery argued that both he and his father were independently financially successful and that he was acting as agent at the behest of the school’s supporters.

Despite Lowery’s defense, *The Christian Standard*’s editors were unconvinced. They stood by their earlier caution to the paper’s readers to “withhold all further aid” to the school.⁴⁶ The editors of *The Gospel Advocate* launched their own investigation because of accusations against Daniel Wadkins, who was a member of the white Congregation of Christ. Along with the Lowerys, Wadkins, who had been contracted to act as an agent for the school from May 1868 to September 1869, came under attack for his involvement with the school. The report offered no opinion on the integrity of the contract’s terms, but instead vindicated Wadkins for acting in accordance with the agreement. Signed by Philip Fall (Fanning’s brother-in-law), the investigation report went to great lengths to explicitly state that “the said ‘University’ has no connection whatever with the Christian brotherhood in Tennessee.”⁴⁷

Expectedly, Tennessee Manual Labor failed. In the face of opposition from the editors of several of Disciples of Christ’s most powerful papers, the Lowerys were simply unable to regain the confidence of their fellow churchgoers as well as what little confidence they had in the enterprise. Further, the social and political climate of the South further handicapped them. First, opportunities for education were limited in the South for both black and whites alike. White southerners, many of whom had no formal education, were generally opposed to any educational opportunities for blacks. Second, the few white southerners who supported black education

⁴⁵ Samuel Lowery, “A Culminating Slanderer,” *The Christian Standard* V, No. 5 (29 January 1870), 35.

⁴⁶ “The Murfreesboro School,” *The Christian Standard* V, No. 5 (29 January 1870), 36.

“Tennessee Manual Labor University,” *The Christian Standard* IV, No. 51 (18 December 1869), 404.

⁴⁷ Phillip S. Fall, “Correction of False Reports,” *The Gospel Advocate* XII (27 October 1870), 997.

probably preferred that it was controlled by whites, who could manipulate its curriculum. As a rule, the attitudes of Southern church leaders towards education were reflective of the wider public, all of which helped to make the success of Tennessee Manual Labor impossible.

Against every odd, the Lowerys still tried to make the college work. Hopeful, they received the support of black barber businessman and civic leader Sampson W. Keeble, the first African-American to serve in the Tennessee General Assembly.⁴⁸ During the first year of his term (1873-4), Keeble introduced a bill to appropriate state funds to support the struggling Tennessee Manual Labor.⁴⁹ The bill failed, but Keeble's attempt not only demonstrated the power of the Colored Agricultural and Mechanical Association as a political base for Keeble and other politicians seeking the black vote, it also proves that the association's faithful freedmen constituents still supported the university after Disciples of Church members ceased to do so. The school eventually failed but it is not clear when it exactly closed. While some histories point to 1874, there is at least some evidence of fundraising activity in as late as 1881.⁵⁰

Despite possibly folding within a decade of its founding, Tennessee Manual Labor University is a powerful testament to the commitment of Nashville blacks to higher education. Almost a century before the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibited discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex and national origin by federal and state governments in some public places, and similarly long before the founding of many of America's colleges, the founders of Tennessee Manual Labor denounced racial segregation. "We make no distinction on account of race or color," wrote Samuel Lowery. In addition to "not [being]

⁴⁸ Sampson W. Keeble (1833-1887) Born a slave in Rutherford County, Tennessee, Keeble was elected in 1872 and introduced several bills during his term in the 38th Tennessee General Assembly. In addition to his bill for the support of Tennessee Manual Labor University, one other bill called for an amendment to Nashville's charter to allow blacks to operate businesses downtown while a second requested protection for wage earners. Keeble only served one term but served as a magistrate in the Davidson County Court from 1877 to 1882.

⁴⁹ *Tennessee, Journal of the House of Representatives, 1873, 38th General Assembly* (Nashville; n.p, 1873), 1, 3, 262 & 547.

⁵⁰ Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 147; *The Christian Recorder*, 16 June 1881.

sectarian in design,” Tennessee Manual Labor University was an integrated campus, with both blacks and whites living and learning together.⁵¹

Founding Fisk: From Freedmen’s School to Black College

The landscape of black education in Nashville had dramatically changed in the years since McKee first arrived in Nashville. Just as his coming had unduly signaled the beginning of the end of Nashville’s more than thirty-year tradition of independent black education, the end of the Civil War and the subsequent establishment of The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands would hold undue consequences for McKee. Established by an act of the United States Congress on March 3, 1865, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, more commonly known as the Freedmen’s Bureau, was designed to aid the transition of newly freed slaves from slavery to freedom. In addition to providing emergency food, clothing and shelter for the freedmen, the Freedmen’s Bureau sought to make more salient improvements in the quality of black life by supporting military courts, negotiating employment contracts and establishing black schools.⁵²

Of all its work, perhaps the most enduring benefit of the Freedmen’s Bureau was its leadership in the education of the freedmen. In the South, the bureau worked alongside a “large, confusing, and constantly changing” group of northern aid societies who formed the cast of characters involved in black education.⁵³ Nashville was no exception from this rule. Led by the assistant commissioner and senior officer in charge of the bureau for Kentucky, Tennessee and northern Alabama, Clinton B. Fisk, who was commissioned as a Brigadier General in the Union

⁵¹ Samuel Lowery wrote “There are some poor whites on the place that have learned to read and write, besides 180 pupils of the freedmen.” See Lowery, “A Culminating Slanderer,” 35.

⁵² Crystal A. deGregory, “Freedmen’s Bureau (1865-1872),” in *Freedom Facts and Firsts: 400 Years of the African American Civil Rights Experience*, eds. Jessie C. Smith and Linda T. Wynn (Canton: Visible Ink Press, 2009), 205-206.

⁵³ Dennis K. McDaniel, *John Ogden, Abolitionist and Leader in Southern Education* (Independence Square: American Philosophical Society, 1997), 25.

Army in November 1862, had performed most of his service in Missouri and Arkansas during the Civil War. Nominated to the Bureau by Abraham Lincoln and appointed by Andrew Johnson (following Lincoln's assassination), Fisk was commissioner from June 25, 1865 to September 1, 1866.⁵⁴

Luckily, if Nashville's freedmen lost a "father" in Joseph McKee, they had already gained a "godfather" in Fisk, who "craved opportunities for these grown-up children in his charge. From the outset," wrote Fisk biographer Alphonso A. Hopkins, "his thoughtful attention was directed to the matter of colored education. More and more he saw the imperative demand for it, and realized how all efforts for the freedmen must fail largely of success which did not include educational means."⁵⁵ As a believer in "the scriptures and the spelling book," Fisk had hoped that the church would lead educational efforts in the South. But when southern churches did not "organically" move as speedily as he wished, Fisk joined forces with the American Missionary Association (AMA) and the Western Freedmen's Aid Commission (WFAC) the latter of which was organized by famous Quaker, abolitionist and "president" of the Underground Railroad Levi Coffin in January 1863 as the Contraband Relief Association of Cincinnati, to found the Fisk School.⁵⁶

The AMA was formally established in 1846. The organization's early focus on foreign missions for freed slaves quickly turned to abolitionism and creating black educational opportunities. In Nashville, the AMA was represented by two men, the Reverends Erastus Milo Cravath and Edward R. Smith. Born in South Britain, Connecticut, Smith attended Dartmouth and Yale colleges as well as the Theological Seminary at New Haven before he became secretary of the United States Christian Commission during the Civil War. From his post in Nashville,

⁵⁴ Fisk's responsibility for northern Alabama ended in October 1865. Kentucky was likewise discontinued shortly thereafter. See Hopkins, *The Life of Clinton Bowen Fisk*, 93-94; McDaniel, *John Ogden, Abolitionist and Leader in Southern Education*, 28.

⁵⁵ Hopkins, *The Life of Clinton Bowen Fisk*, 109.

⁵⁶ McDaniel, *John Ogden*, 25.

Smith and his wife, Hannah tended to the spiritual and physical wounds of the war until its end. After the war, Smith, a Congregational Church minister, joined the AMA as a field agent, where his focus shifted to black education.⁵⁷

Likewise, Erastus Cravath also arrived in Nashville as a field agent of AMA in 1865. The son of abolitionists, Cravath was born in Berlin, Ohio, just twenty miles from Oberlin College, where he was later educated. During the Civil War, he left his Congregational Church pastorate to serve as chaplain of the 101st Ohio Volunteers. Heightened by his exposure to black life during his military stint, Cravath's deeply held antislavery sentiments lead him to commit himself to the service of the freedmen. Accepting a position as a field missionary of the AMA, Cravath found himself in Nashville in June of 1865.⁵⁸

The WFAC's representative John Ogden was the last of the three Fisk founders. Early on, the WFAC provided relief to black refugees during the Civil War, which continued in the postwar years even after the organization's successful push for the government's founding of the Freedmen's Bureau.⁵⁹ Together, the WFAC and the bureau, under the auspices of General Fisk (who by this time had grown impatient, having also worked to establish schools across Tennessee and Kentucky), hired John Ogden to assume the post of Nashville superintendent of schools July of 1865.

A native of Mount Vernon, Ohio, John Ogden was already an experienced educator by the time he answered Fisk's call. Dubbed the "West Point of Missions" because of the legion of its graduates who went on to serve as missionaries, Ohio Wesleyan University was both

⁵⁷ *New York Times*, 16 August 1876; See Ralph C. Gordon, "Nashville and the U.S. Christian Commission in the Civil War," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 55 (Summer 1996), 98-111; *Edward Parmelee Smith, Incidents of the United States Christian Commission* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1869).

⁵⁸ See Robert T. Swaine, *The Cravath Firm and its Predecessors, 1819-1947* (New York: Priv. print. at Ad Press. 1948).

⁵⁹ See James M. McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1964); Paul Skeels Peirce, *The Freedmen's Bureau: A Chapter in the History of Reconstruction* (Iowa City: The University of Iowa, 1904), 28.

schoolhouse and workplace for Ogden who after graduation served as principal of the University's normal department. Imprisoned in a Tennessee Confederate prison camp during the Civil War, Ogden developed an interest in black troops and later in the freedmen. It was because of the combination of his educational leadership and his sincere interest in the welfare of blacks, that the Bureau and WFAC chose him to lead the establishment of black schools in Tennessee in general and Nashville, in particular.⁶⁰ A little less than a month after accepting the post, Ogden, busy leading black educational efforts in Macon and Atlanta, Georgia, was rushed by General Fisk to begin his work in Nashville. Ogden could not "be too expeditious in reporting for duty," Fisk wrote to Ogden's superiors at the WFAC. "I want the schools to commence on the first Monday in September."⁶¹ When Ogden arrived in Nashville in August as General Fisk had requested, 10,744 blacks, of whom 3,580 were children under the age of fifteen, were poised to welcome any educational opportunity these men would bring.⁶²

Delivering these opportunities, however, was no easy task. While "there were vacant buildings" recalled the Reverend Smith, there were "none for a colored school." One property owner, despite acknowledging needing the money from the sale of his property reportedly told the group that he was not "so long down" that he would sell it for the purpose of black education.⁶³ It was a common occurrence that suitably priced and ideally located properties became unavailable once owners learned what it would be used for. After a two-month search, the group discovered that the former Nashville Union Army Construction Corps was available for purchase. Surrounded by a high fence, several wooden buildings stood on the 1.25 acre site, which was located in the "negro district" just west of the Chattanooga Depot. But, even the

⁶⁰ See McDaniel, *John Ogden*, 3-24.

⁶¹ General Fisk to Walden, 1 August 1865. Quoted in McDaniel, *John Ogden*, 28.

⁶² "Census report of colored population in Nashville," W.T. Clarke, Asst A-G to General Fisk, 10 August 1865. Quoted in McDaniel, *John Ogden*, 31.

⁶³ *Fisk University History, Building and Site and Services of Dedication at Nashville, Tennessee January 1, 1876* (New York: Published for the Trustees of Fisk University, 1876), 40.

fourth of the land's \$16,000 purchase price; which was required in cash, was a considerable sum. "Using all we had and borrowing all we could," wrote Smith, he, Cravath and Ogden scraped together the \$4,000 down payment, offered a promissory note and took a mortgage for the remaining amount.⁶⁴

Eventually, the AMA and WFAC reimbursed the three men and paid two of the three remaining installments of the loan; the Freedmen's Bureau covered the remaining portion. Acting on behalf of the AMA and WFAC respectively, school superintendents Cravath and Ogden, who worked together as close collaborators and friends pushed ahead with plans to open the free school.⁶⁵ The property's place in the heart of Nashville's largest freedmen community made the location ideal for the establishment of the school. General Fisk's desire to have the school opened that fall, however, remained problematic. The property's modest low, one-story barracks, each with side porches and single two-story building which were needed to begin the school, still belonged to the government. Fortunately, through Fisk's assistance, the buildings were acquired for the school; and for his patronage—which eventually amounted to about \$30,000--the school was named the Fisk School (also known as the Fisk Free Colored School) in his honor.⁶⁶

A host of distinguished guests gathered along with administrators, teachers and students to participate in the dedication of the Fisk School on January 6, 1866. The object of the school, which had unofficially begun a month earlier, according to Cravath, was to establish a free school for black children that equaled the best in the country taught by the best teachers in the country. While the school's normal department would be dedicated to training teachers, Cravath

⁶⁴ According to Charles Edwin Röbert, *Nashville and Her Trade for 1870* (Nashville: Roberts & Purvis, 1870), 492. The school was located on Knowles Street between Church and Hines (Hynes) streets; McDaniel, *John Ogden*, 32; H. S. Bennett, "Colored Schools of Nashville," in *Negro Civilization in the South: Educational, Social and Religious Advancement*, ed. Charles Edwin Robert (Nashville: Wheeler Brothers, 1880), 149. Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 3

⁶⁵ Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 3; Dennis K. McDaniel describes Cravath as Ogden's "closest collaborator" and sites Cravath's salutation to Ogden as "Dear Bro. John," as evidence of their nearness. McDaniel, *John Ogden*, 31.

⁶⁶ Richardson. *A History of Fisk University*, 3-4; McDaniel. *John Ogden*, 32-33.

announced plans for the school to serve “at first as a high school and afterwards, if circumstances are favorable, [the buildings] are to be used as a college.” His remarks were undoubtedly well received, as were those of Fisk who “rejoiced that he was permitted to stand as godfather at the baptism of a new and a *free* school.” At least two black leaders also addressed the audience, one of which was prominent black businessman and barber Nelson Walker, a former pupil of Daniel Wadkins, who told listeners to take advantage to the opportunity to receive an education, for without it, he contended, blacks would never become “a people.”⁶⁷

While the day’s program was replete with well wishes, the tenuous nature of the environment in which it operated was not lost on the attendees. Keynote speaker and Republican Governor of Tennessee W. G. Brownlow, reflected the paradox of the period in his opening remarks. “Attend your schools; learn to read the word of God, and then learn to love and practice it,” he admonished Fisk students, but “be mild and temperate in your habits and spirit, and your conduct towards white people.” To teachers he advised, “be exceedingly prudent and cautious, and do nothing offensive to the predominant party here.” Brownlow, a self-described “friend” of the institution, himself acknowledged that it may have seemed “a little strange” for him to offer such measured advice. But Brownlow explained that he did so because without the protection of federal troops, the school would not last “a week, not a week.”⁶⁸

Brownlow’s assessment was probably accurate too. Described by Fisk historian Joe M. Richardson as “a time of intimidation, bigotry, lynchings and murders” the postwar years were difficult and frightful ones for blacks across the South.⁶⁹ Neither Tennessee nor Nashville was exempt from such realities. Still disgruntled over emancipation, the majority of white Nashvillians (much like their southern counterparts), resented opportunities for black education.

⁶⁷ “Tennessee,” *American Missionary* 10 (March 1866).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*; *Nashville Daily and Union and American*, 10 January 1866.

⁶⁹ Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 7.

Whether or not Fisk administrators and teachers were fully cognizant of the danger posed by such opposition, they, along with their students, were susceptible to it.

As early as February 1866, Fisk instructor Miss E.A. Easter wrote to the AMA: “White children are so incensed at the thought of niggers *learning to read* that they often stone them on their way to and from school.” Many of her own students were victims of stoning, which prompted Easter to act as a guard. Yet, even Easter’s presence did not offer the assurance of safety for her or her students. As she noted: “Those that *teach* these colored people are not exempt from these manifestations of hatred.”⁷⁰ Despite Easter’s plea, such incidences persisted. The following month, Ogden reported that Fisk students were not only assailed almost daily, they were often cut and bruised. On at least one occasion, General Fisk had to intervene to punish ten boys of each color for participating in a mutual stoning.⁷¹

The stoning of school boys, while serious, was arguably the least of the threats of white violence Fisk students faced daily. Nevertheless, “having been emotionally and intellectually deprived under slavery and oppression,” black Nashvillians, in spite of the ominous consequences, “entered the Fisk School in droves to acquire skills that were applicable to everyday life.”⁷² The school, which could accommodate 1,500 students, had immediately enrolled almost 200 students in its day and evening classes. Ranging in age from seven to more than seventy and initially all at the same reading level, enrollment steadily increased to 500 by February and doubled to 1,000 by mid-June. It is unsurprising then, that the school’s curriculum was primary-based, with the vast majority of pupils focusing on basic reading and writing skills. In that time, however, the students had demonstrated a remarkable commitment to and aptitude

⁷⁰ Miss E.A. Easter to M.E. Strieby, 12 February 1866; J. Ogden to C.B. Fisk, 8 March 1866. Quoted in Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 11.

⁷¹ *Nashville Daily Union and American*, 3 January 1866; *Ibid.* 10 January 1866; Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 11-12.

⁷² Yollette Trigg Jones, “The Black Community, Politics and Race Relations in the ‘Iris City’: Nashville, Tennessee, 1870-1954” (PhD. diss., Duke University, 1985), 52.

for learning. By the end of first month alone, more than half of the students enrolled at the school had learned how to read.⁷³

Soon, Fisk pupils were mastering skills in other areas such as arithmetic, geography, and grammar, with a select number of students even studying Latin. The increasing success of Fisk students presented a quandary to administrators who had initially envisioned the school as a primary or graded school.⁷⁴ However, it seems as though in the time that it had taken to secure the location and for the school to become operational, AMA officials had changed their minds. Having decided that it was “unduly expensive” to send white missionaries south to teach a rudimentary curriculum, the AMA thought the school could do the greatest good if black men and women could assume responsibility for basic academic instruction. Recognizing that there was “an immense work to be done for the education of the masses of the colored people of the South,” the attendees of a May 1866 AMA Executive Committee meeting contended that “the best economy will be reached, as in many places schools under these colored teachers will in short time become self-sustaining.”⁷⁵

In short, the AMA wanted Fisk to become a college. Consequently, when plans to offer free black normal school instruction in Nashville was announced in the spring of 1867, the Fisk School’s trustees began making plans for the institution’s transformation to a normal school and college. On August 22, 1867, the Fisk School was incorporated as Fisk University.⁷⁶ At once, Ogden, who had since been appointed principal and had long pushed for the transformation, proudly acclaimed that Fisk would finally be in the “business of making teachers.”⁷⁷ Truthfully,

⁷³ McDaniel, *John Ogden*, 42; Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 7.

⁷⁴ *Fisk University History, Building and Site and Services of Dedication at Nashville, Tennessee January 1, 1876*, 40.

⁷⁵ McDaniel, *John Ogden*, 44-45; *American Missionary* 10, No. 8 (August 1866), 190.

⁷⁶ Typed copy of Articles of Incorporation of Fisk University is Fiskiana Collection, original in Register’s office, Davidson County, Tennessee book 38, p. 339; registered 24 August 1867.

⁷⁷ Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 13; McDaniel, *John Ogden*, 44; Ogden to E. P. Smith, 25 November 1867.

Fisk would remain more of a teacher-training center than a college for more than a few years. This may have been in part attributed to Odgen's leadership, as his "chief joy" was said to have been in the training of teachers; but it is more likely that the lag stemmed from the unavailability of students capable of college-level work.⁷⁸ Even so, Fisk was not alone in the practice of identifying itself as a "university" even though it had no actual advanced curriculum until 1871.⁷⁹ In many ways, that year, marked the beginning of Fisk's unique institutional mission in more ways than one.

"Jubilee!": The Jubilee Singers and Early Alumni

By 1871, the temporary wooden structures that housed Fisk University were rotting extensively. There were insufficient funds for repairs. There was not even enough money for food to feed the 400 students enrolled at the school. "The beef was so tough that the boys called it "Old Ben and declared that every time they saw the cow they felt like apologizing" reflected student Ella Sheppard, who arrived in September 1868 with all of her possessions in a trunk so small that the boys at the school called it a "pie box."⁸⁰ Even Fisk instructors, who were "on a crusade, sacrificing a more pleasant life, sometimes better paying jobs, and frequently their health to work with former slaves," lodged complaints that their already poor salaries were in arrears.⁸¹

Along with several Fisk students, Sheppard spent what little free time she had rehearsing music with Fisk treasurer and music teacher George L. White. His encouragement of the small student gatherings began in 1867, amid these difficulties and against the directives of his

⁷⁸ McDaniel, *John Ogden*, 49.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*; McDaniel observed that "it was common throughout the nation, that institutions were called colleges or universities even though they continued for decades to provide a lower-level preparatory school that had nothing to do with its higher education mission."

⁸⁰ Ella Sheppard Moore, "Historical Sketch of the Jubilee Singers," *Fisk University News* (October 1911), 41, 48; Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 18-19.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

superiors, from the school's first principal Ogden to its second, Adam K. Spence; and even to his brother-in-law and founder, Cravath who chastised him for not giving his complete attention to the school's tenuous financial position.⁸² That summer, White organized a group of his best students to perform at a fundraising concert in Nashville. Sheppard was included in the select group shortly after arriving at Fisk school. Quickly recognizing her musical talents, White offered Sheppard the position of assistant music teacher sometime during her first year. With her acceptance, Sheppard at just 17 years old became the first African American to serve on the faculty of Fisk University. She remained the only black member of the Fisk faculty before 1875.⁸³

Under White's instruction, the group's repertoire primarily consisted of contemporary numbers and abolitionist hymns. Yet, when left to their devices, the students chose to sing the songs born of the slave experience, songs now known as "Negro Spirituals." "We did not dream of ever using them in public," wrote Sheppard. Only with the door shut and locked and with the curtains drawn did the singers "sit upon the floor (there were but few chairs)," practicing "softly, learning from each other the songs of our fathers."⁸⁴ Like other northern missionaries, Fisk faculty members were fascinated by the soulful stirrings of the newly freed. The students, however, felt that "[t]he slave songs were never used by us in public." As Sheppard later wrote: "They were associated with slavery and the dark past, and represented the things to be forgotten.

⁸² Andrew Ward, *Dark Midnight When I Rise: The Story of the Fisk Jubilee Singers* (Amistad: New York, 2001), 82-83, 97.

⁸³ Gustavus D. Pike, *The Jubilee Singers and their Campaign for Twenty Thousand Dollars* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1873), 53; The *1868-9 Fisk University Catalogue* lists Sheppard as a Teacher of Instrumental Music but does not list her in any of its departments as a student, suggesting the either Sheppard's recollection was wrong or that she was absent so often as to not be legitimately enrolled as a student.

⁸⁴ Moore, "Historical Sketch of the Jubilee Singers," 43.

Then too, they were sacred to our parents, who used them in their religious worship and shouted over them.”⁸⁵

Partly inspired by the applause his small company received in nearby towns as well as the emptiness of the Fisk treasury, White proposed that he take a company of students north to raise money. The Fisk board and many of the school’s teachers remained unconvinced. “The last thing the association [AMA] wanted was one of its own teachers embarrassing himself and his students, begging money from the association’s hard-won constituency.”⁸⁶ When the board refused to help fund the effort, White replied to his dissenters: “Tis time to hog, rot or die: I’m depending on God, not you.”⁸⁷ White, however, was unyielding. Sheppard recalled White “taking every cent he had, all his school treasury could spare, and all he could borrow...started in God’s strength ...with his little band of singers to sing money out of the hearts and pockets of people.”⁸⁸

Ultimately sharing in White’s vision, Fisk faculty divided their clothing with troupe members and Principal Spence added to their effort all that was in the school’s treasury, except one dollar. Amid the cries of parents and teachers as well as other onlookers, the troupe of nine students—Ella Sheppard, Isaac Dickerson, Green Evans, Maggie Porter, Minnie Tate, Jennie Jackson, Benjamin Holmes, Thomas Rutling and Eliza Walker—departed Nashville on a train bound for Cincinnati, Ohio on October 6, 1871 to save Fisk University.⁸⁹ The tears of their loved ones echoed the students, parent and teachers’ shared fears about the journey as at least six of the troupe’s nine original members had been born slaves and the memory of slavery and potential of race hatred weighed heavily. Despite their fears and a general lack of optimism toward the trip, the band of singers was soon after named “Jubilee Singers,” because of the biblical reference to

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ J. B. T. Marsh, *The Story of the Jubilee Singers: With Their Songs* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1877), 13-15; Ward, *Dark Midnight When I Rise*, 120-121.

⁸⁷ Moore, “Historical Sketch of the Jubilee Singers,” 45.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 46.

⁸⁹ Marsh, *The Story of the Jubilee Singers*, 16; Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 25-28.

Jewish year of Jubilee in the Book of Leviticus (25:8-17). Blacks had long identified with the scripture's promise of freedom. As slaves, they had figuratively included "jubilee" in their prayers to represent their hope for emancipation. The name's musical euphony was surpassed only by its symbolic fittingness.⁹⁰

As the school's greatest hope, the singers traveled across the nation over the course of the next several years. They endured harsh weather conditions as well as countless acts of racial discrimination under frequent treats of mob violence. They owned little tangibly, most, no more than the clothes on their backs and inadequate shoes on their feet yet remained undeterred by the physical stress imposed by harshly cold and damp conditions as well as constant travel. With their unwavering will, the "Jubilees" never failed to astound their listeners even amid the most challenging of circumstances. Early on, while stranded between trains in a small town, the Jubilees were cornered by a mob of whites at a local hotel. With White standing between them and the mob, they followed his direction to sing and pray. Recalling the incident, Sheppard wrote, "One by one the riotous crowd left off their jeering and swearing and slunk back, until only one leader stood near Mr. White, and he finally took off his hat."⁹¹

Arrival at a hotel did not guarantee safety either. On one occasion in Chillicothe, Ohio, the troupe was denied lodging twice and was only admitted on the condition they not eat at the regular meal times with other guests and not sleep in the guest rooms but in the landlord's own backroom. Similarly, the troupe was immediately ordered off the hotel property in Newark, New Jersey, after the proprietor returned to find that the clerk had registered "not 'cork' minstrels" but real African Americans instead. As Ella Sheppard later noted, such incidences made them,

⁹⁰ Ward, *Dark Midnight When I Rise*, 123.

⁹¹ Moore, "Historical Sketch of the Jubilee Singers," 43

terribly aware of the “caste prejudice which was to follow us, and which it was to be a part of our mission if not to remove at least to ameliorate.”⁹²

Despite the bitter sting of these incidences, the Jubilees won allies among leading American personalities such as William Lloyd Garrison, Mark Twain and President Ulysses S. Grant, who invited them to perform at the White House in 1872. By the close of their first tour, the troupe had raised \$20,000, which was not only enough funds to pay off many of the university’s debts, but also to secure the purchase of the present site of Fisk University.⁹³ The following year, a reconstituted group boarded a ship bound for Europe. There, they accumulated an impressive list of admirers, including United Kingdom Prime Minister William E. Gladstone and Queen Victoria. This time the Jubilees raised \$50,000, which was used to build Jubilee Hall on the new campus. Named in their patrons’ honor, the Victorian-Gothic six-story structure was the first permanent structure erected in the South for the purpose of black education.⁹⁴

Dedicated on January 1, 1876, Jubilee Hall was the crowning achievement of the numerous benefits reaped by the Jubilee Singers’ seven-year of national and international tours. When the Jubilees returned to the Fisk campus in July 1878, they had achieved world renown. Having raised more than \$150,000, the singers had grown from mere adolescents and young adults facing a nation that questioned their dignity, into a distinguished and cosmopolitan group of men and women of national and international repute. In addition to enabling the purchase of the university’s present site and the building of Jubilee Hall, the capital the Jubilees’ raised also practically sustained the entire AMA.

As one of the ever-changing group’s few constants, Ella Sheppard’s diaries reveal that troupe members recognized that their performances were much more than merely entertainment. While the indignities they fought were not entirely ameliorated by their work, they set a standard

⁹² Marsh, *The Story of the Jubilee Singers*, 35-36; Moore, “Historical Sketch of the Jubilee Singers,” 46.

⁹³ Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 30, 32.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 33-35.

for generations of other black entertainers to aspire. The “Jubilees” were aware that they were among the most widely known Americans, black or white, in the world; and as such, they were constantly conscious of their role as ambassadors of the African-American experience. Perhaps even more remarkably, “what the Jubilees accomplished for themselves and the nation,” noted Andrew Ward “was to demonstrate the dignity, intelligence, and educatability of black Americans ...without abandoning their own culture and traditions.”⁹⁵ The Jubilees had given Fisk a viable future. They gave countless other students a chance to have an education and to earn a college degree, although for many troupe members, including Sheppard, that time had come and gone.

One exception to this rule was Soprano America Robinson who had been on tour with the singers during most of her time as a Fisk student. Still, she managed to graduate with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1875, along with three other students. As the school’s first college graduates, Robinson, James Dallas Burrus, John H. Burrus and Virginia Walker symbolized the realization of the Fisk founders’ loftiest dreams—the recognition of Fisk University as the nation’s first truly black liberal arts college below the Mason-Dixie line. Robinson, who was unable to attend Commencement exercises because of her commitment to the singers, continued with the troupe until 1878 and remained in Europe for one more year to intensely study French and German before returning to Nashville. Later, together with her husband Edward Lucas, Robinson made her home in Mississippi, where they were both dedicated teachers. She sharpened her lifelong commitment to education by earning a master’s degree in 1890, and went on to become principal of the Macon Public School in Macon, Mississippi as well as the founder of her very own teacher’s institute.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Ward, *Dark Midnight When I Rise*, 394.

⁹⁶ Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 43-44.

Luckily, Robinson had overcome her responsibilities as a Jubilee Singer to earn her degree, but her longtime courtship with James Burrus crumbled under the burdens of time and distance. Born to a slave mother and her white master, their father had died suddenly before the outbreak of the Civil War, leaving the family defenseless against his brother, who sold them into Confederate service. The family was able to return to Nashville after the war, where the two eldest Burrus brothers, James and John, worked as waiters. They saved enough money to enroll at Fisk in 1867, but the family still struggled to make ends meet. The brothers often remembered that they and their youngest brother Preston had successively worn a single pair of trousers which their mother had repeatedly “turned and patched.”⁹⁷ Consequently, the brothers’ acceptance into the college’s first university class in 1871 and subsequent graduation in 1875 was a remarkable achievement. James, who had chosen to study mathematics, joined the university’s faculty as its first full-time black instructor before leaving to pursue graduate work at Dartmouth College in the fall of 1877. For his studies, the university awarded him an honorary master’s degree in mathematics two years later, reportedly making him the first black to receive that type of degree from an accredited college in the nation.⁹⁸

Burrus returned to Fisk for a stint before assuming a professorship in mathematics at the nation’s first public black college, Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College in Mississippi, where he also served as superintendent of the college’s farm. His brother John, who earned his bachelor’s degree in Greek, had since served as the principal of a school in Nashville and another in Yazoo, Mississippi, dabbled in Republican politics and passed the Nashville bar. Due in no small measure to James’ advocacy, John was elected as Alcorn’s president in 1882. Together, the brothers helped to build the school’s academic reputation before leaving to return

⁹⁷ See Joe M. Richardson, “A Negro Success Story: James Dallas Burrus,” *The Journal of Negro History* 50, No. 4 (October 1965), 274-282; *Fisk News*, (December 1928), 8.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*; Richardson notes Burrus was awarded an honorary degree because Dartmouth did not award graduate degrees at that time. Richardson, “A Negro Success Story,” 277.

to Nashville in 1893. Once back in Nashville, the Burrus brothers focused on entrepreneurship. John resumed his legal career and began farming, while James joined their brother Preston's pharmaceutical business and a second career in real estate. The Burrus' financial success enabled them to endow Fisk with multiple pieces of property with James offering "his greatest gift," that of everything he owned upon his death in 1928.⁹⁹

As a teacher and Baptist missionary, Virginia Walker's financial success pales in comparison to the Burrus' and likewise, she could not boast world renown like America Robinson. She is, in either sense, less successful and much less widely known, all of which makes her an unlikely choice as the epitome of the teachers' and students' loftiest hopes and dreams. But Walker, like her father Nelson Walker, had been a student of Daniel Watkins' native school and she was among the first Fisk students when it was just a freedmen's school. She had been with the school since its inception and had experienced the struggles of its missionary teachers. As one of the South's first black liberal arts college graduates, Walker was a model of achievement. Her life's work as a teacher, administrator and missionary, as chronicled in her autobiography, *Twenty Year's Experience of a Missionary*, demonstrates a deep commitment to black education and black self-help.

The members of the Fisk Jubilee Singers troupe and the school's earliest alumni were the very embodiment of the Fisk spirit. When the Jubilees first ventured across the Mason-Dixie line, few, if anyone could have imagined their future success. As young men and women, at the risk of their lives, they sacrificed their own academic endeavors in order to save their school. Their sacrifice in this regard, was second to none—not even to the school's missionary founders. In the process of doing so, they not only became the ambassadors of their school and the chief purveyors of the spirituals, they became shining examples of black potentiality. They introduced the world to the spirituals not merely as vestiges of slavery, but as testaments of the worthiness of

⁹⁹ Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 44-45.

black culture. Like them, the first classes of Fisk graduates Robinson, the Burrus brothers and Walker (who was once a student in a Nashville native school) shared the mission of Fisk with the world.

Humble Beginnings: Founding Central Tennessee College

While it was officially founded in 1876, the history of Meharry Medical College dates back to the humble beginnings of Central Tennessee Methodist Episcopal College in May of 1866. Just five months after Fisk University's incorporation, Central Tennessee Methodist Episcopal College was incorporated by the Tennessee State legislature "for the general and theological education of colored people."¹⁰⁰ As implied by its name, the school was affiliated with the Methodist Episcopal Church whose Wesleyan roots had denounced slavery from the church's founding in America during the Revolutionary War. Though the church's theological framework was initially "decidedly antislavery," its growth through the revivalist period signaled increasing accommodation of slave ownership among some of its membership.¹⁰¹ Conflicts over slavery repeatedly led to church divisions including a major departure by many black Methodists in 1816. Led by Richard Allen, the black exodus resulted in the founding of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1816.

Still, White Methodists also struggled over the issue of slavery. Founded in 1834, the first Methodist Anti-slavery Society signaled a turning point in the church's long struggle to decide whether its anti-slavery position would be true in word and deed. Just ten years later, white southern Methodists, angry over the church's mandate that Georgia Bishop James Osgood Andrew emancipate his slaves, formed the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The M.E.

¹⁰⁰ "Chapter CXV: An Act to Incorporate the Trustees of Central Tennessee Methodist Episcopal College," *Second Session 34th General Assembly 1865-1866* (Nashville: S.C. Mercer, 1866), 301.

¹⁰¹ A. James Fuller, "Methodists and Antislavery," in *Encyclopedia of Antislavery and Abolition*, eds. Peter P. Hinks, John R. McKivigan, R. Owen Williams (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), 468-470.

Churches' remaining members were able to formally reiterate their anti-slavery commitment following the close of the Civil War. Founded on August 7, 1866, the Freedmen's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church (later known as the Freedmen's Aid and Southern Education Society), was established to organize the church's effort to educate the freedmen.¹⁰²

Immediately, the society assumed responsibility for Central Tennessee. However, the college was also an outgrowth of a freedmen's school the M.E. Church established in a Andrew's Chapel, a church building formerly of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Renamed Clark Chapel, the chapel that doubled as a schoolhouse was the brainchild of M.E. Church Bishop Davis W. Clark. Clark, who had visited Nashville in the spring of 1865 with "great interest," was committed to wresting Methodism in Tennessee from the control of the M.E. Church, South.¹⁰³ Therefore, the freedmen's school served dual purposes: one, to provide black education and two, to establish the M.E. Churches' presence in the state. Upon visiting the school in January 1866, Clark wrote to his wife: "This school *must* do good. I trust it will prove a gem of an educational seminary of high grade, not very far off in the future."¹⁰⁴

While the school was led by Methodist minister O.O. Knight as its principal, it is noteworthy that all three of the school's teachers were black women. Much like Fisk, the freedmen's school-turned-college's earliest students ranged in "all ages and sizes, grandparents and grandchildren, parents and children, were all in the same classes." By the close of its second academic year (1866-'67), the school boasted 800 students as well as a staff of eight or ten teachers. However, the city's provision of public education for black children began in 1867,

¹⁰² Ronald E. Butchart, "Freedmen's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church," in *Organizing Black America*, 236-237.

¹⁰³ Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors*, 4-5; James Monroe Buckley, *A History of Methodists in the United States* (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1896), 518.; Lucius Salisbury Merriam, "Central Tennessee College," *Higher Education in Tennessee* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903), 269; Daniel Curry, *The Life-story of Rev. Daniel Wasgatt Clark, D.D: Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1874), 206-207; J[ohn] Braden, "Central Tennessee College," in *Negro Civilization in the South*, ed. Charles Edwin Robert (Nashville: Wheeler Bros., 1880), 143.

¹⁰⁴ Curry, *The Life-story of Rev. Daniel Wasgatt Clark, D.D*, 213-214.

which, combined with the imposition of a \$1 per month in tuition caused a severe decline in its enrollment.¹⁰⁵

Initially, Central Tennessee's educational instruction ranged from elementary work to advanced study; but the availability of public education led school officials to reconsider its mission. "Not wishing to do work that others would do," the school narrowed its mission "to prepare college teachers to become educators of their own people, and to prepare young men for the ministry."¹⁰⁶ Leading the college's transformation was the Reverend John Braden, who having led the school as principal during the 1867-'68 academic year, was elected as the college's first president in 1869.

Born in New York in 1826, Braden was reared Presbyterian by his mother and grandmother, following his father's death when he was a young child. He left home at sixteen and much to his grandmother's dismay, converted to Methodism. Like a host of other Methodist ministers of the time, Braden attended the church-sponsored Ohio Wesleyan University. In 1853, the same year of his graduation from Ohio Wesleyan, Braden became a professor at Xenia Female College in Xenia, Ohio. The school bridged the gap between his past and future. Founded by the Presbyterian Church in 1850, the school had since received the financial support of the Methodist Episcopal Church. After just one year at Xenia, Braden joined the church's Cincinnati Conference and by 1859, had assumed the presidency of New Carlisle Academy. After just two years as New Carlisle's president, the school was closed, as a result of the start of the Civil War.

¹⁰⁵ John Wooldridge, *History of Nashville, Tennessee: With Full Outline of the Natural Advantages, Accounts of the Mound builders, Indian tribes, early settlement, organization of the Mero district...* (Nashville: Barbee & Smith, Agents. 1890), 428; Merriam, "Central Tennessee College," 269; J. Braden, "Methodist Episcopal Church-Central Tennessee College," in *A History of the Colored Schools of Nashville, Tennessee*, 17-18.

¹⁰⁶ Braden, "Methodist Episcopal Church-Central Tennessee College," 18; Merriam, "Central Tennessee College," 269.

After working in New York during the war, Braden answered the church's call for volunteers to work among the newly freedmen in the South.¹⁰⁷

He arrived in Nashville in 1867 to assume the pastorate of Clark Chapel and begin work at Central Tennessee. The school's success in its first year had necessitated its move to a larger location. However, finding a location that was both affordable and available was a considerable challenge. With help from General Clinton B. Fisk of the Freedmen's Bureau, the school relocated to an abandoned gun factory on South College Street, which had been seized by Federal troops for use as an army hospital during the Civil War. For two years, the gun factory, which was also home to Braden, his wife and young daughter, doubled as a schoolhouse. But the site was far from ideal for either habitation or teaching.¹⁰⁸

With a \$10,000 gift from the M.E. Church, school officials began making plans for its relocation, during which time they secured the purchase of a suitable location up the same street on Rutledge Hill. Away from the muddiness of the street below, Rutledge Hill was the home of University of Nashville's medical department as well as several wealthy whites who did not welcome the idea of a black school in its midst. White opposition to the school resulted in a lawsuit in which the chancery court annulled the purchase. After attempts to purchase property in Franklin, Murfreesboro and Gallatin met similar fates, officials finally successfully purchased a two-acre property on South Maple Street, just south of Lafayette Street. Located on the opposite

¹⁰⁷ William Osburn, "Biographical Sketch of the Late Rev. John Braden, President of Central Tennessee College," (Nashville: Central Tennessee College Print., 1900); Rossiter Johnson and John Howard Brown. "John Braden," in *The Twentieth Century Biographical Dictionary of Notable Americans* (Boston: The Biographical Society, 1904), n.p.; Matthew Simpson, "John Braden," in *Cyclopedia of Methodism: Embracing sketches of its rise, progress, and present condition etc.* (Philadelphia: Everts & Stewart, 1878), 130; "John Braden" *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Thirty-ninth Annual Meeting Held at Charleston, South Carolina, July 7-13, 1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1900), 719.

¹⁰⁸ J[ohn] Braden. "Central Tennessee College," in *Negro Civilization in the South*, ed. Charles Edwin Robert (Nashville; Wheeler Bros., 1880), 143 & 144; James T. Haley. *Afro-American Encyclopaedia, or, the thoughts, doings, and sayings of the race...* (Nashville: Haley & Florida, 1895), 294; Merriam, "Central Tennessee College," 269; Wooldridge, *History of Nashville, Tennessee*, 428; Walter Durham, *Nashville The Occupied: The First Seventeen Months—February 16, 1862 to June 30, 1863* (Nashville: The Tennessee Historical Society, 1985), 214.

side of Rutledge Hill, the South Maple property had one large two-story brick building that was badly in need of repair.¹⁰⁹ In the fall of 1868, the school moved to South Maple without Braden, who had resigned after a one-year stint, at its helm. Not only were they able to repair the initial building during that academic year, a \$18,000 donation from the Freedmen's Bureau made it possible for the school to erect two additional brick buildings. One of which housed a chapel and dormitories, while the other was used for classroom instruction and additional student housing. Together the campus facilities accommodated at least 200 students.¹¹⁰

When Braden assumed the presidency on June 28, 1869, few could have imagined that he would lead Central Tennessee until his death some thirty years later. It was however, over the course of the first decade of his leadership that the school truly became a college. Published in 1869, the college's first catalog offered the first glimpse of the school's academic future. With 192 enrollees, all of whom had mastered the Second Reader many Central Tennessee students were pursuing advanced subjects. But classes involving higher levels of study were hardly filled to capacity as many students often left school to fill the dire need for teachers and/or preachers in the black community. Even in the 1870s, Central Tennessee, like Fisk, wrestled with its mission's practicality for pressing needs among ex-slaves for any semblance of instruction versus the potentiality of higher education for improving the long-term station of blacks as a people. As Braden himself noted: "The demand is so great for teachers that it hardly seems just or right to keep young men and women plodding through Greek and Latin while thousands are perishing for lack of a little learning."¹¹¹

This struggle was undoubtedly the struggle of Central Tennessee and Fisk as well as their other black educational contemporaries across the South. In the coming years, black communities

¹⁰⁹ Wooldridge, *History of Nashville, Tennessee*, 428; J[ohn] Braden. "Central Tennessee College," 144; Merriam, "Central Tennessee College," 270; Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors*, 6.

¹¹⁰ J[ohn] Braden. "Central Tennessee College," 144, 146.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 146; Minutes of the Board of Trustees of Central Tennessee College, May 1872. Quoted in Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors*, 8.

across the South realized that their communities were in need of other kinds of black professionals in addition to teachers and preachers. The black South increasingly found itself perishing under the weight of sickness and disease. Skyrocketing black mortality rates were increasingly more and more staggering. In the coming years, nowhere was this need more obvious than in Nashville, a city that straddled the line between begrudged black advancement for some and black suffering in mass. Central Tennessee and Fisk embodied these challenges, as well as the many contradictions inherent in the rhetoric of the New South.

A Promise Kept: Meharry Medical College

During his commencement address to the class of 1878, John Braden remarked: “I congratulate you tonight, first, because you are recognized as men. You were born slaves, the recognized property of others... Tonight you are on your own; no fetters bind your limbs, no human manacles your intellect, no earthly master has the keeping of your conscience... I hail you as men.” Braden however, was not hailing any ordinary class “men.” The college’s class of 1878 was special in the history of the college and of its medical department. While the college undoubtedly graduated scores of men from its normal course in its more than decade-long history, that year it was a woman, Araminta P. Martin who was the school’s first college graduate. The accomplishment was a remarkable one for Martin, who went on to enjoy a career as an educator, as well as for the institution which had finally realized its dream of producing advanced-level college graduates.¹¹² Just two years earlier, Central Tennessee embarked upon a most daring endeavor—to establish a medical department. Once hastened to abandon advanced study to supply the desperate need for black teachers and preachers, Central Tennessee students began inquiring about the possibility of medical and/or legal study. Braden sought to answer this

¹¹² Haley, *Afro-American Encyclopaedia*, 296; Merriam, “Central Tennessee College,” 270; Martin, who had been among Central Tennessee’s earliest students, graduated with honors and was a teacher of mathematics, Latin and history, until her death in 1883.

call for medical training but no other school was willing to partner with Central Tennessee to establish a joint medical program. Braden decided that the best chance at founding the department was to convince George W. Hubbard, then, a medical student at Vanderbilt University to lead the effort.¹¹³

Braden had every reason for his confidence in Hubbard's commitment to the freedmen. After all, Hubbard, who was born and reared in North Charlestown, New Hampshire had left the small community of his birth where both his maternal and paternal grandfathers had been among its earliest and distinguished settlers, to volunteer with the U.S. Christian Commission in 1864. Hubbard, who was educated in local public schools before attending a private academy, seminary and scientific and literary institute, offered his services as a missionary and chaplain with General William T. Sherman's famous campaign on Atlanta. With the railroad between Nashville and Chattanooga destroyed by Confederate General Nathan B. Forrest, Hubbard took a teaching position at Nelson G. Merry's Baptist church until it could be repaired. And for a year, Hubbard taught the freedmen in a Baptist church before leaving the school to teach colored troops.¹¹⁴

For the next several years, Hubbard assumed teaching positions at various schools including one in Clinton, Kansas and two others in Nashville before enrolling at the University of Tennessee (also referred to as the Medical Department of Nashville University) in 1875. He graduated the following year, soon after enrolling in the Medical Department of Vanderbilt University School of Medicine. Hubbard's teaching experience combined with his missionary experience and medical training made him the ideal person to bring Braden's dream for a medical department to fruition. Even so, it would take three additional years before Braden finished his

¹¹³ Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors*, 12-13, 15; Merriam, "Central Tennessee College," 270-271.

¹¹⁴ Jay S. Stowell, *Methodist Adventures in Negro Education* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1922), 54, 56; Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors*, 13, 15.

medical degree at Vanderbilt and Braden's challenge to fund the school's operation as well as the ambitious medical department project remained.¹¹⁵

To secure funding for the college, Braden drew on another of his relationships, this time his friendship with the Reverend Alexander Meharry. Meharry and his seven siblings had been reared in the M.E. Church by their devout parents Alexander and Jane Meharry. Both natives of Scotland, the Meharrys had migrated to America in 1794, where they eventually settled in Pennsylvania. Even after the senior Meharry's unexpected death in 1813, Jane and her children managed to keep their father's farm development profitable. Several of the Meharry brothers were also able to take advantage of land development opportunities in Indiana and Illinois, where they established homes of their own. As a Methodist Episcopal minister, it is plausible that the younger the Reverend Meharry had some knowledge of the work of Central Tennessee before visiting the campus in the spring of 1874. Braden used Meharry's visit as an occasion to express the college's need for a secure and permanent income to ensure the viability, productiveness and growth of Central Tennessee moving forward. Alexander called on his brothers to come to the college's aid.¹¹⁶

In concert with his brothers Jesse, Samuel and David, Alexander Meharry had his brother Hugh convey a tract of farm land valued at \$10,000 to trustees of Central Tennessee. Yet, of all of his brothers, Samuel Meharry was perhaps, the most committed to the medical department specifically. As a teenager, he had been traveling a road in the backwoods of Kentucky to get to his home on the other side of the Ohio River. But when his wagon, heavy with a load of salt stalled, the darkness of night threatened to envelop him in the wilderness. With no food or shelter, he followed a faint light—a light that lead him to a slave cabin. Samuel detailed his plight

¹¹⁵ *Meharry Medical College, Walden University, Nashville, Tenn: Its History, Work and Needs* (Nashville: The University, 1908), 3; Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors*, 15.

¹¹⁶ Frances Meharry, *History of the Meharry Family in America* (LaFayette: Lafayette Printing Co., 1925), 12-35, 371; Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors*, 16; J[ohn] Braden. "Central Tennessee College," 148.

to the black family and was given a meal, shelter and breakfast the following morning.

Explaining that he had no money, Meharry vowed to the family before leaving: “When I can, I shall do something for your race.”¹¹⁷

In 1875, he kept his promise with an additional gift of \$500, which was to specifically support the plan for the medical department. While the Meharrys would donate an additional \$19,500 to Central Tennessee and its programs over the next several years, their earliest two gifts enabled Braden to fulfill his dream for Central Tennessee to establish the first medical department for blacks south of the Allegheny Mountains. With Samuel Meharry’s gift, Braden was able to tap Hubbard’s mentor Dr. William J. Sneed to offer classes in anatomy and physiology to a few students in the fall of 1875. Sneed, a former Confederate surgeon with whom Hubbard formed a strong, if unlikely friendship sometime during the Civil War, was also a Vanderbilt alumnus and had encouraged Hubbard to attend his alma mater.¹¹⁸

Sneed, whose pioneering efforts in the school’s medical department are less widely known, together with Hubbard and Braden, formally launched Central Tennessee College’s Medical Department in the fall of 1876. Applicants had to be “at least eighteen years of age, of good moral character and pass a satisfactory examination in the common English branches.”¹¹⁹ However, the last pre-requisite was not rigidly enforced; and similarly, while a knowledge of Latin was welcomed, it was not required.¹²⁰ For ten dollars per term, students enrolled in the department’s intense two five-month term program. Its relatively short duration, did not however, make completing the course undemanding. In the first term alone, students were required to master anatomy, physiology, chemistry and pharmacology. Likewise, the second and final term

¹¹⁷ Meharry, *History of the Meharry Family in America*, 369-371; Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors*, 1.

¹¹⁸ Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors*, 12; *Nashville American*. 18 March 1907.

¹¹⁹ Roman, *History of Meharry Medical College*, 44; *Central Tennessee College Catalogue, 1878-79*, 25; Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors*, 18.

¹²⁰ Roman, *History of Meharry Medical College*, 45; *Central Tennessee College Catalogue, 1878-79*, 25.

required mastery of surgery, obstetrics, surgical anatomy, female and children's diseases as well as theory and practice of medicine.¹²¹

“Having paid tuition,” observed early Meharry graduate Charles Victor Roman, “one could attend until he passed or got tired.”¹²² In order to graduate, students needed among other things, to have studied medicine with a physician and/or at Meharry for a minimum of three years, to satisfactorily pass all major written examinations, to author an accepted original thesis and to have paid in full all college dues, including the graduation fee.¹²³ Of the department's first crop of eleven students, only one, James Munroe Jamison, was graduated in the spring of 1877. As the South's first formally trained black physician, Jamison beat the odds of “poverty, illness and distractions [that] caused some to leave the college altogether and others to fall behind.”¹²⁴

In addition to undoubtedly celebrating the commencement of its first graduate, the medical department also recognized the philanthropy of the Meharry brothers. In recognition of their aid to the college in general and to the medical department in particular, the trustees, upon the recommendation of the faculty, renamed the medical department Meharry Medical Department.¹²⁵ Again, the Meharry brothers came to the aid of their namesake. They contributed \$10,000 for the erection of a new medical building at the corner of Maple and South Franklin streets. The cornerstone was laid on May 14, 1879 and dedicated on October 13, 1880. Four stories tall, the building housed a chemistry laboratory, offices, a museum and apartments.¹²⁶

The building, like the increasing numbers of graduates Meharry produced, signaled the beginning of a decade of rapid institutional advancement for the medical department and for

¹²¹ Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors*, 18.

¹²² Roman, *History of Meharry Medical College*, 45.

¹²³ *Ibid.*; *Central Tennessee College Catalogue, 1878-79*, 25.

¹²⁴ Stowell, *Methodist Adventures in Education*, 56; Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors*, 21.

¹²⁵ Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors*, 19.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

Central Tennessee. Meharry's graduating class grew from just one in 1877 to three in 1878, to eight in 1879. By 1890, the program had produced more than 100 pioneering black physicians, which Meharry claimed was "more than one-half of the educated black physicians in the Southern States."¹²⁷ Among the ranks of its pioneering alumni was Lorenzo Dow Key '78 who practiced in West Tennessee; Henry A. Napier '80, son of William Carroll and Jane C. Napier and brother of James C. Napier, served as the principal of the East Nashville colored public school; William A. Hadley '80, who balanced practicing medicine with public teaching before serving as a magistrate of the 13th District of Davidson County; doctor, dentist and lawyer Charles H. Phillips, '82 became a bishop in the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church of America and principal of its school Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee; and Robert F. Boyd '82, who later became a distinguished Professor of Physiology was among the first class on Meharry's dental program.¹²⁸

Created in 1886, the Central Tennessee's dental course was established at the behest of the college's earliest medical graduates. As a professor, physician and dentist, Boyd was among the ranks of early Meharry graduates who epitomized the numerous professional responsibilities and social possibilities made available to them by the institution. In addition to providing blacks in their respective communities with the earliest opportunities to receive medical care from a formally-trained physician, Meharry graduates like Boyd, Hadley, Napier and Phillips, often balanced multiple and diverse professional duties including medicine, dentistry and law. As "black Nashville's only comprehensive university," Central Tennessee and Meharry were not only at the vanguard of providing medical and dental training, other program offerings included a

¹²⁷ "Alumni," *Central Tennessee College, Nashville, Tennessee: Meharry Medical, Dental and Pharmaceutical Department Catalogue of 1891-92, Announcement for 1892-93* (Nashville: Marshall & Bruce Stationers and Printers, 1892), 3.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 10-12; "Record of the Alumni," *Catalogue of Meharry Medical Department of Central Tennessee College, Nashville, Tennessee, 1884-1885* (Nashville: Industrial Department of Central Tennessee College, 1884) 5-7; Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors*, 34-37.

nurses' course (1878), industrial education (1885), a law program (1882) and a School of Pharmacy (1889).¹²⁹ As Central Tennessee's course offerings grew, so did its student body, which increased from 331 students in 1880 to 545 by 1889.

Conclusion

The founding and growth of Nashville's black colleges was no easy feat. To be sure, it involved the sacrifice of numerous white abolitionists and missionaries who gave of their time, talents and treasures to ensure the early success of the city's black schools. However, they were not singular in their sacrifice. Black students, their families and the wider black community were at the very least, equally committed to the success of these schools. Even before education was made available to them in the postwar period, they had sought it in black clandestine schools. Many of the first and arguably best-prepared students in white-founded black schools were among the former students of black schools and black teachers. Students like Sheppard and the Fisk Jubilee Singers, exemplified the spirit of their fledgling schools as much, if not more than their white missionary teachers. Their successes were the greatest testaments of black potentiality. And their commitment to education as an instrument of personal improvement as well as community and racial uplift was formative in the character development and institutional mission of Nashville's black schools.

¹²⁹ Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors*, 28-31; Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 155.

CHAPTER III

NEW, BUT NOT “NEW” ENOUGH: THE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK NASHVILLE IN THE NEW SOUTH

When northern white missionaries arrived in Nashville after the close of the Civil War the city had been radically transformed from its former self. Gone were its majestic trees and many of its picturesque homes. Its hills were littered with the refuse of military engagements and its citizens were forever changed by viciousness of war. Suddenly transformed from a booming Confederate arsenal to a ghost town then again to a Union outpost, Nashville had been an especially difficult place to live during and after the war. The movement of so many troops (and their supplies) made the city a virtual dust bowl during arid summers, while winters presented freezing temperatures that covered city-streets with sodden mud, making living conditions difficult for all who lived there.¹ Described as a “mixed lot [of] newcomers and old-timers, peacemakers and troublemakers, carpetbaggers and scalawags, Yankees and reconstructed Rebels and some who loathed the very notion of reconstruction,” the population of Nashville after the Civil War reflected the external changes across the South. With the exception of the freedmen, those in the most “precarious position” in post-Civil War Nashville were northern missionaries.²

As proponents of abolition, white missionaries belonged to the small rank of persons whose activism challenged the notion of black perpetual servitude; but even fewer among them, if any at all truly believed in the social equality of blacks and whites. Some missionaries denounced Social Darwinist theories of black innate inferiority, yet they too, held racist notions of childlike personalities and exaggerated spirituality among blacks. Dubbed “romantic

¹ Edgerton, *Nashville*, 113-130.

² *Ibid.*, 131.

racialism” by George Fredrickson, white nineteenth century notions of the biological and genetic inferiority of black people were rife among whites, both northern and southern, by the close of the Civil War.³ Loosely-based on the life of the Reverend Josiah Henson, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s widely popular antislavery novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* epitomized the embodiment of romantic racist sentiments that pervaded white thought. These notions of black nature may not have been intended to prejudice whites, but were internalized by northern whites prior to their arrival in the South.⁴

It is highly unlikely that white missionaries had any knowledge of the city’s long history of successful black native schools prior to their arrival in Nashville. As a rule, they were surprised by their pupils’ enthusiasm as well as commitment to learning. They were even more astounded by the sacrifices parents and other family members made so that their loved ones could attend school. And these sacrifices paid off too. As the producer of many of the South’s “college” graduates, earliest trained black teachers, ministers, doctors, lawyers and dentists, Fisk, Central Tennessee and Meharry helped to create an emerging black middle class. Together, they assumed the mantle of providing essential services--such as educational instruction, medical and dental care, legal representation and religious guidance--to the first generation of blacks in the postwar South. In black urban and rural communities, black professionals who had attended black colleges such as those in Nashville established and/or expanded the ranks of the region’s small black middle and elite classes. As community leaders, they served as visible and living examples of black achievement. They helped black Nashvillians to carve out a life for themselves and working alongside them, helped to forge a “world-within-a-world” which sought to insulate blacks from the indignities they would suffer in the wider world. They helped to imbue other blacks with a sense of self-respect, racial pride and most of all, a sense of their own possibility.

³ See George Frederickson, *Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press) 1987.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 110-117.

This chapter explores the social development of black Nashville as a burgeoning “world-within-a-world.” By examining Benjamin Singleton’s exodus movement, it examines the city’s place in the region’s black separatist movements. It argues that Singleton’s desire for “land and liberty,” undoubtedly related to black demands for the ability to safely pursue educational opportunities.⁵ Set against the backdrop of the city’s “Athens of the South” sobriquet and the region’s emergent New South ethos, it situates Nashville within the context of this larger history, while testing the benefits of the self-identification of its black community. It argues that the region’s acceptance of industrialization as well as its similar desire for whites to enjoy the social and cultural benefits that accompanied better educational offerings and increased wealth, were somewhat predictable in nature. This chapter therefore, contends that a more exacting test of Nashville’s purported commitment to becoming an educational oasis or “Athens” and to the values of the New South can be produced by examining the progress of the city’s black community.

The evolving sense of mission at Nashville’s black colleges also emerges out of this conflicted history. At a time when Fisk and Meharry administrators were sharpening their schools’ respective foci, its students began to articulate their own purposes for higher education—purposes which included both personal and professional advancement as well as corporate racial uplift. The tensions afoot between white administrators, teachers and philanthropists and the black students they served, increasingly developed over the course of this period as black students challenged notions of white paternalism with varying degrees of success.

⁵ See Selena Ronshaye Sanderfer, “For Land and Liberty: Black Territorial Separatism in the South,” (PhD. diss., Vanderbilt University, 2010).

Learning the South a Lesson: Nashville as a New South City or Kansas as the Promise Land

More than fifty years has come and gone since historian of the American South and American race relations C. Vann Woodward penned the seminal work, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (1951) and still, the book towers over its field.⁶ At the time it was published, the phrase “New South” captivated historians and theorists as neither a place nor a period in time, but instead as a “rallying cry” that separated the “Lost Cause” from the “New Cause” and that abandoned Old South traditions of slavery and cotton for the progressive pursuits of industrialization and nationalism. Instead of falling victim to existing paradigms, Woodward consciously endeavored to define the New South in the more practical terms of geography, political unity, economic deficiency and regional peculiarity.⁷ Twelve years in the making, *Origins* defied existing paradigms of Southern historiography, which attempted to passionately legitimate Romanticism in southern literature. Save some occasional criticism, historians had long touted the political leaders of the post-Reconstruction as the “Redeemers” for their “perceived courage, self-sacrifice, and sincere devotion to good government” in expelling the South’s carpetbagger governments and its military occupation as well as for reestablishing white power.⁸

Written in 1992, Howard Rabinowitz’s book *The First New South, 1865-1920*, masterfully outlines postbellum southern history, while focusing on politics, economics and race relations.⁹ In his exploration of “the myth and reality of the First New South,” Rabinowitz is

⁶ See C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1951).

⁷ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, ix-x.

⁸ James Tice Moore, “Redeemers Reconsidered: Change and Continuity in the Democratic South, 1879-1900,” *The Journal of Southern History* 44, No. 3 (August 1978), 358.

⁹ See Howard N. Rabinowitz, *The First New South, 1865-1920* (Arlington Heights: Harlan Davidson, 1992).

“especially interested in the claims of progress made by New South proponents.”¹⁰ In addition to concluding that the economic transformation decreed by its boosters (including most notably Henry Grady) never materialized, Rabinowitz demonstrated that their conception of racial progress was to segregate black Americans from facilities to which they were once completely denied access. Rabinowitz also argues that the realities of the South’s inability to secure agricultural and industrial progress can be easily traced back to the structural deficiencies of the pre-Civil War era—namely, credit availability, racism and social conservatism. As such, the study largely falls within Woodwardian paradigms, but adds several important and nuanced arguments as divergences from *Origins*’ contentions. Chief among these departures is Rabinowitz’s final statement in the book, in which he contends: “The point is not that the First New South was not new, but that it was not new enough.”¹¹

Following the close of the Civil War, Nashville’s leaders began to push for the city’s identification as a New South city. As Don Doyle has successfully argued in his 1985 publication *Nashville in the New South, 1880-1930*, the Nashville Centennial served as an important benchmark for marking the beginnings of Nashville’s entrance into the race of emergent New South cities. Acknowledging that “nothing tells us quite so much about a community as the way it interprets its own history,” the Centennial celebration was the city’s first major exercise in the delicate balance between Old South romanticism and New South advocacy.¹² And so, on the morning of April 24, 1880, the roar of a one-hundred-gun salute signaled the beginning of a grand Centennial Procession of Centennial Commission officials, city officials and politicians,

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 186.

¹² Don H. Doyle, *Nashville in the New South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 3.

educators and war veterans whose new uniforms “betrayed nothing of their former allegiance to the Confederate grey.”¹³

Led by the Reverend Nelson G. Merry and John H. Kebble, the unit that followed the war veterans was “distinct and symbolically important.” Segregated in the parade just as they were within wider Nashville society, the black militia companies and bands, followed by black fraternal societies marched as “an integral part of Nashville’s self-image.”¹⁴ In fact, when plans to include the Fisk Jubilee Singers were announced in the *Nashville American* a month earlier, the editor confidently penned that the suggestion “meets with our hearty approval, as we are sure it will be approved by every citizen in Nashville.” As “an agent for good in the elevation of a race which has just emerged from bondage,” he wrote, “all citizens of the State, who hope to see the race elevated and made truly citizens, interested in law and order and the prosperity of the State, and efficient co-workers” were compelled to agree.¹⁵

The Reverend Merry, the first ordained Negro minister in Nashville and the pastor of the First Colored Baptist Church, further reiterated the parade’s tone of racial harmony with his address at the end of the speakers’ program. After testifying to the “cordial consideration” he (and by virtue of him, all Nashville Blacks) received while he assisted the Centennial Committee, Merry announced that by turning out together “without regard to race or previous condition,” the celebration signaled that “they were getting nearer to each other.” Having prophesied greater racial harmony, he declared that “they had come here, had lived here and would die here.”¹⁶ However, as Doyle has noted, “the idea of racial harmony,” indeed, “was every bit as important to the New South creed as sectional reconciliation.” In light of those realities, the “careful consideration” that Doyle advances was given to include black organizations in the

¹³ *Nashville American*, 25 April 1880; Doyle, *Nashville in the New South*, 6.

¹⁴ Doyle, *Nashville in the New South*, 6.

¹⁵ *Nashville American*, 27 March 1880; Doyle, *Nashville in the New South*, p. 8.

¹⁶ *Nashville American*, 25 April 1880; Doyle, *Nashville in the New South*, p. 8.

parade undoubtedly reflected both the more earnest sentiments of the *American* editor as well as the strategy of Nashville whites who wished to project the image of a racially united city, even if it was artificially manufactured.¹⁷ In fact, Nashville whites had demonstrated this consciousness—a preoccupation of sorts with projecting the image of racial harmony—for over a decade, and with good cause.

Six years earlier, the planners of the Nashville Exposition had also sought out the Fisk Jubilee Singers to perform as a part of the city's greatest offerings. In fact, when the Jubilees ascended to the stage of the Nashville Exposition on the evening of October 21, 1874, the master of ceremonies requested that the crowd of eighteen thousand onlookers be "as still as possible while the singers were singing." After ordering that the Exposition's spattering fountains be turned off "the hum of the audience sank into faint whispers as the 'Jubilees' arose before them." And while each of their renditions was met with applause, none was met with more enthusiasm than the "Dixie" line, "I'll live and die in Dixie."¹⁸ While the song was received as an affirmation of the audience's commitment to the Southern ethos, the Singers and indeed, the wider black Tennessee community had more than sufficient reason to be less enthusiastic.

Just five years earlier in 1869, having regained the right to vote and soon thereafter terminating the pledge once required, ex-Confederates, had reasserted their racist attitudes in a rash of violently repressive measures against blacks across the South. Tennessee did not escape this wave of violence. In the midst of Tennessee's bloody and tumultuous mid-1870s black Tennesseans found a voice in an elderly carpenter and former Davidson county slave named Benjamin "Pap" Singleton. Born in 1809, Singleton had escaped from slavery after being sold in New Orleans. He returned to Nashville for a time, but was forced North and then to Canada under the threat of being returned to slavery. Following the Civil War Singleton resettled in

¹⁷ Doyle, *Nashville in the New South*, 7-8.

¹⁸ *Nashville Republican Banner*, October 1874; Ward, *Dark Midnight When I Rise*, 270.

Nashville's Edgefield community, a contraband camp. Singleton made as much of a living building cabinets as he did constructing caskets for the myriad victims of Klan violence.¹⁹

Disenchanted with failures of emancipation, enfranchisement and even black political representation to effect positive economic and social changes in the lives of black Tennesseans, Singleton began his "mission" to urge black property ownership as "a first step toward achieving industrial independence."²⁰ Singleton soon found that land prices in Tennessee were too expensive for his black followers. Frustrated by the freedmen's plight of poverty, disease, homelessness, unemployment and inordinately high mortality rates, Singleton, self-styled, "the Moses of the Colored Exodus," turned his attention westward and began his campaign for black migration out of Nashville and Middle Tennessee into Kansas. Singleton's rationale to fellow blacks was clearly and forcefully outlined in an interview with a St. Louis newspaper: "Hy'ar you is a-potter'n' round in politics and tryin' to git in offices that aint fit, and you can't see that these white tramps from the North is simply usin' you for to line their pockets and when they git through they'll drop you and the rebels will come into power and then whar'll you be?"²¹

Despite its truth, the incendiary undertones of Singleton's rhetoric may have barred the support of many Nashville blacks who were careful not to incite violent attacks from racist whites. At the time of the State Colored Men's Convention meeting in 1873, Singleton sought the support of the meeting's delegates for his Kansas project.²² But Singleton failed to persuade the

¹⁹ See Walter L. Fleming, "Benjamin 'Pap' Singleton: The Moses of the Colored Exodus," *The American Journal of Sociology* 15, No. 1 (July 1909), 61-82; Roy Garvin, "Benjamin, or 'Pap,' Singleton and His Followers," *The Journal of Negro History* 33, No. 1 (January 1948), 7-23; Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977) 109-110; Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee*, 79; Ward, *Dark Midnight When I Rise*, 265.

²⁰ Fleming, "Benjamin 'Pap' Singleton: The Moses of the Colored Exodus," 62.

²¹ Benjamin Singleton. Quoted in Fleming, "Benjamin 'Pap' Singleton," 62.

²² Painter, *Exodusters*, 113; Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville*, 82; Roy Garvin submitted that "Most Negroes in slavery had heard of John Brown's attack on Harper's Ferry in an attempt to free them and of the struggles of Brown and the 'Free Soilers' to prevent the extension of slavery into the Kansas-Nebraska territory, so that his name and Kansas had become synonymous with freedom and opportunity." Garvin, "Benjamin, or 'Pap,' Singleton and His Followers," 11;

attendees to support his scheme. When he returned to the 1875 convention as an official delegate, attendees echoed the 1871 convention's rebuke of the federal government, calling its enactment of laws for the protection and enjoyment of all its citizens a "dead letter." In reaction, attendees formed the Nashville Colored People's Cooperative Emigration Club to assist with black emigration efforts. Even so, some historians have concluded that as the most prominent black men in Nashville, the delegates primarily (and in some instances, only) supported the migration movement in an effort to rid the city of its poor black laboring class.²³

Nashville's black elite were not alone in their opposition or measured support of the black exodus. Preeminent black leaders, such as Frederick Douglass rejected the entire movement. While he was "virtually alone [in his opposition] among black leaders," Douglass viewed the "exodus" strategy as "a surrender, a premature, disheartening surrender, since it would make freedom and free institutions depend upon migration rather than protection; by flight, rather than right."²⁴ Yet, even his opposition had been at least in part, driven by political and economic reasons.²⁵ But, Singleton never contended that black migration would offer the solution to the intolerable economic conditions plaguing southern blacks. Instead, he hoped that the mere threat of a mass black exodus would force Nashville whites to acknowledge their dependence on the contribution of blacks and eventually welcome them back to Tennessee. "We don't want to leave the South," Singleton told local whites, "and just as soon as we have confidence in the South I am going to be an instrument in the hands of God to persuade every man to go back, because that

²³ Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville*, 82.

²⁴ Frederick Douglass. Quoted in "Frederick Douglass and Richard T. Greener on the Negro Exodus, 1879," in *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (New York: Citadel, 1951), 724; David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1991), 206.

²⁵ David W. Blight contended that "the extent to which political considerations dominated Douglass' economic thought was demonstrated even further by his insensitive and faulty understanding of the southern black exodus to Kansas in 1879-81...His position on the exodus demonstrated his growing estrangement, not only from other black leaders but from economic reality as well." See Blight, *Frederick Douglass' Civil War*, 206-207.

is the best country; that is genial to our nature, we love that country, and it is the best country in the world for us; but are going to learn the South a lesson.”²⁶

But it was not meant to be. Fearing the loss of the local economy’s labor force, many leading Nashville whites, including General William Harding owner of the Belle Meade Plantation, resolutely opposed the migration of blacks to the West while the city’s dailies refuted charges that efforts to disenfranchise blacks was the cause of the black exodus.²⁷ Despite having successfully directed 8,000 blacks to Kansas with little or no genuine support from local black leaders, and in the face of widespread disapproval among white leaders, Bobby L. Lovett has asserted that “Nashvillians quickly forgot about the Black Exodus.”²⁸ Some 5,420 Tennesseans had joined the “Black Exodus” to Kansas.²⁹

It is for these reasons that Andrew Ward concluded that the crowd of listeners probably applauded the Jubilees so feverishly because they construed the Dixie line as “an opposition to Pap Singleton’s Exodus movement.”³⁰ It should not be assumed that Nashville blacks, who made up 37.7 percent of the city’s 43,350 populace in 1880 however, were happy with its racial dynamics just because they remained in the city. The desperate economic conditions and white repression motivating migration out of Tennessee and the lower Mississippi Valley did not improve with the coming of the centennial celebrations in 1880. And sadly, neither the vision of city leaders for Nashville’s character as a New South city nor the constant harping on themes of the New South by editors and orators—cheap resources, business opportunities, railroad developments and commercial enterprise throughout the 1880s—included an embrace of “progressive” racial ideals.

²⁶ Benjamin Singleton, *Senate Report 693, III*, 387-388; Benjamin Singleton. Quoted in Painter, *Exodusters*, 117; See *New York Times*, 18 April 1880 for a summation of Singleton’s testimony.

²⁷ Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville*, 83; *Union and American*, 10 March 1874; *Union and American*, 7 November 1874; *Nashville Daily American*, 24 September 1879.

²⁸ Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville*, 84.

²⁹ Painter, *Exodusters*, 147; Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville*, 83-84.

³⁰ Ward, *Dark Midnight When I Rise*, 270.

Hence, the characterization of the *American* editor who concluded that the Centennial's opening parade offered "a fair picture of the social order" could not have been truer for Nashville blacks. The city's white leadership soon revealed "an equal determination that this new world would be a southern world built upon its past."³¹ Their attempts to skillfully dance between the old and new worlds generally meant new economic opportunities for white Nashville and old repressive social customs for black Nashville.

The Long Awakening: Nashville as "Athens" of the New South

Its economic and commercial successes in the wake of the Civil War undoubtedly buttressed Nashville's character as a New South city. By the beginning of 1880, the patterns of trade shifted from seaports like New Orleans, Charleston and Savannah, making the central location of interior cities like Nashville increasingly popular as they offered railway companies direct access to the North. With the city's increased attractiveness, the efforts of local railroad entrepreneurs like Edmund Cole of the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railroad (NC & StL), fell prey to the "powerful octopus" of Louisville and Nashville system (L&N) and its Wall Street financiers.³² Captain Tom Ryman busied himself with becoming the waterborne equivalent to Cole. Having also driven out most of his competitors during the 1890s, Ryman's steamboat eventually fell victim to the changing water levels of the Cumberland River. By the turn of the twentieth century, the Nashville steamboat industry was quickly giving way to the more efficient barge, while Nashville transportation operators continued looking to the federal government to stop L&N's monopolistic hold on Nashville commerce.³³

³¹ Woodward, *The Origins of the New South*, 6; *Nashville American*, 25 April 1880; Doyle, *Nashville in the New South*, 6, 18.

³² Doyle, *Nashville in the New South*, 19-22.

³³ *Ibid.*, 24-35.

No matter how distasteful its policies and how widely disliked (even hated) they were, L&N had lead the way in ushering in a new age of commercial possibilities for Nashville. Nowhere was the city's economic growth and economic transformation more evident than in its positioning as a major distribution center, with its vast market including southern Kentucky, the Cumberlands and northern Alabama. In spite of its competition with surrounding city-centers such as Louisville, Memphis, Birmingham, Atlanta, Chattanooga and Knoxville, Nashville merchants were so successful in securing sales in communities off the beaten track that grocers began to specialize in chosen goods by the late nineteenth century. A prime example of the benefits of this type of specialty enterprise is Joel O. Cheek who premiered his special blend of coffee in 1892. By the late 1890s his Nashville Coffee and Manufacturing Company had already enjoyed notable success and had firmly secured its future as the forerunner to the present-day Maxwell House business empire.³⁴

Before the turn of the century, New South advocates also drew on education, which had begun as a small staple of the Nashville economy, as the centerpiece of their “program to reconstruct the mind of the South.” At the forefront of their plan were the city's major white educational institutions—Vanderbilt University and Peabody College—as well as Fisk University and Meharry Medical College. Despite being established and funded by northern philanthropists, the colleges “lent a certain tone of refinement and [offered] cultural amenities” of which its New South advocates readily boasted.³⁵ Driving their claims was Nashville's growing repute as the “Athens of the South.” But just as Fisk, Meharry, Vanderbilt and Peabody were more accurately the product of northern philanthropy rather than of southern enterprise (and/or

³⁴ Ibid., 38-40; Other important Nashville industries included grain mills, meat-processing, wood, iron and coal manufacturing and textile mills. Publishing houses also became an important component of Nashville's diversifying economy.

³⁵ Doyle, *Nashville in the New South*, 51.

commitment to racial progressiveness), the city's "Athens" sobriquet found its origin in Philip Lindsley, a northern transplant, rather than in Nashville's native leadership.

A native of New Jersey, Lindsley had been educated in private academies and was a graduate of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University).³⁶ He turned down an offer to lead his alma mater to assume the presidency of Cumberland College in Nashville in 1824, which was later changed to the University of Nashville at his behest. It is believed that sometime during the following year, Lindsley, while laying out his plan to create an educational center in the region—then considered the Old Southwest—that could rival those of the East, referred to Nashville as the "Athens of the West."³⁷ Dubbed a "grand experiment," Lindsley's plan to transform the fledgling college into a renowned university required capital, and lots of it. But he soon found that "local enthusiasm for his university, which had attracted him to Nashville, was not redeemable in cash."³⁸

While the frontier concept of self-sufficiency (which was kept alive by frontier religion) as well as "frontier egotism" continued to impede his plan to spread education across the state, Lindsley continued to build and expand the University of Nashville over the course of the next twenty-five years.³⁹ Despite fervent opposition from many Nashvillians who believed that the college land grants would have been better used by farmers, Lindsley was committed to educating the children on the frontier. Historians such as John Woolverton and James Davidson have pointed to the progressive nature of Lindsley's advocacy of education in general and for the

³⁶ For more detailed biographical information on Philip Lindsley see F. Garvin Davenport, "Culture Versus Frontier in Tennessee," *The Journal of Southern History* 5, No. 1 (February 1939), 18-33; John V. Woolverton, "Philip Lindsley and the Cause of Education in the Old Southwest," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* XIX, No.1 (1960), 3-22; See Paul Keith Conkin, *Peabody College: From a Frontier Academy to the Frontiers of Teaching and Learning*, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002), 24-45.

³⁷ Henry McRaven, *Nashville: Athens of the South*, (Chapel Hill: Scheer & Jervis, 1949), vii; Conkin, *Peabody College*, 46.

³⁸ James F. Davidson, "Philip Lindsley: The Teacher as Prophet," *Peabody Journal of Education* 41, No. 6 (May 1964), 328.

³⁹ Davenport, "Culture Versus Frontier in Tennessee," 25-27.

building of an educational center in Nashville in particular. As Davidson pointedly notes, Lindsley “believed strongly that education should not be a trophy, only for those already endowed with wealth or talent; it was a necessity to a free people.”⁴⁰

By “free” people, Davidson presumably meant white people. Shortly after his arrival in Nashville he claimed “nothing here [Tennessee] ever reaches perfection.” In his opinion, the city boasted “nothing but cotton, tobacco, corn, whiskey, negroes and swine,” all of which was “not worth the growing.”⁴¹ In the twenty five years he spent in Nashville, his opinion of blacks remained unchanged. While he once lauded Liberia as “The Great African Republic,” Lindsley was “no abolitionist dropped down from the North into the midst of Southern society.”⁴² He may have lamented the separation of slave families, but, accepted without qualification, slavery as a necessary institution because of black inferiority. “An inferior race,” wrote Lindsley, “can never long exist in the midst of a superior race, upon equal terms.” Paradoxically, he concluded that blacks had benefited physically, morally and intellectually from slavery; yet somehow he still viewed slavery as a sin that damaged the human personality of whites more than blacks.⁴³ Hence, Lindsley’s plan for Tennessee as “Athens,” despite what H. M. Doak characterized as a “clear and far reaching view of the relations of Nashville and of Tennessee to the cause of Southwestern education,” did not include any plans in support of black education.⁴⁴

Even so, when Lindsley resigned from the presidency of University of Nashville in 1850, not even his plans for white Tennesseans had been realized. As early as 1837, Lindsley himself

⁴⁰ Davidson, “Philip Lindsley: The Teacher as Prophet,” 330; See also Woolverton, “Philip Lindsley and the Cause of Education in the Old Southwest,” 18.

⁴¹ Le Roy J. Halsey, ed., *The Works of Philip Lindsley, D.D.* Volume III (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1866), 329.

⁴² Woolverton. “Philip Lindsley and the Cause of Education in the Old Southwest.” p. 9.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 9; Halsey, ed. *The Works of Philip Lindsley, D.D.*, 583, 577-578, 580.

⁴⁴ H. M. Doak, “The Development of Education in Tennessee.” *American Historical Magazine and Tennessee Historical Society Quarterly* Volume VIII, ed. A.V. Goodpasture (Nashville: A.V. and W.H. Goodpasture, 1903), 73. The article was originally an address prepared by H. M. Doak at the request of the Committee of the Tennessee Historical Society, to be delivered at the Nashville Centennial of 1880.

recognized that he had merely laid “a foundation—a nucleus—a corner stone—a first essay towards the glorious consummation and perfection of my own cherished hopes and anticipations.”⁴⁵ Despite Lindsley’s personal disappointment, white Tennesseans heralded him as a “master builder of that temple whose foundations only are yet laid.”⁴⁶ His achievements at the University of Nashville were commendable; but his fervent commitment to the cause of education across the state was hailed as pioneering. As observed by Doak, Lindsley, in the face of “pernicious tillage... went on sowing seeds to bear fruit in coming time, allowing capacity and efficiency, turning out able men to bear witness in the future.” Lindsley, he contended, had helped to build a community that attracted the city’s colleges, law and medical schools, normal, high and female schools as well as “drawn hither your Fisk, Tennessee Central and Baptist colleges to do their great work amongst the African population.”⁴⁷

Doak recognized the contributions of New Englanders to the success of Tennessee’s educational system but chastised those who “believe that we have transplanted a system from New England, instead of growing one in our own soil.”⁴⁸ His sentiments were probably widely echoed by white Tennesseans, as he gave considerable attention to attacking “the war with its evil teachings” for disrupting the natural development of education in the state and to disputing any acclaim accorded to education in Tennessee as a “Yankee invention.”⁴⁹ While Doak attributed the “high position of Nashville as an educational center” to the students sent out between 1825 and 1861, it is highly unlikely that he was referring to Nashville’s black colleges or the native schools that preceded them. No, Doak’s preoccupation was with reclaiming white

⁴⁵ Halsey, ed., *The Works of Philip Lindsley, D.D.*, 399; Davenport, “Culture Versus Frontier in Tennessee,” 33.

⁴⁶ Doak, “The Development of Education in Tennessee,” 73.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 75-80.

Tennesseans' ownership of white education; and likewise, the majority of white Tennesseans' who supported education associated it with the cause of white, and not black, children.

Even so, Lindsley's quarter-of-a-century-long leadership of the university was as Garvin Davenport has observed, "indicative of an awakening, however elemental it may have been."⁵⁰ No matter how much New South boosters like Doak sought to help Tennessee reclaim its progressiveness, as late as the thirties and forties some white Tennesseans had "an aversion for education and cultural life that was almost fanatical."⁵¹ Therefore the "awakening" of Tennessee education that grew in the long shadow of the Civil War, was anything but guaranteed. This was even truer for black Tennesseans, even as New South idealists increasingly claimed the repute as "Athens." But unlike Lindsley, they were not consumed with a state-wide claim to the sobriquet. New South proponents increasingly sought to separate Nashville from the backwardness of the remainder of the state and were content to push Nashville as a cultural oasis in the midst of a wider cultural and social desert.

More of the Same: Ku Klux Klan Violence Terrorizes Tennesseans

Nevertheless, black Nashvillians knew, all too well, the limits of New South rhetoric, just as blacks across the South knew the limits of the federal government's power to protect them. While Reconstruction in Tennessee had begun during the Civil War, the middle and western regions of the state (where its efforts were concentrated), were largely Confederate and had a long history of slaveholding. The Union capture of the state and the subsequent leadership of military governor Andrew Johnson infuriated Confederate sympathizers, as did the election of William G. Brownlow in 1865. While Brownlow had been pro-slavery, he was also decidedly pro-Unionist. The year following his election, "Parson" Brownlow lead Tennessee's ratification

⁵⁰ Davenport, "Culture Versus Frontier in Tennessee," 33.

⁵¹ Ibid., 24.

of the Fourteenth Amendment, which paved the way for the state to be fully restored to the Union.⁵²

Still angry over the passage of the 1866 Civil Rights Act, which reinforced the rights of citizenship to the freedmen, and the subsequent passage of the supporting acts of 1870 and 1871 (also known as the enforcement and Ku Klux Klan acts respectively), which established sanctions against the obstruction of black suffrage and guaranteed citizenship to the freedmen, southern whites, as a rule, despised the civil rights acts and viewed them as evidence of the federal government's intrusion into state affairs.⁵³ No single group embodied southern white resentment as did the Ku Klux Klan, whose Tennessee roots are well known. Founded in the little market center of Pulaski, the county seat of Giles County, Tennessee, the Klan's founders were six idle former Confederate soldiers, who at the close of the war were bored with "enforced inactivity." In his seminal work, *Invisible Empire*, Stanley Horn contended that the Klan was not established to repress the Reconstruction efforts or to terrorize the freedmen.⁵⁴ Given the Klan's metamorphosis into the "invisible empire," it is difficult to accept this nonsensical view of its origins as a club for the horseplay of college graduates of the "highest standing in their community." Yet, even if it is accepted that their initial aims were purely for "amusement" and "relaxation," the Klan became increasingly violent as it grew in the wake of the Radical Republicans' return to power in Congress in 1867. Ex-Confederate resentment made the South "rotten-ripe" for the Klan's growth.⁵⁵ By 1868, the Klan had begun to demonstrate the violent

⁵² Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 44-45.

⁵³ Together with the Thirteenth (which abolished slavery), Fourteenth (which established black citizenship) and Fifteenth (which established black male suffrage) Amendments to the *United States Constitution*, the civil rights acts serve as the capstone achievements of the Reconstruction Congress.

⁵⁴ Stanley Horn, *Invisible Empire: The Story of the Ku Klux Klan, 1866-1871* (Montclair: Patterson Smith, 1969), 7-9; David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1965), 8-9; J. Michael Martinez, *Carpetbaggers, Cavalry and the Ku Klux Klan: Exposing the Invisible Empire During Reconstruction* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 7-8.

⁵⁵ Horn, *Invisible Empire*, 9-10, 21.

acts with which it would later become synonymous. Dressed in makeshift robes and hoods made from sheets and pillowcases “it threatened, exiled, flogged, mutilated, shot, stabbed and hanged” blacks in the nine states in which it was active including Tennessee, the Carolinas, Mississippi, Arkansas and Texas.⁵⁶

As the “cradle of the Ku Klux,” the spread of Klan “dens” across Tennessee to the middle and western parts of the state was undoubtedly accelerated by the membership of Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest, who “brought prestige and legitimacy to the organization.”⁵⁷ Despite what would be a short-lived association between Forrest and the Klan, dens across Tennessee continued to grow and to terrorize black Tennesseans with their power unchecked until 1869, when Governor Brownlow led the push for the Klan’s disbandment through the passage of the anti-Ku Klux law. The law led to the Klan’s disbandment and historians have subsequently noted 1870 to 1873 as years of Klan suppression.⁵⁸ Even so, as Allen W. Trelease has noted, such claims are imprecise. “Even in Tennessee, where the Klan supposedly disbanded in 1869, it by no means disappeared,” wrote Trelease. “Night riding and outrages on Negroes continued to take place in the middle and western sections of the state.”⁵⁹

In fact, Klan violence was among the principal concerns of the delegates to the 1871 State Colored Men’s Convention, who reported that outrages by Klan outlaws to both white and colored teachers in colored schools were so great that they had broken up nearly all schools outside of large cities. “With impunity, [they] defy, successfully all attempts that have been made to stop them in their lawlessness.”⁶⁰ The committee commended Fisk Principal E.K. Spence and

⁵⁶ Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 10.

⁵⁷ Horn, *Invisible Empire*, 74; Martinez, *Carpetbaggers, Cavalry and the Ku Klux Klan*, 18.

⁵⁸ Everette Swinney, *Suppressing the Ku Klux Klan: The Enforcement of the Reconstruction Amendments, 1870-1877* (New York: Garland. 1987), 286.

⁵⁹ Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (New York: Harper & Row. 1971), 278.

⁶⁰ Swinney, *Suppressing the Ku Klux Klan*, 286; *Proceedings of the Colored State Convention*. Held in Nashville, February 22, 23, 24 & 25th. 1871, 1; The delegates represented Davidson, Shelby, Williamson,

Central Tennessee President John Braden for their work “to elevate our colored citizens and to break down the barriers to progress, elevate Christianity, and dispel the darkness of ignorance and prejudice,” and hailing them as “true Christian philanthropists and benefactors of our countrymen.” Despite their satisfaction with the work of Fisk and Central Tennessee, delegates (who included Tennessee Manual Labor University (TMLU) founder Samuel Lowery and fellow Nashville native school alumnus Nelson Walker) lamented: “The committee [on education] can see no hope for the general education of the children of our race in Tennessee.”⁶¹

Challenging the government to keep its promise to afford equal political rights to all, the Convention called for the establishment of a state industrial college. The resolution called on “the Congress of the United States to order the doors of such College or Institution [that] shall receive all pupils irrespective of color, and that they be admitted on equal terms.”⁶² Under the subject headings “Homes,” “Education,” “Labor,” and the penal system as “Slavery in Force,” the delegates adopted a memorial to the Congress and president of the United States that called for the amelioration of the conditions suffered by black Tennesseans:

“The cry of the masses coming up from every quarter is protection! protection!! protection!!! from the outlaws and desperadoes who swarm by thousands up and down the highways of every district and county under the secret oath-bound societies known as Pale Faces and Ku klux, to deny colored citizens every right of citizenship, civil and political. We inform you that every supporter of the Lost Cause in this state is arrayed and engaged in the malicious effort, our State being under the political control of these men and their sympathizers.”⁶³

The following year, the Tennessee Democratic Party split during the elections of 1872, which led to Republican gains at the polls. These gains spurred on Democratic fears that they could lose power in the impending election of 1874. Hence, it was Republican gains that led to the resurgence of the Klan across the state. “In this context,” observed Everette Swinney,

Montgomery, Tipton, Giles, Maury, Robertson, Cheatham, Sumner, Rutherford, Marshall, Henry and Obion counties.

⁶¹ Ibid., 3.

⁶² Ibid., 3-13.

⁶³ Ibid., 14.

“renewed Klan activity was virtually inevitable, and violence was widespread throughout middle and western Tennessee during and following the campaign of 1874.”⁶⁴ Swinney’s assessment of Klan violence was no exaggeration. By September 1874, the Nashville *Union and American* ran a series of editorial comments from papers around the country under the heading “Tennessee’s Troubles.” Bemoaned as one of the “darkest and bloodiest of all States” by John W. Forney’s *Philadelphia Press*, the rash of racial violence experienced in Tennessee lead its writers to conclude that along with Kentucky, its government had “shown that they cannot protect the weak nor restrain the strong.”⁶⁵

Similarly the *Chicago Times* observed: “There is nothing which so much stands in the way of political and economic reform as this very ruffianism...that there is a party in the North which is ready to defend the “white man’s party,” no matter of what brutal atrocities it may be guilty.”⁶⁶ A week earlier, under the heading “Murders in Tennessee,” an article in the Cincinnati *Commercial* contended that the rash of violent attacks on black Tennesseans in the preceding months, which included thirty-nine murders in Rutherford, Sumner and Gibson counties alone, had earned Tennessee its title as “darkest and bloodiest of all States.” “What a record is this for eight months in three counties, the aggregate population of which all combined is less than one seventh that of Hamilton Country, Ohio,” continued the writer. “If murder should be proportionately frequent you [Cincinnatians], you [Cincinnatians] would have in your county [Hamilton County], since January, 275 murders!”⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Swinney, *Suppressing the Ku Klux Klan*, 286-287.

⁶⁵ *Nashville Union and American*, 4 September 1874.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *New York Times*, 7 September 1874; Located in the southwest corner of the state of Ohio, Hamilton County cities include the county seat of Cincinnati. According the 1870 US Census Hamilton County had a population of 260,370 while Rutherford, Sumner and Giles counties.

Murder in Our Midst: The Case of Julia Hayden

The alarming statistic was followed by an account of the latest murders. While she was neither a native of Davidson County, nor was she murdered there, of all attacks on black Tennesseans, it was the murder of Julia Hayden that undoubtedly hit home for black Nashvillians. Described as “bright, intelligent and rather handsome,” Hayden was just seventeen years old when she ventured to Trousdale County to set up a school for black children. She had gotten the appointment with the aid of Central Tennessee President John Braden, who came to know her during the two years that she was a student at the school. A native of Spring Hill, in Maury County, Hayden belonged to a family “as respectable as any colored family in the State,” and had “manifested a strong disposition to educate herself.” Speaking of her in the highest terms, Braden asserted that Hayden was one of his “best scholars and a devout Christian.”⁶⁸

Having just graduated, Hayden accepted the call to teach and with Braden’s help, began her short-lived career in a schoolhouse just outside Hartsville on July 29, 1874. About three weeks later, she secured boarding at the home of Hembry Lowe, a black ferryman who lived on the farm of E.P. Lowe, a wealthy white farmer, trader and landowner.⁶⁹ At about 2 o’clock Saturday, August 21, just three days after Hayden took up residence there, two men knocked on the door of Hembry Lowe. The “violent knocking at the door” was followed by their demand for “that school teacher.” Hearing their demands, Hayden ran towards the Lowes’ bedroom, where she attempted to get into the bed alongside Lowe’s wife. Presumably for their protection, Lowe stood at the door, barring the entry of the armed men. “We do not want to hurt you Uncle Hem; we want that teacher,” said one of the men.

Undeterred, the men kept banging against the door, all the while threatening to break it down and shoot. Lowe, in fear for their lives, cried out “Massa Pink! Massa Pink!” to E.P. Lowe

⁶⁸ *New York Times*, 7 September 1874; *Union & American*, 26 August 1874.

⁶⁹ *Union & American*, 26 August 1874.

for help. While one of the men ran away saying “We had better get away from here,” the remaining man either fired through the door, or through the space left open by having forced the door slightly ajar. Just as Hayden reached the Lowes’ bedside, the shooter’s bullet struck her either in the neck or in the right breast. Hayden shrieked upon being struck by the assailant’s bullet, which killed her almost instantly. As blood streamed from Hayden across the sheets of the bed, the gunman made a hasty retreat.⁷⁰

One can only imagine the shock waves that reverberated through black Nashville on August 23, upon reading the *Nashville Banner*’s brief account of the incident under the heading “Murdered: A College Female Teacher Taken Out and Shot to Death.” Having learned of Hayden’s murder from a private letter sent from Lebanon the previous day, the staff inaccurately reported that she had been taken from the house and shot to death. Still, the report left no question of Hayden’s identity, as it offered about Hayden’s rearing in Spring Hill and education at Central Tennessee.⁷¹ Two days later on August 25, the *Banner* reported that Hayden’s father arrived in Nashville the previous day with his two sons. He reportedly sent his sons with a coffin fashioned by Benjamin Singleton to collect the remains of his daughter.⁷²

At the time, Hayden’s father reported that he was considering asking the Governor to offer a reward for the apprehension of those responsible for her death. Understandably, he wanted details about his daughter’s death. In order to force the cooperation of the governor and other officials, Hayden’s father sent letters to “some prominent white citizens with whom he has lived at Spring Hill.”⁷³ Maybe his connections did wield influence because just one day after he

⁷⁰ *New York Times*, September 7, 1874; *Union & American*, August 26, 1874; *Union & American*, August 27, 1874; *Harper’s Weekly* 18, September 19, 1874, 769-770; *Harper’s Weekly* 18, October 3, 1874, 813; Ward M. McAfee, *Religion, Race and Reconstruction: The Public School in the Politics of the 1870s*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), 153-154.

⁷¹ *Nashville Banner*, 23 August 1874.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Nashville Banner*, 25 August 1874; *Nashville Banner*, 26 August 1874; *Nashville Union and American*, 26 August 1874.

reported contacting them, the *Nashville Banner* and *Union & American* were able to report specific details about the attack and murder of his daughter. The latter reported that upon arriving in Hartsville, the men learned that the murdered sixteen year old had been buried at the county's expense. Undeterred, they dug up her remains and returned with them to Spring Hill by way of Nashville.⁷⁴

In addition to forcing the details of the gruesome murder into the open, the family's connections to the white citizens of Spring Hill conceivably attracted the attention of Tennessee Governor John C. Brown who issued a proclamation on August 26 which read: "Whereas it has been made known to me that certain persons, whose names are to me unknown, on the night of August 21, 1874, committed a foul and atrocious murder upon the body of Julia Hayden, colored, and are now at large...I, John C. Brown...by virtue of the power and authority in me vested, do hereby offer a reward of five hundred dollars for the detection and apprehension of said parties, or either of them, to be paid on final conviction."⁷⁵ Despite the apparent sincerity of the governor's actions, it is understandable that historians question the motives of his proclamation. Whether his aggressive response to Hayden's murder was the result of genuine outrage or merely an attempt to "save face," or yet still, was a combination of the two, is difficult to deduce.

Racial violence against blacks after all, had become a crisis of sorts for Governor Brown, who issued a similar proclamation only two days later. Again, he offered a \$500 reward for information "detection and apprehension of any one and each of the said parties" involved in "forcibly and unlawfully" taking sixteen black prisoners from the Gibson County jail on the morning of August 26.⁷⁶ The proclamation reported that the culprits "fouly and brutally murdered four of them, mortally wounded two and removed the other ten of whom nothing has

⁷⁴ *Nashville Union and American*, 26 August 1874.

⁷⁵ *Nashville Banner*, August 27, 1874; *Republican Banner*, 27 August 1874.

⁷⁶ *Nashville Banner*, August 29, 1874; *Nashville Union and American*, August 29, 1874.

since been heard.”⁷⁷ Five hundred dollars was a considerable sum of money, but it is highly unlikely that Governor Brown intended to award the reward for all, if any of the reported seventy-five to one hundred man-mob who stormed the Trenton Jail.⁷⁸

The sixteen men had been placed in jail after being accused of having been a part of a group of thirty or forty blacks who unprovoked, fired upon two white men returning home from church. At least one report, however, points to an old unpaid debt a white man owed a black man as the origin of the dispute. Other reports contended that groups of black men had long been strategically organizing to attack or at the very least defend themselves against the Ku Klux Klan.⁷⁹ If their intent was to protect themselves against the Klan, the result proved just the opposite. Whites were already riled up after the killing of the prisoners; and white hysteria quickly arose following reports of black attempts to purchase large amounts of guns and ammunition. Fortunately, the report of whites who claimed that an army of 500 blacks had already killed two white women and planned to march on Trenton were baseless, as a slaughter of the county’s black community would have plausibly ensued.⁸⁰

Characterized by KKK historian James Melville Beard as “one of the most daring and venal of all acts of these regulators,” the Trenton Massacre as well as the murder of Julia Hayden were only two of several instances of racial violence against black Tennesseans that captured the headlines of local dailies.⁸¹ For several weeks, the August 5 murder of Sandy Peebles by masked men seized headlines as well as the murders of “old colored man” Dick McKinney on August 24,

⁷⁷ *Nashville Union and American*, 29 August 1874.

⁷⁸ Five hundred dollars in 1874 is worth more than \$9,700 in today’s value. According to Samuel H. Williamson, “Six Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount, 1790 to Present,” *MeasuringWorth*, 2009. URL <http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/>.

⁷⁹ *Nashville Union and American*, 28 August 1874.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*; *Nashville Union and American*, 27 August 1874.

⁸¹ *Nashville Banner*, 27 August 1874; James Melville Beard, *K.K.K. Sketches: Humorous and Didactic* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, 1877), 117.

who was shot three times before beaten to death with an ax. Similarly, Robert Banks “a peaceable man” was murdered in open light of day as was B.H. Nelson at Pulaski.⁸²

Both the nature of the murders and the rate at which they occurred alarmed Nashville blacks. Having formed a committee to lead their calls for redress, several hundred black Nashvillians gathered on the night of August 26, at the office of R.D. Campbell, a prominent black citizen and chairman of the committee, to share their concerns about the incidences.⁸³ General William B. Bate, Judge Trimble and Governor Brown were invited to attend the meeting, but none attended. The governor, however, did send a letter extolling their efforts as a “laudable purpose” and vowed his “earnest desire to have the laws impartially and certainly executed.” He continued: “I will exhaust every legal remedy to protect every citizen of the State in the employment of every civil and political right, without regard to race or color.” Still, he took “liberty to counsel prudence and moderation” and hastened that “violence, both in words and acts, kindles strife, while kind words and pacific counsels beget a spirit of forbearance and friendship.”⁸⁴

While appreciative of the governor’s sentiments, the attendees offered several resolutions of their own. “Whereas, we are peaceable and law abiding citizens both of the State and the Government of the United States, and have done nothing as a people to merit the abuses and bad treatment which we are enduring and have endured,” read the declaration, “[speeches and writings] declaring that the social rights of the whites are in danger from us, also that a war of races is imminent and that the negro must be put down... have excited many whites to undue violence towards us [including the] outrages committed this month.” Their resolution used the murders of Pebbles, Banks, Nelson, the victims of the Trenton Massacre as well as “the foul and

⁸² *Nashville Union and American*, 28 August 1874; *Nashville Union and American*, 29 August 1874.

⁸³ Committee members included R.D. Campbell, chairman, A. Manifee and John McGowan, secretaries and W. L. Irwin.

⁸⁴ *Nashville Union and American*, 28 August 1874.

atrocious murder of Julia Hayden” as examples of the unprecedented wave of violence against black Tennesseans. Citing that none of the “assassins” in the mentioned cases had been brought to justice, they resolved, “in justice to ourselves and those we represent, we ask the white people of the State how long is such a state of affairs to be tolerated, and is there no redress for these outrages?”⁸⁵

Attendee Sam Robertson interjected. He wanted to amend the last resolution by declaring that blacks “must be protected at the hands of the white people,” and said “they had called again and again for rights to no purpose.” Robertson concluded that if such acts persisted, “they would be compelled to defend themselves.” But his sentiments were not endorsed by the body.⁸⁶ While the meeting’s attendees were unprepared to endorse Robertson’s incendiary statements, it is important to note that their resolution and in many ways, the nature of the meeting alone, was nothing less than militant. First, it is improbable at best that a hundred or more blacks could meet in the office of a prominent black Nashvillian, even at night, without calling attention to themselves and their gathering. Second, not only did they hold a public meeting to address their concerns, they wanted to do so in the presence of three of the city’s most influential whites. Third, they committed their concerns to the local newspaper and hence, to public record. To publish their invitations to Brown, Trimble and Bate was an act that potentially put their safety at risk, especially when all three men declined their invitations.

The implications of the meeting are also equally if not more important indicators of the militancy of black Nashvillians. While white Nashvillians may have viewed racial violence in other Tennessee counties coupled with the dearth of similar reports as evidence of Nashville’s sense of social and cultural exceptionality, their black counterparts demonstrated a concern for the safety of black Tennesseans statewide. In doing so, black Nashvillians not only confirmed

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

their awareness of reports of racial violence against blacks in surrounding counties; they also established their connectedness with the broader struggle to secure state protection against mob violence. The defenselessness of other black Tennesseans was something they could relate to and for obvious reasons, feared. The murder of Julia Hayden in particular, outraged black Nashvillians. Initially outraged because of the heinous nature of the attack, black Nashvillians had to feel a keen sense of indignation over the murder of one of their own. She was among the best and the brightest youth their community and schools had produced and she was murdered because of her efforts to teach other black youth. Her murder involved more than the taking of her life; it was the loss of her potential influence over her students, and also a larger threat to the transformative power of black education.

Hayden's death also had broader regional as well as national implications. When *Harper's Weekly* reported Hayden's murder on October 3, 1874, it demanded the "extermination of the White Man's League." Its description of the Klan as a "fearful association [that] extends through every Southern State," recognized that "one of its chief objects is to prevent the education elevation of the colored race. It [the Klan] whips, intimidates, or murders their teachers from the Ohio to the Gulf," observed the editorial, "and its terrible outrages have already surpassed the horrors of the most vindictive civil war."⁸⁷

Likewise, black publications such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church's *The Christian Recorder* also reported the tide of violence sweeping across Tennessee during the summer of 1874.⁸⁸ *The Christian Recorder* took an especially keen interest in the "murder of poor Julia Hayden" after an editorial writer in the Nashville *Tribune* charged that "any visitor in the South will very soon discover that the negro men, as a class, have the reputation of being thieves and the negro women of wanting in chastity" and as such, "it may easily be understood

⁸⁷ *Harper's Weekly* 18, 3 October 1874.

⁸⁸ *The Christian Recorder*, 10 September 1874.

why three young men who had been drinking freely should stop at the house where Julia Hayden lived, supposing that she would admit them and submit to their wishes.” Portraying the murder as merely “reckless and fiendish” rather than malicious, they contended that “there is no evidence that the girl's occupation or that hostility to negro schools had anything whatever to do with the homicide.”⁸⁹

The Nashville writer's vehement insistence that Hayden's death had nothing to do with her job as a teacher or opposition to black schools was shared by a Hartsville correspondent who contended “We recognize the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments as accomplish facts and accept colored schools upon the same platform. Instead of opposing such schools...we have in many instances given them encouragement.”⁹⁰ The preoccupation of these white Tennesseans, as well as those who shared their sentiments, indicates that there must have been some belief of the contrary.

In its direct response to the *Tribune* writer, *The Christian Recorder* leveled an indictment that embodied the sentiments of those who believed that Hayden's murder was a blatant attack rooted in white opposition to black education. “You lie, you villain, you lie; and you know you lie... So dastardly is it, so insulting to every colored husband, father, and brother, in the land, that we really find ourselves tempted to add an Horation [sic] oath; and would, if it would do any good. But alas! We are measurably in the hands of the villain, and he is privileged to write, and the *Tribune* is privileged to print what they seem to think policy demands.”⁹¹

These “villains” were not merely those who committed these heinous acts of racial violence; but rather it was the *zeitgeist* that nurtured the social and political climate in which the murder of blacks could take place whether under the cover of night in the open light of day, without the fear of paying the consequences for these crimes. Still, perhaps even worse than the

⁸⁹ *The Christian Recorder*, 5 November 1874.

⁹⁰ *Nashville Union and American*, 27 August 1874.

⁹¹ *The Christian Recorder*, 5 November 1874.

denial of justice was the sentiment of “sympathetic” whites who attempted to reduce the phenomena of racial violence and murder across Tennessee to merely isolated instances. In refusing to admit that the violence was a part of a larger problem, namely the opposition of many whites to the rights of blacks in general, and black education and the Civil Rights Act in particular, white Tennesseans continued to enable mob violence against blacks.

There is little doubt that black Nashvillians saw themselves as the intellectual leadership of black Tennesseans in other counties. While white Nashvillians, in the “Athens” tradition, viewed themselves as the beneficiaries of Nashville’s sense of social and cultural exceptionality, their black counterparts felt a keen sense of duty to all black Tennesseans. Perhaps the murder of Julia Hayden heightened this sense of responsibility not only because she was a young and bright product of their community and schools or even because she was presumably killed for being a teacher, but rather because the vast majority of the graduates of Nashville’s black colleges were being trained as teachers. And as teachers, they were expected to instruct black youth in even the most rural settings. It was not unusual for them to be employed in the establishment of rural black schools. As a result, Hayden’s murder was the personification of a black college graduates’ worst fear.

Answering the Call: Du Bois and the Black Student “Schoolmaster”

Hailed as Nashville’s “great African schools” during the Nashville Centennial, Fisk, Tennessee Central and Roger Williams may have been perceived as havens from racial violence as the close of the nineteenth century approached.⁹² However, students of the city’s black colleges were being taught to put their education to good use in black communities across the South. While specifics regarding the Tennessee’s bloody summer presumably abated with the passage of time, black students knew all too well, that they faced the risk of white violence when

⁹² Doak, “The Development of Education in Tennessee,” 88.

putting their education to use in rural settings. The threat of white violence was not only real, it grew exponentially when Nashville black college students and/or alumni set-up churches, schools and or medical practices in rural communities. This threat was constant. And Nashville's black students and their white teachers and administrators were well aware of Tennessee's potential for white violence.

While some historians have argued that the bloody summer of 1874 eventually led to the suppression of the Klan in Tennessee, others contend that acts of racial violence still terrorized blacks more than a decade later. "Murder, killing and maiming Negroes, raping Negro women—in the 80's and in the southern South, this was not even news," reflected W.E.B. Du Bois, "it got no publicity; it caused no arrests; and punishment for such transgression was so unusual that the fact was telegraphed North."⁹³ Du Bois, who was a student at Fisk during the mid-to-late 1880s, claimed that these southern experiences led him to conclude: "No one but a Negro going into the South without previous experience of color caste can have any conception of its barbarism." He continued: "It is not a matter of law or ordinance; it is a question of instinctive feeling; of inherited and inborn knowledge."⁹⁴

As a northern transplant of mixed heritage, the time Du Bois spent in Tennessee undoubtedly shaped his keen awareness of southern race relations. Born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts on February 23, 1868, just five years after the Emancipation Proclamation, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois was reared by his mother in the New England community of approximately 5,000. With blacks no more than twenty to fifty in number, Du Bois' Dutch-African ancestry likely impeded his sense of race-consciousness. He claimed that he did not begin to "feel the pressure of the 'veil of color'" until after entering high school."⁹⁵ Despite being

⁹³ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois* (New York: International Publishers Co. 1968), 122.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 66-83.

poor, the family's long standing ties to the region and to the valley in particular as well as his academic excellence, offered young Du Bois a privileged place as a young black man in America during the late nineteenth century. But despite the patronage of his family, church and even some local whites, Du Bois had to postpone his dreams of attending Harvard University and resign himself to attending Fisk for undergraduate studies. While his "family and colored friends rather resented the idea [because] their free Negro prejudice naturally revolted at the idea of sending me to the former land of slavery, either for education or for living," Du Bois' experiences while at Fisk surely influenced the man and scholar he would become.⁹⁶

Du Bois arrived on the campus at the age of 17 in the fall of 1885. He later remembered, "I was thrilled to be for the first time among so many people of my own color... Never before had I seen young men so self-assured and who gave themselves such airs."⁹⁷ While he reveled in the diversity of "beauty" and in the self-assuredness of fellow students, Du Bois' rearing in New England was unlike that of his counterparts. Most Fisk students, who had come from all over the South could "paint from their own experience a wide and vivid picture of the postwar South and of its black millions," recalled Du Bois. Among the student body "were men and women who had faced mobs and seen lynchings; who knew every insult and repression; and too there were sons, daughters and clients of every class of white Southerner."⁹⁸ In fact, Du Bois' rearing was in many ways, more like that of the Fisk faculty. Much less diverse, all but one of its teachers was white, from New England or from the New Englandized Middle West."⁹⁹

Still, back in Great Barrington, his white counterparts were expected to comfortably occupy professional roles as store clerks, bookkeepers and teachers, positions that were not open to him even as a light-skinned black man. Instead of resigning himself to this fate, Du Bois chose

⁹⁶ Ibid., 105.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 107.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 108.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

to answer “the call of the black South.” The need for teachers was great and having surmised that “Black folk were bound in time to play a large role in the South [but] they needed trained leadership.” Du Bois declared, “I was sent to furnish it.”¹⁰⁰ At some point during his matriculation at Fisk, the South’s separation of the races, revealed to Du Bois, a world “split into white and black halves, and where the darker half was held back by race prejudice and legal bonds, as well as by deep ignorance and dire poverty.” Having conceptualized Fisk as “a microcosm of a world and a civilization in potentiality,” Du Bois “leapt with enthusiasm” into the world of blackness. “A new loyalty and allegiance replaced my Americanism,” claimed Du Bois, “henceforward I was a Negro.”¹⁰¹

Du Bois’ realizations about his blackness were likely as much a product of his Fisk experiences, as they were about his summer teaching experiences in the surrounding rural counties. From the “protected vantage ground” of Fisk, Du Bois was yet a stranger to the South beyond the campus’ borders.¹⁰² As David Levering Lewis has pointedly illustrated: “If they were going to be his life’s work, Willie [Du Bois] needed to spend time among those African-Americans who were unlikely ever to see the inside of a Fisk classroom—among real peasants in the rural backcountry.”¹⁰³

But, while securing a teaching position as a teacher in the summer was expected, it was not easy. More than a half century later, Du Bois would still vividly recall the “deep wariness of heart and limb” as he searched the southern countryside for a vacancy he could occupy. He walked for untold miles, until he found a little school where his teaching experiences were meager in every way except for the wonderment his students held in the “wisdom of [him as]

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 106.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 108.

¹⁰² Ibid., 114

¹⁰³ David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race 1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993), 67.

their teacher.”¹⁰⁴ Yet, it was the weekends he spent in the homes of his students that offered him a deeper understanding of their plight and of the southern black experience. “The heroic futility of the two summers [teaching in rural Tennessee] weighed upon him,” observed Lewis. “He saw written across the faces deep in Wilson County the rebuked destinies of the black people who came singing, praying, and aspiring out of slavery.”¹⁰⁵

As the best known of all Tennessee black student “schoolmasters” during this period, W.E.B. Du Bois epitomized the very best possible outcome of these theoretical and practical learning experiences. However, to be fair, Du Bois was by no means average in any way, and scholars Rayford Logan and David Levering Lewis convincingly argue that Du Bois’ fate was with “black folk” whether he accepted it or not.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, E. Franklin Frazier criticized Du Bois’ conceptualization of the “New Negro” as evidence that “he never was thoroughly assimilated into Negro life.”¹⁰⁷ Still, the seminal place of Fisk in his sense of “blackness” is unquestionable. Referring to the essay “The New Negro,” which Du Bois unsuccessfully wrote for publication during his senior year, Lewis convincingly argued that Du Bois’ “developing sense of mission was fully evident in his senior year.” He continued, “Fisk was basic training for combat, and Fiskites were to provide the officer corps.”¹⁰⁸

Trouble on the Horizon: Signs of Student Unrest

If Fisk was a training ground for combating the ills of the racist South, so too were other Nashville black colleges, including Roger Williams and Central Tennessee and its Meharry

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 114-115.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 70.

¹⁰⁶ See Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois*, 72; Rayford W. Logan, ed. *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Profile* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), xi

¹⁰⁷ Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois*, 73; Franklin Frazier. “The Du Bois Program in the Present Crisis,” *Race, Devoted to Social, Political and Economic Equality, 1935-36* (Westport, Conn.: Negro Universities Press, 1970), 11.

¹⁰⁸ Lewis argues that this essay plausibly directed Du Bois to his “talented tenth” theory. See Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois*, 73.

Medical Department. In 1882, a guest to the Fisk campus characterized it as “a city set on a hill, where nothing is hid.” Characterizing its teachers as “trained and efficient, going about their work with a quite devotion which nothing can divert,” the visitor sensed “the idea of power, each in his or her own sphere, which comes of a thorough knowledge of the entire round of duty.”¹⁰⁹ The students, contended the visitor, “exhibit[ed] neither the submissive air of the slave, nor the self-assertiveness of new freedom which is always looking out for a place to assert itself.”¹¹⁰

The visitor’s assessment was a wonderful endorsement of Fisk. Its teachers were heralded as devoted martyrs and their black pupils as proud, but unthreatening. Yet, while Fisk students may not have continuously sought to assert their freedom in ways that may have offended sympathetic whites, they did make demands on the American nation to live up to the promises of freedom. Despite the efforts of administrators and teachers to appease sympathetic white benefactors, students were not resigned to silence when the United States Supreme Court declared the Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional. Under the heading “Declared Unconstitutional,” the November 1883 issue of the *Fisk Herald* observed: “This decision had produced wide spread dissatisfaction, and justly so, throughout the land—not only on the part of colored, but white citizens as well.” The editorial declared: “We think that every liberty loving man, of every race, who desires equal rights and protection of the law, to all citizens alike should discountenance this action, the evil effects of which are even now being developed.”¹¹¹

The editorial’s public opposition to the Supreme Court’s decision may seem unsurprising given its damaging implications to black life in America for decades to come. But the impending harm of the ruling as well as today’s widespread acceptance of its injustice, are benefits of hindsight. As black college students in the racist South, the editorial challenge of Fisk students to

¹⁰⁹ From the *Nashville American*, “Fisk University and the Public,” *Fisk Herald* 5, No.1 (February 1882), 6.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Fisk Herald* 1, No.4 (November 1883), 4.

the nation's highest court was nothing less than radical. Its printing in the *Herald*, an official publication of the school whose content was closely monitored and perhaps even regulated by school officials, signaled the shared nature of their protest with at least some sympathetic whites who also loathed the ruling.

The frequency of public black student protest to white power however, was few and far between. The white missionaries who operated these schools enforced strict codes of conduct, which ruled over virtually every facet of student life. And they did not take kindly to challenges of any kind to their "wisdom" and authority. "Some standards," concluded Faye Wellborn Robbins, "they brought with them remained inflexible."¹¹² Students at Nashville's black colleges were expected to possess "good moral character," and to observe strict codes of moral and religious behavior. Likewise, social interactions across gender lines were firm and unyielding. "Chaperons sat in plain sight when a boy called on his girl," recalled the famous black tenor Roland Hayes¹¹³, who was a student at Fisk just after the turn of the twentieth century, and "girls were rarely permitted to go out after dark, and then they went in squads, led by lady sergeant-majors."¹¹⁴ Nashville black college students acutely felt the proscriptions on student life and often viewed them as extensions of the racism that pervaded the white South. "It is old Southern doctrine that any unoberserved Negro, man or boy, will commit rape at the slightest opportunity," wrote Hayes. "It was therefore a rule at Fisk that students were to be under constant surveillance."¹¹⁵

Robbins concluded that despite Hayes' characterization, "very few white Southerners had any voice at all in making these values, as more than half of the trustees as well as the

¹¹² Robbins, "A World Within A World," 46.

¹¹³ Roland Hayes (1887-1977) The son of former slaves, Hayes studied music at Fisk University before receiving international acclaim as concert performer. A masterful interpreter of both classical songs and black spirituals, he was considered the first national and world renown

¹¹⁴ Roland Hayes. Quoted in Robbins, "A World Within A World," 47.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

administration and faculty, while being white, where Northern residents if not missionaries to Dixie.” Further, she observed, “there was very little difference in these regulations and in those applying to white church-related colleges.”¹¹⁶ Despite the truth of her appraisal, Robbins failed to see that the “built-in racial suspicions” that “colored” Hayes’ resentment offered important insight to the dynamics between white missionaries and their black students. Students were reticent to criticize white missionaries, preferring instead to view their administrators’ and teachers’ actions as a consequence of southern white customs, than as an intentional prejudiced act on their parts.

While these dynamics would eventually change as the earliest missionaries died during the early twentieth century, white administrators and teachers at Nashville’s black colleges successfully discouraged student protest for more than half a century after the Civil War. During the 1890s, desire among Meharry students to make changes to something as simple as their dress code, was crushed as soon as it rose. The way in which Central Tennessee President John Braden quelled the dispute is instructive for historians attempting to understand the complicated dynamics between these white missionaries and their black students. In his 1934 publication, *Meharry Medical College: A History*, Charles V. Roman, who entered Meharry in 1886, recalled the instance as only one of the times he could remember when the student body challenging the authority of the school’s missionary administrators.

Born in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, on July 4, 1864, Roman was reared and educated in Ontario, Canada. Unlike Du Bois, his father was a canal-boat owner and his mother was the daughter of a fugitive slave yet their rearing outside of the black South offered them somewhat similar educational experiences. Roman was smart. Completing the four-year course at Hamilton Collegiate Institute, in only two years, Roman dubbed himself a “factory boy—a product of the

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

night school and public library, a triumph of democracy and a justification of its creed.”¹¹⁷ When questions were raised about what he would do with his future, one of Roman’s teachers said to him, “Go south and teach school.” Up until then, “the call of the South” had been unknown to him, but in a twist of fate, he was introduced to Central Tennessee President John Braden. In 1885, he traveled to Nashville to meet Braden, who hastened Roman to continue to Trigg County, Kentucky, where Braden had secured a teaching position for him. After teaching for six months in the country school, Roman was “converted...to the wisdom of [his] teacher’s advice.”¹¹⁸

Roman’s new-found passion for teaching, combined with his childhood love of plants, made him a student stand-out at Meharry. He recalled that while he was at Meharry, there was an occasion when he and his fellow Meharry classmates expressed their desire to change their hats and coats. Because of their demands, Roman’s entire class was summoned to the Meharry student chapel by Dr. Hubbard, the dean of students. The address however, was not made by Hubbard, but by President Braden. Vehemently delivered with much success, Braden’s speech was an “impassioned address” that “spoke of modesty and common sense and economy.”¹¹⁹ While he could not recall Braden’s words verbatim, Roman recalled that Braden “pictured the type of people that were contributing to the education of the colored people, and tried to make the students realize what would the reaction of these benefactors should they walk upon the campus and discover the objects of their charity dressed better than they were.” One can only imagine the nature of such an exchange as doe-eyed students sat spell-bound under the commanding voice of their school’s founder. “I have no way to portray the humiliation of those who had foolishly gone

¹¹⁷ “Medical History,” *Journal of the National Medical Association* 45, No.4 (July 1953), 301.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Roman, *Meharry Medical College*, 30.

to chapel thus arrayed,” wrote Roman, “these habiliments of fashion disappeared from the campus—never to return.”¹²⁰

Hence, for a multitude of plausible reasons, Braden had, while encouraging the success of black students inside the classroom, not so gently reminded them of the limits of their success outside of the classroom. Not only did they have to be excellent, they also had to be unthreatening to their white benefactors. “Looking the part” of an appreciative beneficiary was considered an important part of the school’s success. If a request to wear a stiff hat and Prince Albert or frock coat was so complicated that it involved perceptions of ingratitude, one can only imagine the reception of the students’ demands for black teachers. Again, Roman offers an account that serves as a window to this time. Described as an “occasion in which the personality of Dr. Braden surged into prominence,” Meharry students again, gathered in the chapel, just as they had on the previous occasion. This time, they were joined by students from each of Central Tennessee’s departments who, along with students from Fisk and Roger Williams, had joined the call for the addition of black teachers to their schools’ faculty.¹²¹

“He was indeed a master of emotions. His ability as a Methodist preacher was never shown to greater advantage than on the day he addressed the students on the subject of ‘Gratitude,’” wrote Roman. Recounting the scene as a “case of college discipline [that] had taken a racial turn,” Roman described the students’ “budding spirit of race consciousness” as having “confused ethics and ethnology.” Whether or not this was indeed true, what is certain is that Braden was unhappy with his students. In his hour-long monologue, Braden “detailed the sufferings and dangers that the missionaries had undergone in establishing these schools.” In closing, “he pointed dramatically to one of the chief and most outspoken offenders and said,

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 30-31.

‘Young man, you should wait until the grass is green on my forgotten grave before you repeat that speech.’” After which, the audience, Roman said, was in tears.¹²²

Sufficiently chided by Braden, Central Tennessee students never raised the issue with his administration again. White missionaries who served as the teachers and administrators of black schools, learned to leverage their longstanding relationships with local blacks to achieve their desired outcomes. The two instances of budding student protest recalled by Roman, serve as telling examples of the power white missionaries yielded over their black pupils. With just the mention of their personal sacrifice, a pioneering missionary such as Braden had his black students not only repentant but also sobbing. The limits that white missionaries placed on their students’ freedoms may have served the best interest of their school’s coffers, but they also demonstrate the complicated nature of paternalism, goodwill and control that was part-and-parcel of white missionary and black student relationships. Despite being the very best their communities had to offer, the earliest generation of Nashville’s professionally-trained and college-educated class was being taught that there were still limits to their freedoms in American society. It was a lesson that generations of black elite would continue to learn for decades to come.

Daunting Realities: Black Nashville in Squalor

Despite the limits placed on them by white administrators and teachers, when black college graduates entered the wider world, they were expected to address many of the black South’s most serious problems. In Nashville alone, the health and sanitation conditions that blacks faced were ghastly by the time C.V. Roman graduated from Meharry in 1890. The previous year, he had become the understudy of Robert F. Boyd, whose work had proven invaluable to the surrounding community. As one of Meharry’s first graduates, Boyd “was also

¹²² Ibid., 31.

drawn into the tumult in which black Nashvillians found themselves during this repressive era.”¹²³ Hailed by James Summerville as “one of the most distinguished men ever educated at Meharry,” Boyd was born in slavery in Giles County, Tennessee in 1855. Eleven years later in 1866, his mother Maria Cuffey brought him to live with Paul Eve in Nashville. While living with Eve who was a renowned surgeon with an international reputation, Boyd hired himself out to pay for night classes at Fisk, and later worked as a teacher and then principal in county schools before enrolling in Meharry.¹²⁴

As one of the earliest graduates of both Central Tennessee’s medical and dental departments (1882 and 1887 respectively), Boyd was well-acquainted with the dire need for black health professionals. “Colored physicians had not been a success here,” wrote Boyd in 1890. “Very few good families had ever given colored doctors their practice.” The demand for his services was overwhelming: “I married to my office, slept there, ate all my meals there...I went to see everybody that sought my services,” recalled Boyd. It was fast “becoming the rule for colored families to have colored doctors.”¹²⁵ The success he and the small rank of black doctors enjoyed raised the expectations of black Nashvillians for black healthcare professionals.

Necessitated by this demand as well as by the prohibition against Meharry students working at the City Hospital and inspired by the mentorship of pioneering black cardiologist Daniel Hale Williams¹²⁶ (with whom he studied as a postgraduate at the School of Medicine at

¹²³ Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors*, 35.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.; See Gibson and Crogman, *Progress of a Race*, 586-588; Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 92-93.

¹²⁶ Daniel Hale Williams (1856-1931) A native of Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania and graduate of the Chicago Medical School, Hale was a pioneering African American who is credited with performing the first successful open heart surgery on July 9, 1893 before such surgeries were established. He performed the surgery at Provident Hospital in Chicago, the first interracial hospital in the nation, which he founded two years earlier in 1891. He later served as the surgeon-in-chief at the Freedmen’s Hospital during the mid-to-late 1890s. He later became a founding member of the black National Medical Association and was the only black charter member of the American College of Surgeons. For biographical accounts of Williams see Helen Buckler, *Daniel Hale Williams: Negro Surgeon* (New York: Pitman Pub. Corp., 1968) and Lewis Fenderson, *Daniel Hale Williams: Open Heart Doctor* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971).

the University of Chicago during the 1890s), Boyd bought a large two-story brick home at 811 Cherry Street that he intended to turn into a hospital. In the face of concerted opposition, Mercy Hospital opened it 1900. It was “initiated and carried through to fruition by the brains and energy of one man,” R.F. Boyd. Despite being privately owned by Boyd, the hospital served as the *de facto* practice facility for Meharry’s medical and dental students after they were indiscriminately barred from the local city hospital. Described as the “largest and most complete hospital owned and operated by colored people,” the facility was desperately needed in black Nashville, where several black enclaves had fallen victim to poverty and squalor and had become havens for disease.¹²⁷

In the years following the Civil War, heavily black populated communities such as the Black Bottom had devolved into muddy shanty towns of deplorable and hazardous conditions. Dubbed “the greatest of all city cankers” by the Nashville Board of Health, “the alleys in Nashville were never intended for resident houses. And almost with exception the houses upon these alleys, now used for tenements, were built for cattle, and not for men.”¹²⁸ However, Boyd did not need to read a report to discover the perilous circumstances of these communities. Like other black doctors in Nashville, he knew, all too well, that most of black Nashville suffered in squalor. In his June 1895 address before the Tennessee State Convention of Colored Teachers in Nashville, Boyd painted a distressing picture of black life in Nashville. Entitled “The Mortality of the Colored People and How to Reduce It,” Boyd’s address described living conditions typical to that of the Black Bottom slum:

“The old dilapidated stables in the narrow filthy alleys are not fit for human habitation. The low, damp, dark basements and cellars often beneath the level of the ground with insufficiency of both light and air are occupied by our people. The cluster of homes built in the bottoms and low places, the closely pent up, back to back, so built as to cut off and prevent free ventilation, with only one entrance to each and a privy in the centre, the dirty

¹²⁷ Gibson and Crogman, *Progress of a Race*, 308; Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors*. 47; Roman, *History of Meharry Medical College*, 73-74.

¹²⁸ Nashville Board of Health. Quoted in Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 114-115.

neglected portions of the cities where heaps of rubbish, animal and vegetable matter, are allowed to decay and send their poisonous odors from house to house are the habitations of colored people. And to add to the woeful condition of things, these uninhabitable quarters are over crowded.”¹²⁹

Not only did black Nashvillians endure their neighborhood’s inadequate sanitation facilities, lack of good water, and poor heating, they braved these conditions despite their poor diet and minimal health care. As Boyd observed,

“[T]hey [Nashville Blacks] go to the markets Saturday nights and buy the spoiled meats and vegetables on which the flies and smaller insects have preyed all day. In these vegetables are the seed of indigestion disorders and death. The vegetables and meats which are left over and not sold in the market and grocery houses are put in wagons and driven to the colored settlements where they are sold cheap for cash.”¹³⁰

Both Old South racists and New South racists (also dubbed “racial pessimists” by Don H. Doyle) manipulated the resulting high death rate of Nashville blacks during the 1880s to bolster their contention that blacks were inherently inferior to whites. While Dr. Boyd and Professor Harris pointed to the city’s high death rates as potentially causing the extinction of the black community in Nashville as a rallying cry to fix the lethal dynamics that they viewed as threats to the viability of a better future for Nashville blacks, white authors predicted black extinction with glee. In a 1900 address on racial conditions in the South, University of Virginia Professor Paul Barringer excitedly told his Montgomery, Alabama audience that because disease was killing blacks as quickly as they could migrate into cities, “[i]n the destruction of the race the city is to play a most important part.”¹³¹ Instead of celebrating the demise of black Nashville Boyd pointedly advised: “The key that will unlock the mystery of high death rate among the colored people is to better their condition, improve their habitation, enact and enforce laws against

¹²⁹ Robert F. Boyd, “The Morality of the Colored People and How to Reduce It,” in *Afro-American Encyclopaedia; Or, the Thoughts, Doings, and Sayings of the Race*, ed. James T. Haley (Nashville, Tenn.: Haley & Florida, 1895), 67.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹³¹ Paul Barringer. Quoted in Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, 280.

allowing people to sleep in the basements, cellars, old stables, alley houses and pent up cluster houses in low malarial sections of our Southern cities.”¹³²

The reality was that despite the personal and professional successes of Boyd and other black college graduates, most black Nashvillians languished in poverty. As a rule, Nashville whites did not want hazardous, irregular and low-paying jobs such as well-digging and sewer building as well as work on city streets, railroad yards and on the docks which were all in great demand.¹³³ Scores of talented blacks, despite having been accomplished artisans before the war, were often denied the opportunity to use their skills despite proclamations of the New South, not only because of more specialized demands of the urban labor market, but also as a result of racist ideas. At the lowest level of the city’s urban workforce was domestic and personal service as well as unskilled labor. As can be expected, its ranks were dominated by black laborers. Black women labored as cooks, nurses, laundresses and maids while black men worked a range of unskilled jobs as servants, porters and common laborers—all with little to no competition from whites.¹³⁴

During the Civil War, free blacks and ex-slaves took advantage of the possibility to expand the old business trades (such as barbering, cooking, hack service and domestic services for whites) as well as the opportunity to provide new services that were once closed to them.¹³⁵ Yet, the end of institutionalized slavery did not immediately expand the city’s fragile antebellum black middle class. Instead, the immigration of rural and foreign whites combined with the emergence of the system of segregation eventually eroded the white customer base of black entrepreneurs.¹³⁶ Despite being forced out of markets to which they had traditionally once provided services, by the late-nineteenth century, the old entrepreneurial class of Nashville’s free blacks and ex-slaves was significantly expanded to include a younger constituency of black

¹³² Boyd, “The Mortality of the Colored People and How to Reduce It,” 68.

¹³³ Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 66-67.

¹³⁴ Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, 264.

¹³⁵ Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville*, 107.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

professionals. Although it remained relatively small, this cadre of black professionals including black doctors such as Boyd, managed to secure their niche in the services market by serving an all-black clientele. Their professionalized services soon ranged from law to medicine to funerals and ministerial leadership. As a result, not only did their client base insure little to no competition from whites, it also ensured that black capital circulated within Nashville's black group economy.¹³⁷

With their success, Nashville's small but growing black middle class took assumed leadership of the city's black community. Meharry graduates like Boyd, took their role as the leaders of black Nashville seriously. They knew all too well, that in spite of their personal successes, most black Nashvillians languished amid terrible living conditions—conditions directly related to the dearth of employment opportunities and *de jure* residential segregation. Nashville blacks struggled to counter the obvious handicaps of employment discrimination via segregated industries as well as their expected labor in unskilled and domestic fields. Despite these limitations, they fought to stretch their meager wages to afford the ramshackle housing of Nashville's downtown slums. In those slums, they suffered higher incidences of disease and experienced death rates significantly higher than those of whites. Although the city did not legislate segregation as some other southern cities did, white Nashvillians drew distinct lines between the New South ambitions that they had for themselves, and those that they had for their black counterparts.

Conclusion

Nashville's New South advocates never concealed their preoccupation with the economic benefits of being a leader among New South cities. As an important part of the local workforce in the years after the Civil War, blacks were included in both the Nashville Centennial and

¹³⁷ Doyle, *Nashville in the New South*, 110; Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, 264.

Exposition. Their inclusion in these public events was indeed, symbolically important. But given the social challenges facing black Nashville, they were not always easily pacified by symbolic gestures. Led by Benjamin Singleton, the exodus movement was a demonstration of black dissatisfaction with the speed at which the purported value of the New South translated into positive changes in their lives. While comparatively few Nashville blacks joined Singleton's cause, the possibility of them doing so, represented a growing threat to the viability of Nashville's New South campaign. Because their departure signaled diminished job competition, some local whites as well as poor white immigrants may have been glad to watch blacks leave. But the leaders of white Nashville were not excited about losing members of the local workforce, especially blacks who had experience performing menial and demanding jobs that most whites did not perform.

One of the incentives that encouraged blacks to stay in Nashville was the abundance of educational opportunities available in the city. As the "Athens of the South," the city's legion of educational centers in the postwar period included black schools. Yet, the driving force behind the transformation of Nashville as "Athens" was not concerned with the availability of black educational opportunities. In earnest, black schools were not a part of New South proponents' plan to reconstruct the mind of the South. More accurately the product of northern missionary philanthropy than the result of southern ingenuity, the early success of Fisk, Central Tennessee and Meharry and Roger Williams should not be attributed to the city's New South ethos or its Athens sobriquet. The sheer survival of these schools depended on maintaining the fragile balance of northern white philanthropy, black self-determination and local white paternalism. This was especially true in an age when the Ku Klux Klan terrorized black Tennesseans. Nashville blacks consistently cried for two principal things: protection and education. Despite their demands that the state and local governments recognize their right to live without fear of persecution, they were painfully reminded of their powerlessness particularly during the summer

of 1874. Dubbed the bloody summer, the senseless violence suffered by black Tennesseans included most notably, the “foul and atrocious” killing of sixteen year old Central Tennessee College graduate Julia Hayden.

Hayden’s senseless murder was the realization of black Tennesseans’ greatest fears. That a black college graduate, the very embodiment of the best her community had to offer, would be killed, struck-down in the prime of life for opening a black school in rural Tennessee did more than just offend the sensibilities of black Nashvillians. It reminded even the most elite black Nashvillian of the fragility of their personal safety. As the intellectual and political center of black Tennessee, black Nashville served as a center of black militancy. However, militancy seldom if ever took the form of threats or retribution. Often, militancy meant demanding protection from racial violence and continuing to work in spite of the threat of violence. Undeterred by the possibility of reprisal, Nashville black college graduates such as W.E.B. Du Bois ventured through the back hills of Tennessee and across the wider South. Others, like R.F. Boyd, who established practices and businesses within the city, shared the benefits of their educational experiences with black Nashvillians, the majority of whom languished in poverty.

In exchange, they received the praise of those they served as well as a greater sense of their role in the transformation of the black South. They realized that despite the successes they enjoyed as black college graduates, they would remain an exception to the rule as long as blacks were denied the opportunity to receive a good education, to secure good jobs and to move out of poorly sanitized shanty towns. While claimed as the successes of both their northern financiers and New South advocates, both of which paid little more than lip service to the cause of the freedmen’s equitable integration into American society, the little progress that Nashville blacks made was made via black entrepreneurship, education and organization. In reality, it was by their own will that Nashville blacks survived this reinvented system of sub-human status and second-class citizenship and the entrenchment of Jim Crow.

However “new” the economic developments and social improvements were for white Nashville; for black Nashville, they remained not “new” enough. Black Nashvillians had to, and did take care of themselves. Early black college graduates such as Boyd used their education and subsequent professional work to fight racism on unanticipated fronts. Once directed at the white South, black student resentment at the limits of the New South to transform black life would increasingly shift towards their white administrators and teachers, threatening to undermine the fragile balance that allowed black colleges to survive.

CHAPTER IV

IDEOLOGUES, IDEOLOGIES AND IMPLICATIONS: NASHVILLE'S BLACK COLLEGES IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

At the turn of the twentieth century, black Nashvillians could look back on their achievements with pride. In spite the crippling subjugation of slavery and all of the post-bellum realities that occurred in its wake—including poverty, limited educational opportunities and racial violence—the city's black community had begun to chip away at the walls erected by centuries of oppression. Chief among their successes was the establishment and growth of black educational centers. The city's black colleges Fisk, Central Tennessee, Meharry, and Roger Williams stood as shining testaments to the transformative power of black self-determination and served as proud examples of black potentiality. Over the course of the next half century, every black college would not survive the administrative and financial difficulties on which their existence hung. The remaining institutions struggled to succeed in an ever-changing environment whose only constant seemed to be the open hostility toward them.

This hostility was underpinned by the United States Supreme Court's decision in the 1896 landmark case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, in which Homer Plessy, who was a mere one-eighths black, challenged the legality of a 1890 Louisiana law that required separate racial accommodations on railroads. In its seven-to-one ruling against Plessy, the court ruled that the law did not violate the Thirteenth or Fourteenth amendments. Justice Henry Brown, who wrote the majority opinion, argued “the underlying fallacy of the plaintiff's argument to consist in the assumption that the enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority.” Separate facilities, contended Justice Brown, did not imply the inferiority of one race to another, so long as they were equal. In doing so, the court created the doctrine of “separate but

equal,” providing constitutional protection for the separation of the two races as a matter of public policy and law.¹

Dubbed “Jim Crow,” the South’s comprehensive series of laws sanctioning segregation had already become a fact of life in the southern states since the end of Reconstruction. Contrary to the Woodwardian theory which argued that “rigid and widespread racial segregation did not emerge until the turn of the end of the century when Southern states enacted a wave of segregation laws,”² American revisionists have since, long (and arguably successfully) contended that Jim Crow laws were merely a reincarnation of the slave codes and later black codes, used to control blacks as slaves and then as newly freed men and women.³ This debate is well established. In popular histories, Tennessee’s role in the evolution of Jim Crow is less well known, but no less important. While they were still a fairly new luxury to most southerners, “railroads, as both metaphor and reality,” contended Kenneth W. Mack, “were markers of the economic changes overtaking the New South.”⁴ Tennessee was not about to be left behind. The state’s place at the crossroads of many of the region’s most important railroad networks insured the vested interest of both white and black Tennesseans alike in the social customs governing the burgeoning transport system.

In 1881, more than a decade before the *Plessy* decision, four black legislators elected on the Republican ticket, challenged the constitutionality of a 1875 state law that abolished the right of equal access to public accommodations previously guaranteed by the Civil Rights Act of

¹ See *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

² Kenneth W. Mack, “Law, Society, Identity, and the Making of the Jim Crow South: Travel and Segregation on Tennessee Railroads, 1875-1905,” *Law & Social Inquiry* 24, No. 2 (Spring, 1999): 377-409; *Ibid.*, 378.

³ See C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford, 1955); See John Whitson Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

⁴ Mack, “Law, Society, Identity and the Making of Jim Crow,” 381.

1875.⁵ Their efforts to have the Tennessee statue repealed were initially defeated twice, despite receiving the support of a few Democrats. On the second occasion of its defeat, the black legislators outlined their protest on the grounds that the restrictive state law “authorizes railroad companies and their employees, unjustly, cruelly, wantonly, without just cause or provocation, and in violation of the common law and the laws of the general government, to oppress and discriminate against more than four hundred thousand citizens of the State of Tennessee, and the colored people of all other states who may desire to travel in Tennessee.”⁶

Undeterred, Isaac F. Norris, one of the black representatives, sponsored a bill to “prevent racial discrimination” aboard Tennessee railroads which never came to vote.⁷ In its place, the Senate passed another bill previously adopted by the House by a 50 to 2 majority. Two of the House’s four black representatives, including Norris cast opposing votes, while one of the remaining two abstained and the final member was absent. Similarly, the purpose of this bill was to prevent discrimination but specified “among passengers who are charged a paying first class passage.” Citing the common practice of relegating first-class black riders “to occupy second class cars where smoking [was] allowed and no restrictions [were] enforced to prevent vulgar or obscene language,” the bill required all railroad companies to “furnish separate cars, or portions of cars cut off by partition walls.” The provision of the separate cars and/or partitions also provided that they “be kept in good repair, with the same conveniences, and subject to the same rules governing other first class cars, preventing smoking and obscene language.”⁸

Recognized widely as the nation’s first Jim Crow law, its characterizations have evolved over time. Writing in 1949, Stanley J. Folmsbee argued that the law’s passage “revived the tactical dilemma which had beset their race ever since Reconstruction.” It is important that

⁵ Civil Rights Act of 1875; *Acts of the State of Tennessee*, 1875, 216-17.

⁶ Tennessee General Assembly, *House Journal*, 1881, 840-841.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 830, 868.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 868.

Folmsbee observed that even when “faced with the impossibility of securing repeal of the basic discriminatory law,” the black legislators were “inclined to accept with extreme reluctance the proffer of more satisfactory but segregated accommodations on the railroads.”⁹ Yet, Kenneth W. Mack’s much more recent work characterized the law as not only “ambiguous,” but described its motivations as a “combination of racial segregationist purposes” as well as “paternalistic concern for the treatment accorded middle-class black passengers.”¹⁰

Whether or not the intent of the law served either some or all of these purposes remains debatable. What is certain, however, is that the desire of middle class blacks to secure the “imprimatur of middle-class identity” through first-class railroad passage would become more and not less difficult to secure in the wake of the 1881 Tennessee laws’ passage. While its enforcement remained inconsistent well into the twentieth century, the law led to the enactment of similar legislation in states across the South. When both *de jure* and *de facto* racial segregation finally blanketed the South, it relegated all blacks to black-only facilities regardless of gender or class differences. In the process of undermining the social stratification among blacks, a long held tradition in Nashville, Jim Crow cemented the fate of all blacks together. It was a reality that, whether welcomed or not, was forced upon black Nashvillians.

The growth and expansion of Jim Crowism in the wider world increasingly forced Nashville blacks into what Faye Wellborn Robbins dubbed, “a world-within-a-world.”¹¹ It was principally in this world that middle class blacks could be accorded the respect and even deference which they believed they deserved. Like their white counterparts, social stratification among black Nashvillians resulted from economic differences as well as educational distinctions. As a result, the size and scope of the city’s black colleges as well as their influence in the

⁹ Stanley J. Folmsbee, “The Origin of the First ‘Jim Crow’ Law,” *The Journal of Southern History* 15, No. 2 (May 1949), 240.

¹⁰ Mack, “Law, Society, Identity and the Making of Jim Crow,” 382, 385.

¹¹ See Robbins, “A World-Within-A-World.”

surrounding black community steadily increased. As the center of black Nashville's intellectual and cultural life, the city's black colleges became important and highly contested grounds between paternalistic and/or racist whites and blacks who sought self-determination.

This chapter explores the emerging place of the city's black colleges against several important backdrops. First, it juxtaposes the professional personalities of Hampton graduate and Tuskegee founder Booker T. Washington and Fisk son W.E.B. Du Bois to construct portraits of the two ideologues that move beyond their widely known debate. As the most prominent figures associated with the pedagogical debate of black vocational versus liberal arts education, this chapter explores their roles not in the context of their differences, but rather in their shared belief in the promise of black higher education to transform the lives of blacks in America. While Du Bois' connection to Nashville as a Fisk alumnus is well known, the chapter uses the relationship of Washington to his third wife Margaret Murray Washington, a Fisk alumna, to demonstrate the cooperative nature of the black ideologues and ideologies to enhance seemingly disparate educational missions.

Using Washington's marriage and his practice of recruiting Fisk students as the basis for his growing relationship with black Nashville, the chapter also examines the role of his 1909 tour of Tennessee in securing the establishment of Tennessee's first public black college. It argues that the founding of Nashville State Normal in 1912 however, cannot be attributed to Washington alone. Exploiting their long history with paternalistic whites, the city's black community intently fought to secure the establishment of the school to provide increased educational opportunities for black Tennesseans. While the public school emerged because of white cooperation, the final section considers what, if any relationship existed between student dissents at Fisk during the 1920s and post-World War I developments including the Harlem Renaissance and its New Negro rhetoric.

It seems to me...I don't agree: The Dialectical Relationship of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois

First published in the 1952-53 winter edition of the *Midwest Journal*, “Booker T and W.E.B.” is the most anthologized poem of poet and publisher Dudley Randall. Despite being a fictional dialogue between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois, the poem successfully captures the prevailing opinions of each man’s racial philosophy. In the “call and response” tradition, so familiar to the black American church tradition, the poem opens with Washington’s supposed views on education:

“‘It seems to me,’ said Booker T./ ‘It shows a mighty lot of cheek/ To study chemistry and Greek/ When Mister Charlie needs a hand/ To hoe the cotton on his land,/ And when Miss Ann looks for a cook, Why stick your nose inside a book?’” Du Bois retorts in the subsequent stanza, “‘I don't agree,’ said W.E.B./ ‘If I should have the drive to seek/ Knowledge of chemistry or Greek,/ I'll do it. Charles and Miss can look/ Another place for hand or cook,/ Some men rejoice in skill of hand,/ And some in cultivating land,/ But there are others who maintain/ The right to cultivate the brain.’”¹²

This oversimplification of Washington and Du Bois’ dialectical difference and others similar to it, have pervaded popular culture as well as some spheres of the academy.

Born a slave on a rural Virginia tobacco farm in 1856, Washington was a part of the last generation of blacks born into slavery. After emancipation, he worked to pay his way through Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute where he became the star pupil of its founder, General Samuel Armstrong. Through a “system of training the hand, head and heart,” Armstrong’s work at Hampton advanced the cause of industrial education as a means to transform what he believed was the “deficient character” of blacks.¹³ Because of the school’s

¹² Julius E. Thompson, *Dudley Randall, Broadside Press, and the Black Arts Movement in Detroit* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1999) 18; Dudley Randall, “Booker T and W.E.B.,” 1.1-7, 2.1-9.

¹³ Samuel Chapman Armstrong, *Twenty-Two Years' Work of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute* (Hampton: Normal School Press, 1893), 2, 6-7.

insistence on the importance of self-help and manual labor in its training of black youth, Hampton's "special mission" to send black teachers to the rural South is often forgotten.¹⁴

Washington took the first step towards the embodiment of Hampton's special mission in 1881 when, upon Armstrong's recommendation, he became the first leader of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Alabama. Within fifteen years of the school's founding, Washington's fundraising efforts led him across the country, where his engagements secured his popularity as a well known speaker among both black and white audiences alike. Even so, the speech which established Washington's preeminence as an educational theorist as well as a race leader was not delivered until 1895.

On September 18, 1895, the opening day of the Cotton States and International Exposition, Washington became the first black speaker "to share the platform with white Southerners on an occasion of national importance." Standing before the interracial audience of thousands and grandly gesturing to them in out stretched hands, Washington delivered his best known rhetorical masterpiece. Later dubbed the "Atlanta Compromise," the speech attempted to "cement relationships" between blacks and whites.¹⁵ To his black listeners, Washington admonished, "Cast down your bucket where you are...Cast it down in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the professions. Our greatest danger," he proclaimed, "is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labour, and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life." In exchange for the earnest labor of blacks, Washington asked whites to remember the "patient, faithful, law-abiding, and unresentful" [sic] character of black people in the past, and to cast down their buckets with their black counterparts in the building of

¹⁴ Samuel Chapman Armstrong, *Ideas on Education*, (Hampton: Hampton Institute Press, 1908), 35-36.

¹⁵ Melbourne Cummings, "Historical Setting for Booker T. Washington and the Rhetoric of Compromise, 1895," *Journal of Black Studies* 8, No. 1 (September 1977), 77.

a stronger South and stronger nation.¹⁶ “His rhetoric” notes Melbourne Cummings, “was meant to make whites feel a sense of duty, responsibility and satisfaction in the existing situation.”¹⁷

And indeed it may have. In addition to being given a standing ovation, Washington’s words were telegraphed in cities all across America. White southerners and northerners as well as many blacks received Washington’s message warmly.

It may surprise some that W.E.B. Du Bois was among those black leaders offering his congratulations to Washington. Du Bois, who was awarded his first bachelor’s degree from Fisk in 1888, graduated with both bachelor’s and master’s degrees in history from Harvard University in 1890 and 1891 respectively. He had studied at the University of Berlin from 1892 to 1894 before returning to the United States, where he later assumed a professorship at Wilberforce University in Ohio. It was while at Wilberforce that Du Bois penned a congratulatory letter to Washington following his “Atlanta Compromise” address. On September 24, Du Bois collegially wrote: “My Dear Mr. Washington: Let me heartily congratulate you upon your phenomenal success at Atlanta—it was a word fitly spoken.”¹⁸ Published in 1940, Du Bois’ autobiography, *Dusk of Dawn*, reinforced his initial support for Washington’s sentiments: “When many colored papers condemned the proposition of compromise with the white South, which Washington proposed, I wrote to the *New York Age* suggesting that here might be the basis of a real settlement between whites and blacks in the South, if the South opened to the Negroes the doors of economic opportunity and the Negroes co-operated with the white political system.”¹⁹

Du Bois’ initial agreement with Washington however, quickly evaporated. The fragile cooperation that had undergirded their cooperation was challenged by several realities that were

¹⁶ See *The Booker T. Washington Papers* 1, 73-76.

¹⁷ Cummings, “Historical Setting for Booker T. Washington,” 77.

¹⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois to Booker T. Washington, 24 September 1895, *The Booker T. Washington Papers* IV, 26.

¹⁹ See W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (1968; reprint; Piscataway: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 55.

obvious to both men. When Du Bois returned from Europe in 1894 jobless, he inquired about openings at Wilberforce, Howard, and Fisk (his alma mater) as well as those at Hampton (Washington's alma mater) and Tuskegee. Within a month of Du Bois' inquiry, Washington offered him a job on the condition that he teach math. Du Bois, however, had already accepted a position at Wilberforce.²⁰ By graciously declining Washington's offer, Du Bois had eluded the firm grasp Washington had undoubtedly calculated he could exercise over a person in his employ. Despite the "obvious" nature of Du Bois "genius" to him, Washington "had not walked out of slavery and a West Virginia coal mine [to make] mistakes about people and policies [that] could destroy everything he had built up."²¹

Still, Americans both black and white, were surer of Washington's success at Tuskegee, a "fragile miracle in the Alabama Black Belt," than they were of the ability of Du Bois' intellectual prowess to effect salutary improvements in the lives of any black Americans other than in his own.²² This, however, did little to dull the reality that for Washington, Du Bois was a "minor irritant with the capacity for major damage."²³ He may have once been at Washington's mercy, but by 1898, Du Bois returned to Fisk for the first time in ten years on a mission. Several years earlier in the spring of 1895, Washington was welcomed to the campus by the Fisk Student Bureau. Arguing that he was not opposed to "literary training," he extolled "two things we must learn to do—one is to put brains into the common occupations of life, and the other is to dignify common labor." The white editors of the *Nashville American* may have thought that Washington's lecture made a "lasting impression on the minds of all who heard him," but Du

²⁰ Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race*, 150-151.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 238.

²² *Ibid.*, 229.

²³ *Ibid.*, 273.

Bois felt a burden to deliver a charge to the graduates of the Fisk class of 1898 they'd never forget.²⁴

Du Bois contended that “the concrete question,” facing the graduating class was “what part can I best take in the striving of the eight million men and women who are bound to me by a common sorrow and a common hope, that through the striving of the Negro people this land of our fathers may live and thrive.”²⁵ The graduates’ part in the advancement of the race did not merely require only white-collared jobs either. Du Bois readily acknowledged “the most useful and universal work...is that of the servant and common laborer.”²⁶ Yet, it seemed equally obvious to Du Bois that “everywhere there is work to be done; in physical and social science, in literature, painting and architecture, in music and sculpture, in every place where genius and toil will unite and strive.”²⁷ Even the most laborious occupations needed “captains of industry [to] marshal and guide workers in industrial enterprises” including farming. “There is little more reason for leaving farming to people without brains or culture,” observed Du Bois, “than there would be in thus abandoning the other great fields of industry.”²⁸

The speech was among the earliest articulations of Du Bois’ belief that it was the black elite’s responsibility to lead the black masses. At the time, it seemed that Washington and Du Bois’ views were not entirely disparate. Both men readily acknowledged the need for both classical instruction and vocational training. As August Meier has observed: “There were remarkable similarities between Du Bois and Washington during the late 1890’s...Both tended to blame Negroes largely for their condition, and both placed more emphasis on self-help and duties than on rights. Both placed economic advancement before universal manhood suffrage, and both

²⁴ Quoted in Booker T. Washington, “Invited to Deliver a Lecture at Fisk University,” *The Booker T. Washington Papers* I, 64.

²⁵ W.E.B. Du Bois, “Careers Open to College-Bred Negroes,” in *Du Bois on Education*, ed. Eugene F Provenzo (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 207.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 211.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 208, 207.

were willing to accept franchise restrictions based not on race but on education and/or property qualifications equitably applied.”²⁹ However, the critical success of Du Bois’ 1896 dissertation “The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America: 1638-1870” and even that of his pioneering sociological study *The Philadelphia Negro (1899)*, paled in comparison to the praise white America heaped upon Washington following the publication of his seminal work *Up From Slavery* in 1901.³⁰ Having turned down Washington’s offer to accept a position at Tuskegee, and having lost his bid to become the assistant superintendent of the District of Columbia’s black schools the previous year, Du Bois had accepted a position at Atlanta University, in Atlanta, Georgia, by the time of the latter’s publication.³¹

Du Bois’ increasing distrust of Washington’s motives was only one aspect of the strain of their tenuous relationship. Du Bois’ “genius” began to receive the acclaim of others who were unhesitant to point out the differences between the two men. In his review of *The Philadelphia Negro* and Washington’s *The Future of the American Negro (1899)*, William F. Blackman, co-editor of the *Yale Review* hailed Du Bois’ work as “not merely a credit to its author and to the race of which he is a member; it is a credit to American scholarship, and a distinct and valuable addition to the world's stock of knowledge.” The study’s discussion of the "Negro problem" was neither “sentimental” nor “prejudiced.” Instead, it demonstrated “candor, thoroughness, and critical judgment, its results being interpreted with intelligence and sympathy.”³² It almost seemed as though he addressed Washington’s *The Future of the American Negro* as an afterthought. According to Blackman, Washington’s work was “not that of a scholar, but of a

²⁹ August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966), 196.

³⁰ See Anonymous Review of Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade. The Atlantic Monthly* 79, Issue 474 (April 1897), 560-562; William F. Blackman, A Brief Review by William F. Blackman of *The Philadelphia Negro*, together with Booker T. Washington's *The Future of the American Negro*. It was published in the *Yale Review* 9 (May 1900), 110-111.

³¹ Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race*, 232-233.

³² Blackman, A brief review by William F. Blackman of *The Philadelphia Negro*, together with Booker T. Washington's *The Future of the American Negro*, 110-111.

shrewd, sane and tactful leader. His book is a contribution, not to knowledge,” wrote Blackman, “but to that good temper and good sense which is perhaps of equal importance.”³³

The publication of *Up From Slavery*, however, made it impossible for academicians to dismiss Washington as a mere propagandist. Not only was the book an international best-seller, unlike its predecessor *The Story of My Life and Work*, which was a poorly-written text targeted towards black readers, *Up From Slavery* was a mesmerizing story, written for northern whites. Written in the same spirit as the Horatio Alger “rags to riches” tales Washington had read as a child, *Up From Slavery* told of Washington’s rise from slavery to freedom and from a student at Hampton to the presidency at Tuskegee.³⁴ In his review of the book, Du Bois recognized Douglass’ place among the pantheon of black leaders dating back to Phillis Wheatley whom the nation “has been impelled to honor and respect.” Even so, Du Bois did not offer *carte blanche* endorsement of Washington’s views. “Educated and thoughtful Negroes everywhere are glad to honor him and aid him, but all cannot agree with him.”³⁵

Washington’s critics, noted Du Bois, pegged Washington as representative of “old attitude[s] of adjustment to environment, emphasizing the economic phase.” On the other hand, there was a “large and important group....who with complex aims,” sought “self-development and self-realization, in all lines of endeavor” as the path to black advancement. While they respected the Tuskegee-Hampton idea, they believed more strongly in the higher education of Fisk and Atlanta Universities; “they believe in self-assertion and ambition; and they believe in the right of suffrage for black on the same terms with whites.”³⁶ In offering his critique, Du Bois

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ See Louis R. Harlan, “Booker T. Washington in Biographical Perspective,” *The American Historical Review* 75, No. 6 (October 1970), 1581-1599; Michael Rudolph West, *The Education of Booker T. Washington: American Democracy and the Idea of Race Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 112-116; Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 225-233.

³⁵ Du Bois, “The Evolution of Negro Leadership,” *The Booker T. Washington Papers* 6, 177-178.

³⁶ Ibid.

firmly cast his lot with Washington's detractors. To people like poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar, artist Henry O. Tanner, novelist Charles Chesnutt, mathematician Kelly Miller, newspaper editor William Munroe Trotter and social reformer Ida B. Wells, Washington's accommodationist strategy, including his insistence on industrial training and seeming willingness to trade black civil rights for white financial support of his vocational education programs was unacceptable.

Just as the erosion of black voting rights became more widespread and racial violence against blacks increased, so too, did the militancy of Washington's black critics, including most notably Du Bois. The publication of Du Bois' 1903 seminal work *The Souls of Black Folk*³⁷, was the culmination of several years of writing, most of which had been previously published in *Atlanta Monthly* magazine. In "Of the Training of Men," Du Bois unapologetically challenged the white South on its treatment of blacks: "Again, we decry the color-prejudice of the South, yet it remains a heavy fact. Such curious kinds of the human mind exist and must be reckoned with soberly. They cannot be laughed away, nor always successfully stormed at, nor easily abolished by act of legislature." He continued: "And yet they must not be encouraged by being let alone. They must be recognized as facts, but unpleasant facts; things that stand in the way of civilization and religion and common decency."³⁸

While industrial schools "proffered answer to this combined educational and economic crisis, and an answer of singular wisdom and timeliness," it was the liberal colleges that trained their teachers, who Du Bois believed should "be broadminded, cultured men and women, to scatter civilization among a people whose ignorance was not simply of letters, but of life itself."³⁹ According to Du Bois, "[t]he function of the Negro college, then, is clear: it must maintain the standards of popular education, it must seek the social regeneration of the Negro, and it must help

³⁷ See W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903).

³⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois, "Of the Training of Men," *The Atlantic Monthly* 90, No. 539 (September 1902): 289-297; *Ibid.*, 290.

³⁹ Du Bois, "Of the Training of Men," 293.

in the solution of problems of race contact and co-operation. And finally, beyond all this, it must develop men.”⁴⁰ Du Bois’ support for liberal arts instruction did not, however, mean opposition to vocational training. He readily acknowledged that industrial schools, as “center[s] of moral influence and of mental discipline,” demanded that its instructors “must be teachers as well as artisans.”⁴¹

It is unsurprising then, that Du Bois concluded, “between the Negro college and industrial school there are the strongest grounds for co-operation and unity.”⁴² The same could not be said however, for his relationship with Washington following Du Bois’ masterful critique of Washington in the essay “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others.” “[T]he distinct impression left by Mr. Washington’s propaganda,” claimed Du Bois, “is, first, that the South is justified in its present attitude toward the Negro because of the Negro’s degradation; secondly, that the prime cause of the Negro’s failure to rise more quickly is his wrong education in the past; and, thirdly, that his future rise depends primarily on his own efforts. Each of these propositions is a dangerous half-truth.”⁴³ Du Bois further contended that Washington’s doctrine stopped short of acknowledging that “the burden of the Negro problem... belongs to the nation, and the hands of none of us are clean if we bend not our energies to righting these great wrongs.”⁴⁴

Unfortunately, Washington’s and Du Bois’ divergent opinions on how to best “right” the “wrongs” threatening to hold back the educational development of blacks, would continue to fracture the delicate co-operation underpinning their relationship. As the demand for Washington’s speeches, writings and intervention grew to almost unprecedented levels, he struggled to keep up. Meanwhile, Du Bois matured as an academician; his already prolific

⁴⁰ Ibid., 297.

⁴¹ See W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Training of Negroes for Social Power,” *Outlook* (New York) LXXV, (October 1903): 409-414; Ibid., 411.

⁴² Ibid., 414.

⁴³ W.E.B. Du Bois, “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others,” in *Souls of Black Folk*, 57.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 58.

writings grew in militancy. Still, Washington's Machiavellian-styled leadership was widely respected across the South. Black Nashvillians, including Fiskites as well as white Fisk administrators happily welcomed him and his philosophy to their black college campus. One faithful visit to Fisk in the spring of 1889, set into motion a course of events which would change the futures of Washington, Tuskegee and Fisk, forever binding each to the other.

Re-imagining the Relationship of Fisk and Tuskegee: The Wedding of The Washingtons

For all their perceived differences, Washington and Du Bois did have something, or rather someone in common more than the immovability of their respective black educational ideologies. Both men shared a deep and enduring relationship with Margaret James Murray Washington—Du Bois as a Fisk classmate, and Washington as her husband. The daughter of a slave woman and Irishman, Murray had worked her way through Fisk as a “half-rater” from Fisk preparatory school to graduate from its normal school in the spring of 1889. A model student, Murray's broad liberal arts training enabled her to secure a teaching post, much like Du Bois and countless other Fisk students had done.

Like Du Bois, Murray had also served on the staff of the Fisk student newspaper, *The Fisk Herald*. Her time on the paper overlapped with Du Bois' stint as editor-in-chief during the 1887/8 academic year. Murray's work as one of *The Herald's* associate editors allowed the two to get to know each other fairly well. Murray was only one of two girls who Du Bois declared “rivals” because they “resented my superior attitude towards girls.” However, they did not dislike each other, as Murray, whom he affectionately referred to as “Maggie” would often “crowd over” him when he forgot any of the lines during his recitation exercises.⁴⁵ Maggie was not only popular; she was “the kind of young woman one felt compelled to notice.” Her mixed heritage gave her a skin tone too light to be called *café au lait*. Her “luxurious” black mass of hair

⁴⁵ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois*, 111-112.

crowned her modest figure. While at Fisk, Murray transformed from “the washer-woman’s daughter and country school-teacher to the bourgeois butterfly that Washington beheld.”⁴⁶

Described by Fisk President Erastus Milo Cravath as “an excellent scholar and good disciplinarian, possessing more than an ordinary degree of energy and executive ability,” Murray was held in high esteem by several Fisk administrators including the school’s principal of woman Anna Ballentine, and Fisk instructor and Booker T. Washington confidant, William Jenkins.⁴⁷ A native of South Carolina, Jenkins matriculated at Fisk for three years before transferring to Hampton, from which he graduated in 1882. His career at Tuskegee began the following year as the head of the school’s academic department, and lasted until 1885 before beginning another two-year stint in Tennessee and Arkansas. Jenkins returned to Tuskegee for a year before he began teaching at Fisk 1889.⁴⁸ While Jenkins would later successfully goad Washington into considering making an address at the 1894 Atlanta Exposition as “the opportunity to make a world wide reputation second not even to Fred Douglass,” his contributions to the Tuskegee machine during the late 1880s were far less lofty.⁴⁹ As a Fisk transplant, Jenkins advocated, with great effect, that Washington fill Tuskegee’s academic posts with Fisk graduates during his multiple tenures as the Tuskegee’s head of the academic department.⁵⁰ Even so, Jenkins’ most consequential Fisk-recruit for Washington was not made until the spring of 1889.

From the Fisk campus in March of the same year, Jenkins excitedly wrote to Washington about Fisk co-ed Margaret James Murray, whom he had told Washington about the previous winter. Jenkins seemed certain that Washington “would do well to have her [Washington] among

⁴⁶ Louis Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 182.

⁴⁷ Margaret James Murray to Booker T. Washington, (Nashville, Tenn.) 21 May 1889, *The Booker T. Washington Papers* 2, 3, 2n, 3n.

⁴⁸ Booker T. Washington to William Jenkins, (Tuskegee, Ala.), 6 April [188]7, *The Booker T. Washington Papers* 2, 337. 1n; Harlan, *Booker T. Washington*, 140.

⁴⁹ William Jenkins to Booker T. Washington, (Washington, D.C.) 1 July 1894, *The Booker T. Washington Papers* 3, 449-450.

⁵⁰ Harlan, *Booker T. Washington*, 145, 275.

your corps of teachers [at Tuskegee] next winter.”⁵¹ Washington must have at least entertained the idea, as he requested Murray to submit recommendations. In May, Murray wrote Washington to explain that her recommendations had been previously written, but she’d neglected to forward them to him on account of his wife Olivia America Davidson Washington’s illness. Not wishing the delay to prejudice her efforts in any way, Murray was careful to reiterate her interest in the job: “I shall be very glad if you can give me work.”⁵²

Meanwhile Jenkins had already written to Washington on March 31, to confirm Washington’s receipt of his recommendation of Murray and to extend an invitation to Washington and the ailing Olivia to visit the Fisk campus during its commencement exercises. The trip, he hoped, “would prove both profitable as well as a source of pleasure both to you and us.”⁵³ But while Washington arrived on the Fisk campus to attend the Fisk Commencement in early June, his wife Olivia did not.⁵⁴ Always prone to illness, she never fully recovered from the smoke inhalation she suffered during a house fire in the wee hours of a February morning. Washington kept a bed side vigil for three months watching “the painless ebbing of her life” until she died on May 9.⁵⁵

The loss of his wife and Tuskegee co-founder left Washington reeling. His bedside vigil had left his financial affairs in disarray and Olivia’s death had left his three children motherless. He wrote to his mentor General Armstrong following her death, “[f]ew will ever know just what

⁵¹ William Jenkins to Booker T. Washington, (Nashville, Tenn.) 3 March 1889, *The Booker T. Washington Papers* 2, 514.

⁵² Margaret James Murray to Booker T. Washington, (Nashville, Tenn.) 21 May 1889, *The Booker T. Washington Papers* 2, 513-514.

⁵³ William Jenkins to Booker T. Washington, (Nashville, Tenn.) 31 March 1889, *The Booker T. Washington Papers* 2, 520.

⁵⁴ “Anniversary Exercises,” *The American Missionary* 43, No.8 (August 1889).

⁵⁵ Harlan, *Booker T. Washington*, 147-148, 155; See Arna Bontemps, *100 Years of Negro Freedom* (New York: Dodd Mead & Co., 1961), 96-105.

she was to Tuskegee and me.”⁵⁶ The white newspapers that later clamored to reprint his Atlanta Exposition Address, printed nothing of his devoted wife’s passing. However, having put purported ideological differences aside, the Fisk campus was undoubtedly sympathetic to Washington’s tremendous sense of loss. As a member of the graduating class, 5’7” Margaret Murray sat across the table from Washington during dinner. While it is impossible to know whether the seating arrangements were by happenstance or by intent, Murray used the opportunity to remind Washington of her interest in working at Tuskegee.⁵⁷

Some historians suggest that the self-assured Murray “cornered” Washington to demand of him why he had not returned her letter and to “boldly” reiterate her interest in working at Tuskegee. Given his grief as well as the respect he wielded because of his position, it seems improbable that Murray, even given her penchant for candor, would have made such disrespecting demands on Washington.⁵⁸ It is far more plausible that she tactfully reminded him that she had already been offered a position at Prairie View College in Texas in order to compel Washington to make an offer.⁵⁹

Washington did indeed offer Murray an appointment as in English instructor. She accepted and began working at Tuskegee in the fall of 1889. Her work must have been well-respected by Washington, who promoted Murray to the position of Tuskegee’s Lady Principal in April 1890, within a year of her arrival to the campus.⁶⁰ As Washington’s travels increasing took him away from the campus, he grew more and more dependent on Murray’s leadership and

⁵⁶ Booker T. Washington to Samuel Chapman Armstrong, (Tuskegee, Alabama) 18 May 1889. *The Booker T. Washington Papers* 2, 531-532.

⁵⁷ Harlan, *Booker T. Washington*, 180.

⁵⁸ Jacqueline Anne Rouse, “Out of the Shadow of Tuskegee: Margaret Murray Washington, Social Activism, and Race Vindication,” *The Journal of Negro History* 81, No. 1/4 (Winter - Autumn 1996), 32.

⁵⁹ Margaret James Murray to Booker T. Washington, (Nashville, Tenn.) 21 May 1889, *The Booker T. Washington Papers* 2, 3, 1n.

⁶⁰ Booker T. Washington to Margaret James Murray, (Tuskegee, Alabama) 7 April 1890, *The Booker T. Washington Papers* 3, 45-46; Booker T. Washington to Margaret James Murray, (Tuskegee, Alabama) 3 May 1890, *The Booker T. Washington Papers* 3, 54; Harlan, *Booker T. Washington*, 180-182.

loyalty. Their letters trace the gradual transformation in their relationship from that of colleagues to one of courtship. They were married October 12, 1893. In addition to the mostly unromantic nature of their correspondence, the practical benefits of the union have led some historians to question the motives for their marriage. Washington biographer Louis R. Harlan concluded that the death of his second wife had left Booker T. unwilling to face that kind of heartache again. Washington's third and final marriage to Margaret Murray Harlan asserted would be little, if anything, more than a "bourgeois marriage contract, for the sake of a stable home life for his children as much as for himself."⁶¹

Even if there is some truth in this, "it is not the whole truth."⁶² Admittedly, Murray Washington was not remotely as demonstrative as Washington's previous wife; but neither was Booker T. The conclusion that their less than idealistic courtship signaled a merely pragmatic marriage is, therefore, an easy one to make. However, these contentions do not take into consideration the magnanimous personality of the third Mrs. Washington. As the wife of the nation's most prominent black spokesman, Murray Washington was more than merely Booker T.'s wife, his children's surrogate mother or even his partner in the building of Tuskegee and in life. Possessing a "ready wit," she was not only "straight-laced and vigorous," she was also straight-forward.⁶³ During their courtship and during their marriage, Murray Washington did not hesitate to challenge Booker T. She demanded that he follow her advice on campus matters when he was away. Even more than that, she dared him to be a more attentive father, demonstrating her value as his equal, rather than the sheer utility of a marriage of convenience. As one researcher pointedly observed, not only would a "*prudent* widower seeking a safe and conventional wife to care for his children would not choose a sharp-tongued and volatile woman... there are hints in

⁶¹ Harlan, *Booker T. Washington*, 176.

⁶² "The Three Wives of Booker T. Washington." *Ebony* (September 1982), 34.

⁶³ Harlan, *Booker T. Washington*, 182; Bontemps, *100 Years of Negro Freedom*, 167.

the record that Washington found the blunt and occasionally light-hearted and frivolous approach of his fiancée refreshing,”⁶⁴

Over the twenty-five year span of their marriage, Murray Washington was an indispensable partner in her husband’s work at Tuskegee. In addition to contributing to his written works and speech composition, she helped to direct the development of Tuskegee into a successful model of black industrial education. The transformation of Tuskegee from a meager county school into black America’s most powerful early twentieth century “machine,” was not merely due to the pedagogy and teachers he imported from his alma mater, Hampton, but also to the successful liberal arts education of Tuskegee administrators and teachers such as Murray Washington and Jenkins who were educated at Du Bois’ alma mater, Fisk. This revelation should not be entirely surprising considering the limited ranks of the black middle class. The achievements of black Nashville demanded that Booker T. Washington pay attention to the city and its leaders. He had been doing so with much success long before his marriage to Margaret Murray and maintained his ties to the city in spite of the increasing contentious relationship with Du Bois. The graduates produced by Fisk, Central Tennessee (and its Meharry schools in particular) as well as Roger Williams did little to deter the demand of the city’s black businessmen for another black college, one funded with money from the public coffers to which they regularly contributed. Washington’s marriage to Murray strengthened his ties to black Nashville in general and to J. C. Napier in particular. The personal relationship of Washington and Napier buttressed a formidable professional partnership that ushered Washington to the forefront of Tennessee’s black educational politics in the most dramatic of ways.

⁶⁴ “The Three Wives of Booker T. Washington,” 34.

The Politics of Black Education: Napier, Washington and the Tennessee Tour of 1909

If the turn of the century was the “Age of Booker T. Washington” across the country, in Black Nashville it was the “Age of James C. Napier.” Once a student in Nashville’s pre-Civil War native schools, James Carroll Napier’s ascent to the top of the city’s political landscape formally began in 1878 when he was elected to the Nashville City Council. He had returned to Nashville in 1872 with a law degree from Howard University’s Law school in Washington, D.C., and was admitted to the Tennessee bar in 1875. Three years later, Napier won his bid for the Nashville City Council. The same year, Napier married Nettie Langston⁶⁵ in an elaborate ceremony that easily was the biggest nineteenth century social event for black Washingtonians.

While his father-in-law’s influence was considerable, Napier stayed busy making a name for himself. Before finally losing his bid for re-election in 1885, Napier had succeeded in securing a number of improvements for black Nashville. As a councilman, he was instrumental in the hiring of black teachers and black detectives as well as in the organization of the city’s black fire-engine company. Described as a “political fusionist” by Bobby Lovett, Napier belonged to a generation of black leaders who “were inclined to work out compromises with local white leaders and accommodate regional white conservative race relations.”⁶⁶

Having met Booker T. Washington sometime in 1891, Napier hired him to repeat his Atlanta Exposition Speech before the Tennessee Centennial Exposition on “Negro Day.” The professional and private relationship of the men grew steadily over the course of the next few years. The two men were like-minded in their strategies. “Your idea of the relations of races in this country seems to be the popular one,” wrote Napier in a July 1898 letter to Washington, “and

⁶⁵ Langston was the only daughter of the Honorable John Mercer Langston, founder, professor and dean of Howard Law, and later United States Congressman for Virginia.

⁶⁶ Bobby L. Lovett, “James Carroll Napier (1845-1940): From Plantation to the City,” in *The Southern Elite and Social Change: Essays in Honor of Willard B. Gatewood, Jr.*, eds. Randy Finley and Thomas A. DeBlack (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2002), 81.

takes well wherever it is expressed whether a black, white or mixed audience.”⁶⁷ It was unsurprisingly then, that Napier served as Nashville’s delegate to the Washington-founded National Negro Business League’s first convention in New York City in 1900. Two years later, Napier founded the first Tennessee chapter of the business league in Nashville. In 1903, the Nashville chapter hosted the League’s national convention and that same year, Napier joined Richard H. Boyd, Preston Taylor, and six other prominent blacks to found the One-Cent Savings Bank. When the bank opened the following year in Napier Court (Napier’s own office building), it was one of the earliest black-owned banks to begin operations in the United States. The bank’s achievements helped to secure the successes of other Nashville’s black businesses.⁶⁸ Yet, black Nashville’s economic accomplishments may have actually served to heighten social proscriptions. They may have prescribed accommodationism for other blacks, but Nashville’s black elite thought that their status should have placed them above the restrictions segregation placed on blacks. Predictably, they “resented being excluded from privileges enjoyed by America’s white upper class.” But black Nashville leaders such as Napier were hesitant to take a stand against it unless extenuating circumstances demanded their activism.

Washington often faced similar criticisms. Despite often being depicted as an “Uncle Tom” who, in his short-sightedness traded civil rights for an outmoded agricultural system that rendered blacks as second-class citizens, Washington worked “behind the mask of acquiescence...with many schemes for black strength, self-improvement and mutual aid.”⁶⁹ The contention of Washington biographer Louis Harlan that Washington “was neither a black Christ nor an Uncle Tom but a cunning Brer Rabbit,” was especially convincing considering

⁶⁷ James C. Napier to Booker T. Washington, 29 July 1898, *The Booker T. Washington Papers* 4, 453.

⁶⁸ Bobby L. Lovett, “James Carroll Napier (1845-1940): From Plantation to the City,” 86.

⁶⁹ Louis Harlan, “The Secret Life of Booker T. Washington,” *Journal of Southern History* 37, No.2 (1971), 112.

Washington's efforts to push (and pay for) cases against discrimination.⁷⁰ Napier may stand in the same tradition. In 1903, the two men teamed-up to test Tennessee's Jim Crow law with litigation against the Pullman Car Company. In the beginning, Napier appeared resolute: "I think that the time has come when we should take a bold stand in favor of law and order and insist on their rigid execution as applied to the Negro whether in his favor or against him."⁷¹ But by February 1904, the commitment of Nashville's militant elite had seemingly receded. In a letter to Du Bois, Washington expressed his frustration at the inability of Napier to push the case forward: "Our people in Nashville find themselves not so much inconvenienced by the recent action of the State Railroad Commission as they thought they were going to be." Despite his ability to rationalize their inaction, Washington was clear to note "the fact is that no action has been taken."⁷² The organizers' efforts ultimately feel short, when the man chosen to test the case backed out.

Napier and his cohorts did not use their tremendous organizing power to lead an effective protest until 1905, when they protested against the newly enacted Tennessee Jim Crow streetcar law. Led by the organizers of Nashville's Negro Business League, blacks conducted an economic boycott of the city's streetcars. Napier along with black business leaders R.H. Boyd and Preston Taylor (with whom he had co-founded the One-Cent Savings Bank) had a long-term vision for the economic boycott which included the establishment of a black-owned and black-operated Union Transportation Company. But capitalization limitations, coupled with poor equipment and electricity challenges forced the sale of the company in 1907. Even so, black Nashville had accomplished two major feats. First, they demonstrated the organizing power of black self-

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ James C. Napier to Booker T. Washington, 11 December 1903, *The Booker T. Washington Papers* 7, 366.

⁷² Booker T. Washington to W.E.B. Du Bois, 27 February 1904, *The Booker T. Washington Papers* 7, 453.

determination to white Nashville. Second, and perhaps even more importantly, they had proven to themselves that the city's entire black community could rally around an important social case.

Nashville blacks must have been convinced more than ever of the limits of accommodationism. Yet, some black Nashvillians were not satisfied with its measured results. In a letter to the editor, James C. Russell contended: "What the Negro of today contends for is an opportunity to exercise fully, all of the rights of manhood and citizenship... So it is not social equality that the Negro of today contends for. He sees nothing in it that can afford either beauty or strength; and he is concerned only about the tangible things of life."⁷³ The short-lived successes of Union Transportation must have paled in comparison to Washington's long list of achievements, as he majestically toured Mississippi in 1908. The tour climaxed with a visit to the all-black cotton-producing town of Mound Bayou, which was fast-becoming one of the nation's largest black communities. Washington realized that by demonstrating the progress of black people, the tour and others like it could serve as combatants against white supremacy and also reinforce his supremacy as the leader of black America.⁷⁴

Black Nashvillians felt that they too had accomplishments worthy of the national exposure a tour by Washington could afford. As the black business leaders of "Athens of the South," Napier and his cohorts wanted Tennessee in general and Nashville in particular, to receive its due. Likewise, Nashville's white New South leaders were probably excited about the positive results that a visit by Washington could bring. His regular visits to the city had made him a welcomed speaker among both black and white audiences even before the success of the Mississippi tour. A visit by Washington to Nashville during the spring of 1907 included an address before white students (and local white ministers) at Vanderbilt as well as an address to

⁷³ *Nashville Globe*, 1 March 1907.

⁷⁴ David H. Jackson, Jr., *Booker T. Washington and the Struggle against White Supremacy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 75.

the graduating class of Meharry.⁷⁵ In an editorial entitled, “A Tribute of Respect to Washington,” the editors of the *Nashville Globe* reported on Washington’s visit and dubbed him “the apostle of industrial education” whose “forceful and forcible” orations commanded the “silent and respectful attention which admits of his every word.”⁷⁶

When Napier and his cohorts began orchestrating Washington’s “tour of the Volunteer State” in the fall of 1909, they knew that he would be well received among black audiences and that even white Tennesseans may have welcomed the positive publicity his visit would bring. Organized “in the interest of Negro education and of racial peace,” the tour began in Bristol, Tennessee on November 18, 1909. When the private Pullman car departed the station, a colorful cast of characters that represented the state’s most successful black businessmen and professionals accompanied Washington. Having “worked their way up to positions and influence among colored people in their communities,” the entourage of twenty-five to fifty bankers, businessmen, doctors, teachers, preachers and other professionals changed over the course of the eight-day tour of the state. The list included several of Nashville’s most prominent black citizens: minister and businessman R.H. Boyd, physician Charles V. Roman, surgeon R. F. Boyd as well as white college administrators George W. Hubbard, physician and dean of Meharry Medical College and George Gates, president of Fisk University.⁷⁷

Persons from the other regions of the state, including Memphis businessman Robert R. Church were among the group, as well as other national figures including Emmett J. Scott, Washington’s private secretary and ex-commissioner to Liberia and newspaperman (and later pioneering sociologist) Robert E. Park. They were all “placed in the charge” of Washington confidante and Nashville leader J.C. Napier, for it was upon the “express invitation” of Napier

⁷⁵ *Nashville Globe*, 15 April 1907.

⁷⁶ *Nashville Globe*, 15 April 1907.

⁷⁷ *Nashville Globe*, 19 November 1909; “Principal Washington’s Campaign,” *The Springfield Republican*, *The Booker T. Washington Papers* 10, 226; Jackson, *Booker T. Washington and the Struggle against White Supremacy*, 80, 82.

and his cohorts “that he [Washington] consented to make the trip.”⁷⁸ The day after the train departed Bristol, the *Nashville Globe* boasted that “the Washington Party will be a success from many viewpoints is no longer a matter of speculation.” Every town was reportedly trying to out-do itself and Nashville was “going to do her part.” Described as having the “most prosperous and the most intelligent community of colored people of any city in the South,” Nashville’s role as host predictably served as the centerpiece of the tour.⁷⁹

When Washington arrived in Nashville on November 21, black Nashvillians attempted to give “the greatest demonstration and the most genuine and hospitable reception that has ever been accorded to the Wizard of Tuskegee.”⁸⁰ A crowd of seven to ten thousand (the vast majority of whom were black) flooded the Ryman Auditorium in anticipation of Washington’s keynote address. The tour’s success prior to its arrival in Nashville all but assured the event’s success, but it was the presence of several white city and state officials including Nashville Mayor Hilary Howse and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Robert L. Jones that signaled the tour’s importance to black as well as white Tennesseans. Despite even their presence, Washington was still undoubtedly the main attraction. Washington’s entrance was met with a thunderous applause that lasted several minutes. “So profuse was the welcome” noted one observer, that after standing at the lectern, Washington had to wait until after a second long ovation to begin his speech.⁸¹

The theme of Washington’s address during the occasion advocated accommodationism. Convinced that “every Negro in the South has a white friend, and [that] every white man has a Negro friend,” Washington challenged that while “many honest Southerners are still unconvinced that the Negro is able to profit by education, it is the business of the people of my race to

⁷⁸ “Account of Washington’s Tour of Tennessee,” *The Booker T. Washington Papers* 10, 226; *Johnson City Comet*, 25 November 1909.

⁷⁹ *Nashville Globe*, 19 November 1909.

⁸⁰ “Account of Washington’s Tour of Tennessee,” *The Booker T. Washington Papers* 10, 211-212; *Nashville Globe*, 26 November 1909.

⁸¹ *Nashville Globe*, 26 November 1909.

convince these men by the results of our education that every time a Negro boy or girl is educated he becomes a better and more useful citizen.”⁸² While common, Washington contended, the cooperation between the races was stunted by “the fact that the worst that occurs in the South is spread readily to all parts of the world, while the best things are seldom heard outside of the community in which they take place...If fifty white men join in assisting a Negro to get an education or establish himself in some business in the community, no one ever hears of it.”⁸³

Locally, the *Nashville Globe* hailed Washington as “the apostle of peace.” Praised for having “never stopped to reply to the criticisms hurled at him from the men of his own race in every section of our country, nor has he allowed the pundits of those of another race to divert his attention from the end he has always been striving to attain,” the *Globe* claimed that because of Washington’s address, “the Negroes in every walk of life will take on new courage.”⁸⁴ Black Nashvillians were however, not the only beneficiaries of Washington’s spirited address. Washington was a master of the “art of double-talking.” White Nashvillians, like other white Tennesseans, did not recognize Washington’s messages as offering their black counterparts “new courage.” They heard Washington’s messages as a challenge to blacks to work hard and observe white prescribed standards of temperance and morality. As David H. Jackson, Jr. pointedly observed: “Some blacks would hear his call for equality of opportunity; while some whites would hear that blacks needed to learn the “dignity of labor,” which they assumed meant working for them or in menial capacities.”⁸⁵

Whether or not either race was conscious of the other’s interpretation of Washington’s pronounced philosophy, one thing was certain: the tour had done much for Nashville’s image

⁸² “Account of Washington’s Tour of Tennessee,” *The Booker T. Washington Papers* 10, 229.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁸⁴ *Nashville Globe*, 26 November 1909.

⁸⁵ Jackson, *Booker T. Washington and the Struggle against White Supremacy*, 90.

nationally. Depicted as “a noteworthy example of what education has done for the Negro,” Nashville was widely touted for its commitment to black education. “Nowhere in the South,” claimed one *New York Post* correspondent “is the average intelligence and literacy among them higher than here [Nashville].”⁸⁶ And Black Nashville intended to keep it that way. Since the Colored Men’s Convention of the 1870s, the repeated call for a public black college had gone unanswered. Finally, Washington’s tour had provided more than enough visibility to the cause of industrial education, challenging Tennessee’s white political leadership to demonstrate their commitment to the vocational instruction of blacks they supposedly supported. The Tennessee tour may have lasted eight days, but Nashville’s black business leaders wanted more than local, state and even national praise as its outcome. They wanted a public black college and Washington’s tour had given them just enough momentum to finally get it.

A Royal Band, the Chosen Few: The Birth of Tennessee State Normal

Almost half a century after the founding of Fisk University, Tennessee had yet to build a single public center for black higher education. Named for its sponsor, Vermont Senator Justin Smith Morrill and signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln, the Morrill Act of 1862 authorized the establishment of colleges in the new western states. In addition to granting each state 30,000 acres of federal land for each senator and representative it had in the Congress to promote public education in agriculture and the mechanical arts, the act signaled the beginning of the federal government's entanglement in public higher education. Almost seven years after its passage, the Tennessee legislature agreed to the conditions of the act, but decided to use the

⁸⁶ “Account of Washington’s Tour of Tennessee,” *The Booker T. Washington Papers* 10, 211.

funding to support the pre-existing East Tennessee University (formerly Blount College and later The University of Tennessee) instead of establishing a new college.⁸⁷

Located in Knoxville, the college created agricultural, engineering and military science course offerings but did offer educational opportunities to black Tennesseans. The 1869 Tennessee legislation that outlined the guidelines for the land-grant college funding, while requiring that “no citizen of this State, otherwise qualified, shall be excluded from the privileges of said University, by reason of his race or color,” gave responsibility to the “trustees of said University” to provide “separate accommodation or instruction” to qualified black applicants.⁸⁸ The earnestness of this pronouncement would not be tested until 1881, when the first known blacks applied for admission to the college, which had changed its name to The University of Tennessee. Predictably, some university officials hastily voiced fears that actual black enrollment would be “fatal to the university,” and newly elected black legislators rushed to work out an amicable agreement that would allow the state to pay to send the black students to Fisk.⁸⁹ However, it was not long before officials from other black colleges challenged the agreement, which led to the state’s termination of its agreement with Fisk and the beginning of its contract with Knoxville College, a black school founded in 1875 by the Board of Freedmen's Mission of the United Presbyterian Church.

By 1890, the passage of the Second Morrill Act cemented Tennessee’s commitment to the provision of “equitable” provisions for black Tennesseans at Knoxville College. The agreement however, was far from ideal. While it was hardly expected that the school receive equal funding, black students could not even receive equity in course offerings or educational standards. Meanwhile, The University of Tennessee was increasingly abandoning its vocational

⁸⁷ “Chapter XII,” *Public Acts of the General Assembly of State of Tennessee, 1868-1869* (Nashville: S.C. Mercer, 1869), 12-14; Stanley Folmsbee, *Tennessee Establishes a State University: First Years of The University of Tennessee, 1879-1887* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1961), 1.

⁸⁸ “Chapter XII,” *Public Acts of the General Assembly of State of Tennessee, 1868-1869*, 12.

⁸⁹ Folmsbee, *Tennessee Establishes a State University*, 37.

programs, leading Samuel H. Shannon to conclude that the differences between the college's foci "serve[d] as an illustration of the larger differences in orientation between the preponderant body of white land-grant colleges and the growing quantity of Negro vocational and land-grant institutions functioning at the turn of the century."⁹⁰ Despite this fact, white legislators were dissatisfied with what they perceived as the lack of focus on manual training at Knoxville College, leading to a strained relationship between the legislature and the school.

The legislature had however, begun freely offering state-subsidized support via the Peabody Fund to the all-white teacher-college Peabody Normal College in 1881. More than two decades later, there were no similar provisions for any Tennessee black college. By 1907, black Tennesseans began publicly voicing their dissatisfaction with the unwillingness of the legislature to fund black education beyond the secondary level.⁹¹ In an educational campaign led by Henry Allen Boyd, the publisher and editor of the *Nashville Globe*, black Nashvillians charged: "The University of Tennessee does not admit Negroes as students, and, as a consequence, the colored people of the state have benefitted very little by an appropriation that was made primarily in their interest." At Boyd's behest, newspaper boys placed copies of the paper on the desks of legislators at the state capitol which included the charge: "It is hoped, now that officials of the University of Tennessee have recognized their duty to deal justly with the children of all races in the state, that

⁹⁰ Samuel Shannon. "Agricultural and Industrial Education at Tennessee State University During the Normal School Phase, 1912-1922: A Case Study," (PhD. diss., George Peabody College for Teachers, 1974), 81.

⁹¹ "Alabama makes large donations to Tuskegee and A. and M. College at Normal; Mississippi puts her money for the Negro youths as Alcorn; Kentucky gave liberally to Berea, and the State University; Texas supports the great Prairie View State Normal; North Carolina has her normals; the others do as much, but the proud Volunteer State will not let Walden, Fisk, Roger Williams, Nelson Merry, Turner Normal or the Knoxville College have one dime of the Peabody Fund." See *Nashville Globe*, 18 January 1907, 3.

the question of erecting a school where black children can profit from the money appropriated by the state and federal governments, will be pushed to a speedy conclusion.”⁹²

Their hope for a “speedy” conclusion was not realized. In 1909, *Globe* publisher Henry Allen Boyd and Napier organized the Agricultural and Industrial State Normal Association to “promote the interest of the school and for securing favorable legislation.” Having elected Ben Carr as chairman, the association held rallies with “some of the fervor of the old-time camp meetings.” At some point during the two-year fight to get a bill passed it must have seemed futile to some. But having worked diligently for the passage of the bill, their “agitation did not cease even when the legislature convened.”⁹³ On April 23, 1909, the headline of *Globe* read: “A Great Victory Achieved; General Education Bill Passes Senate; Carries Appropriation for Negro School.”⁹⁴

The bill called for the establishment of “one normal school for the education and professional training of white teachers...in each Grand Division of the State” and “one Agricultural and Industrial Normal School for the industrial education of [N]egroes and for preparing [N]egro teachers for the common schools.”⁹⁵ Unlike its white counterparts, the location for the black school was not specified. And because it was not, the association began its statewide survey of blacks to decide where the school should be built. It soon became obvious however, that the committee was partial toward the establishment of the school in Middle Tennessee. By November 1909, the *Globe* reported that after “close and careful investigation into the educational affairs of the state,” the association had concluded it was the “unanimous

⁹² Interview with Dr. George W. Gore, Nashville, Tennessee, March 10, 1972. Quoted in “Agricultural and Industrial Education at Tennessee State University During the Normal School Phase,” 94; *Nashville Globe*, 6 March 1908, 4.

⁹³ Eugene L. Pearson, *Tennessee Education 1780-1962* (Nashville: State Department of Education, 1963), 18; *Nashville Globe*, 31 December 1909; *Nashville Globe*, 12 November 1909.

⁹⁴ *Nashville Globe*, 23 June 1909.

⁹⁵ See “Chapter 264: House Bill No. 242,” *Acts of the State of Tennessee Passed by the Fifty-sixth General Assembly 1909* (Nashville: McQuiddy, 1909), 912-915.

opinion of the cities and citizens from Bristol to Memphis that this school should by an[y] means be located in Middle Tennessee.” The association’s leaders argued that a central location would “get an advantage either way” because of travel considerations and that the school “ought to be placed as near as possible under the supervision of the state officials” proximate to the capital.⁹⁶

If necessary, advocates for the school would also chastise the black community. Shortly after the close of Booker T. Washington’s November 1909 tour, the *Globe* ran an editorial which read “The Negroes of this state have not shown the proper interest in this school. Especially is this true of the Negroes in Nashville.” The school, it contended, “should arouse every Negro in Tennessee to alertness... We ought to have a desire to see our school the equal of any in the South.”⁹⁷ Even so, the editors of the *Globe* had to acknowledge that blacks in cities across the state were “absorbed” in the debate over where the school should be built. They maintained that it should be “located in a section of the state where it can be of the most benefit to the most people.” It was their desire to have the school be “an ideal one in every sense of the word...and it will be,” it claimed, “if the Negroes from every section of our commonwealth will for once make a united push.”⁹⁸ Black Tennesseans from outside of Middle Tennessee must have found this challenge at least a little disingenuous, as the *Globe* continued to campaign for the school to be built locally. In order to help sway public opinion, the committee of more than 100 black Nashvillians began a campaign to raise \$25,000 for the school. A speaker even reasoned that if each black Nashvillian donated just \$1 to the campaign, that the black community could easily rise over \$30,000.⁹⁹

Led by Napier, Carr and Boyd, the campaign grew steadily through the spring of 1910, when the trio presented their case before the Davidson County Quarterly Court on April 4, in

⁹⁶ *Nashville Globe*, 12 November 1909.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 26 November 1909.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 10 December 1909.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 31 December 1909.

order to secure an initial appropriation of \$60,000 bonds from the court. Speaking first, Napier reminded the court that blacks had recently supported an appropriation of \$300,000 bonds for a new white high school. “We knew it wasn’t for our race, but we realized that every educated person was an added asset to any community, whether white or colored.” Napier proclaimed: “We want to go out in Davidson County and build you a Tuskegee.” Similarly, Carr and Boyd’s addresses focused on the school’s role in training blacks as farmers, cooks, laundresses, mechanics, printers, book binders and pressmen.¹⁰⁰ While the trio was not unaware of the benefit the school would afford in the training of black teachers, the men were probably careful to avoid calling attention to such a benefit. As seasoned leaders of the local black community “they may have anticipated greater resistance from the Quarterly Court if teacher-training was stressed,” suggesting their “sensitivity to the potential persuasive effect which an agricultural and industrial emphasis would create.”¹⁰¹

Their restraint paid-off, as the court approved the \$60,000 bonds. They did so in part because Chattanooga had already granted \$50,000.¹⁰² Less than 150 miles south east of Nashville, Chattanooga had launched its own campaign for the black normal school to be located there. Leading their movement was William Jasper Hale, the principal of the city’s St. Elmo High School. Born in Marion County on September 26, 1874, he rose from humble beginnings. The family was poor and as the eldest of seven siblings, young Hale attended local public schools but began working at an early age. He paid his own way through school and into Maryville College. Established in 1819, the college’s founders became abolitionists and as such, had done much to encourage Unionism in East Tennessee during the Civil War. After several terms, Hale began

¹⁰⁰ *Davidson County Quarterly Record*, 4 April 1910; *Ibid.*, 5 April 1910; *Nashville Globe*, 8 April 1910; *Nashville Tennessean*, 6 April 1910.

¹⁰¹ Shannon, “Agricultural and Industrial Education at Tennessee State University During the Normal School Phase,” 105.

¹⁰² *Nashville Globe*, 8 April 1910.

teaching stints in Coulterville and Retro before becoming principal of Chattanooga's East First Street Grammar School and later St. Elmo.¹⁰³

It was in part due to the success of the Hale-led campaign that black Nashvillians intensified their push to secure funding for the establishment of the school in Middle Tennessee. The \$20,000 raised privately by Nashville's black citizens shifted the balance of power in their favor. When the State Board of education met in January 1911, it provisionally agreed to award Nashville the contract to build the school provided the Quarterly Court's approval of an additional \$20,000 bonds. The *Nashville Globe* pronounced: "It has been a long drawn-out contest in which Chattanooga, the city located by the side of Lookout Mountain, gave the capital city the closest race and hardest fight ever known." Due to the "herculean work of Mr. Ben Carr...the bringing of this school to Middle Tennessee gives Nashville a final hold on the claim that she is the "Athens of the South."¹⁰⁴

When the court approved the request the following month, Nashville officially became the location for the Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State Normal School for Negroes.¹⁰⁵ At first glance, it may appear that Nashville won the fight, but not without making concessions to Chattanooga. Even before Nashville received the additional appropriation rumors that Chattanooga principal-turned-campaign leader Hale had been elected as the school's president had begun to circulate.¹⁰⁶ Hailed as "one of the best known educators in the state," it would seem that Hale, despite being largely self-taught, was a qualified applicant. His work at Chattanooga had not gone unnoticed by R.L. Jones, the superintendent of Chattanooga schools; coincidentally, Jones had been promoted to State Superintendent of Public Instruction and was responsible for

¹⁰³ "William Jasper Hale," *The Journal of Negro History* 30, No.1 (January 1945), 111-112; *Ayeni, Yearbook of Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College, 1942* (Nashville: The Hemphill Press, 1942), 3.

¹⁰⁴ *Nashville Globe*, 13 January 1911.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 17 February 1911; *Ibid.*, 13 January 1911.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, January 13, 1911.

recommending a candidate for the headship of the school. Unsurprisingly, Jones nominated Hale. In addition to his educational and administrative experience, Hale's leadership of Chattanooga's nearly successful bid demonstrated his keen political acumen.¹⁰⁷

When thirty-seven year old Hale was extended the offer to assume the leadership of the Nashville-based black normal school he must have known that his appointment was probably not without political considerations. Chattanoogaans who acutely felt the loss of their campaign to have the school established in their city, could feel a tremendous sense of pride that even though the school was to be located in Middle Tennessee, it was going to be lead by one of their city's most capable sons. The white Chattanooga newspaper *Daily Times* reported: "Prof. Hale stands high not only as an educator but as a man of sterling worth, a genuine friend of his race and a safe leader." On the "problem of the races," the editorial contended, "[h]e avoids much of the difficulty by counseling caution, meantime educating and preparing by manual and technical training the young Negro for usefulness in his present station in life."¹⁰⁸

The white Chattanooga community's perception of Hale's commitment to industrial education was definite but probably inaccurate. Fisk graduate Edna Hankal, one of the teachers under Hales' supervision at the time of his state appointment later pointed out that the manual and vocational training was not a part of East Fifth Street's curriculum under Hale's headship.¹⁰⁹ Whether or not Hale intentionally gave whites the impression that he supported black industrial education, the belief that he was committed to Washington's pedagogical philosophy surely helped him win the appointment. White Tennesseans did not know however, that Hale, like Washington was not above using white paternalism to advance black self-determination. As a

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., January 13, 1911; R. Grann Lloyd, *Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State University 1912-1962* (Nashville: n.p., 1962), 7.

¹⁰⁸ *Chattanooga Daily Times*, 10 January 1911. Quoted in Shannon, "Agricultural and Industrial Education at Tennessee State University During the Normal School Phase," 117.

¹⁰⁹ Hankal referenced in Shannon, "Agricultural and Industrial Education at Tennessee State University During the Normal School Phase," 117.

part of his responsibility to help devise a pedagogical plan for the black normal school at Nashville, Hale had the opportunity to visit a number of black industrial schools, including both Hampton and Tuskegee. The success of those schools was undeniable. To the white outsider, the schools represented models of black efforts to “dignify labor, to create respect for those occupations which have generally been regarded as most menial.”¹¹⁰ But to someone like Hale, the schools’ ability to provide both teacher-training and vocational instruction could not have gone unnoticed. The tour probably only served to confirm what Hale already knew, as the leader of Tennessee’s only black normal school, he would have to appear “safe” to whites in order to carry out the educational agenda of black Tennesseans.

Hale may have looked like a “white” man, but the soft-spoken, wavy brown haired leader of the Agricultural and Industrial State Normal School was determined that the black school succeed. From its perch on 165-acres between Centennial Boulevard and Jefferson Street, the school opened its first summer session June 19, 1912. Situated on “high ground, commanding magnificent views,” the buildings were “of brick with stone trimmings, substantial in structure, heated by steam, lighted by electricity and supplied with other modern conveniences.” Right from the start, it was clear that under Hale’s direction, the school would focus on training teachers. The chief aim of the session was “to strengthen teachers as useful and helpful members of the community in which they live and work.” The school boasted a “superior faculty of trained men and women, specialists in educational work and deeply interested in the teachers and schools of the state” including graduates from Fisk, Atlanta, Howard and Tuskegee, some of the nation’s best-known black colleges.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ *Nashville Globe*, 23 February 1912.

¹¹¹ *Nashville Globe*, 21 June 1912, 1; *Nashville Globe*, 19 June 1912; *Nashville Globe*, 20 June 1912; Shannon, “Agricultural and Industrial Education at Tennessee State University During the Normal School Phase,” 20; Also included were the alumni of leading white colleges Amherst, Columbia, Oberlin, The Ohio State and Western Reserve.

When the school was dedicated on January 16, 1913, both Governor B. W. Hooper and Mayor H.E. Howse were among the distinguished attendees. Described as an occasion that “will go down in history as one of the grandest exercises ever held in the State of Tennessee,” it was the keynote address by the Honorable Samuel H. Thompson that received the most attention in the local black press. On the front page of the *Nashville Globe* under the heading “Stay Out Of Politics,” Thompson’s address reportedly “startled his audience when he made a strong plea to the Negro men to stay out of politics.” Reprinted in its entirety, Thompson’s speech opened with the caution: “I do not propose taking you into the clouds, dropping you into the abyss or spiriting you across the chasm, but I do hope to say something of practical worth, come after us or investigate the work this state and school are going not only for the Negro race but for the white race as well.” Advising his black listeners to “cast your vote for the best man on the ticket regardless of the politics,” he told them to “return to your place of business and work industriously until the next election day at which time you should repeat the performance. You know as well as I do that it is not for the best interests of either race for you to hold office in this country under the present conditions,” claimed Thompson, “therefore your way to preferment is over the sometimes hard but entirely safe road of industry and economy.”¹¹²

Even so, the most significant aspect of the occasion, he said, was that it “dawns a new era for the Negro in Tennessee. Under the magnificent leadership of your President William J. Hale, you could fail if you wanted to...It is our hope that this school will in time be for Tennessee what Hampton and Tuskegee are to the [n]ation.”¹¹³ Whether or not Thompson was sincere in his praise for Hale, his assessment of Hale’s leadership capabilities would indeed prove true. Immediately, Hale went to work building the normal school into one black Tennesseans could be proud of. Praised as “apostles of better living” in one of the school’s earliest *Bulletins*, the faculty

¹¹² *Nashville Globe*, 24 January 1913.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

had initially included Ben Carr but his inability to yield to Hale's leadership lead to his sudden dismissal in May 1913.¹¹⁴ With his departure, Hale's all-black faculty initially provided instruction on the elementary, high school and normal levels. Along with industrial instruction, the general curriculum included reading, language, geography, history, arithmetic, art and music. As a part of the industrial program, students at Nashville Normal, much like students at other black industrial schools, helped to maintain the schools' facilities. Virtually all black industrial programs widely encouraged "self-help," and Nashville normal promoted a tradition of "one hour of work per day" for both its teachers and students. Females often contributed in the school's kitchen, sewing and laundry responsibilities, while males did construction, electrical and plumbing work as well as other odd jobs around the campus.¹¹⁵

Some of these duties served even more practical purposes than character-building and campus up-keep. Student jobs were often designed to help defer the financial burdens on students, many of whom were "extremely economically deprived." As Evelyn P. Fancher noted: "Great energy and effort were devoted to creating part-time opportunities for the students and keeping food costs at a minimum."¹¹⁶ While historians point to "a fundamentally different approach to education," as the cause of the chasm between normal school students and those of nearby Fisk, the perceived differences between the schools and their students may have really stemmed from socio-economic differences in their backgrounds rather than education pedagogy. Admittedly, imagined differences between the schools' educational missions (which were in reality more alike than they were dissimilar), may have lead supporters of Du Bois' "talented tenth" theory to be "disdainful of those institutions not specifically designed to produce a

¹¹⁴ Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State Normal School, *Bulletin*, Catalogue 1914-1915, Vol. 3, No. 8 (August 1914), 11; See Shannon, "Agricultural and Industrial Education at Tennessee State University During the Normal School Phase," 143-145.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 28

¹¹⁶ Evelyn P. Fancher, "Tennessee State University (1912 – 1974): A History of an Institution with Implications for the Future," (Ph.D. diss., George Peabody College for Teachers, 1975), 41.

professional leadership class among Negroes.” It may have been in part because of their economic disadvantages that normal school students perceived they were looked down upon by students on the nearby campus of Fisk University.¹¹⁷

Despite merely advocating the same objectives from two different viewpoints, the dialectical relationship between Washington and Du Bois had already begun to trickle down to the students on black educational campuses including those in Nashville. “Supporters of Fisk expressed no sympathy for an agricultural and industrial normal school,” contended Samuel H. Shannon, who concluded that Fiskites “expressed no sympathy for an agricultural and industrial normal school which they perceived to represent a leveling influence popularized by Fisk alumnus, DuBois.”¹¹⁸ Even Hale acknowledged that the school was initially regarded as a “folly” because of its location “under the very shadow of three [N]egro universities.” Hale however, remained undaunted by the challenges the other schools’ posed: “The fact that a school of this kind can thrive in a college city where the prevailing sentiment is against industrialism, proves the worth of this institution.”¹¹⁹

Dubbed “a royal band, the chosen few,” early students of the normal school were guided by Hale’s firm, keen and resolute leadership. Not only were students expected to work hard, they were also required to be circumspect in their deportment and observe the school’s strict moral code. They were also encouraged to contribute to their community. Within the first decade of its existence, the college steadily grew and as it did, so did Hale’s vision for the school. The “‘vision’ and ‘force’ of the President contributed to the generation of forces external to himself that called for an expansion of the school,” observed Fancher. “Black students who wanted the

¹¹⁷Shannon, “Agricultural and Industrial Education at Tennessee State University During the Normal School Phase,” 142.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ William J. Hale. Quoted in Shannon, “Agricultural and Industrial Education at Tennessee State University During the Normal School Phase,” 143.

opportunity to develop themselves through education beyond the normal school level increased in numbers with each graduating class.”¹²⁰

By 1922, Hale began actively pursuing his plan to transform the normal school into a college. In order to do it, he would need to draw on the exemplary record of the almost 300 normal graduates the school had produced during its first decade.¹²¹ He would also need the commitment of his dynamic faculty. Perhaps even more importantly, Hale would need all the political savvy he could muster in order to solicit and manage successfully the funding necessary for the school’s expansion. However, even Hale’s push to secure college status would pale in comparison to the fight Fisk President Fayette McKenzie would soon have on his hands.

Fisk Student Protest: A Faithful Step in the Future of Black Colleges

When Fayette Avery McKenzie became Fisk University’s fifth president in 1915, few could have imagined the firestorm his presidency would later stir up among the university’s black student and alumni populations. A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Lehigh University who earned his doctoral degree in 1908, McKenzie’s educational record was long but not vast. Perhaps even more importantly, McKenzie had experiences among Native Americans but none among black Americans before joining Fisk.¹²² The belief that McKenzie’s inexperience in the African American community would not constitute a major problem among Nashville blacks was a gross miscalculation, especially when one considers the problems of his predecessor George A. Gates.

Gates had been the second president of Iowa’s Grinnell College and later Pomona College in Claremont, California by the time he assumed the Fisk presidency in 1909. He was an experienced administrator, but Fisk desperately needed to raise money, an undertaking Gates had

¹²⁰ Fancher, “Tennessee State University (1912 – 1974),” 33.

¹²¹ See Shannon, “Agricultural and Industrial Education at Tennessee State University During the Normal School Phase,” Appendix A: Normal School Graduates—1914-1933, 277-285

¹²² Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 72.

previously had little success doing at Pomona. His appointment was less about his unimpressive fundraising record and more about the support Gates received from a Fisk parent and trustee Booker T. Washington.¹²³ The “Wizard of Tuskegee” and prophet of industrial education, Washington’s relationship with Fisk stretched back to the late-nineteenth century. As early as 1905, when he successfully petitioned Andrew Carnegie to fund the building of a library on the Fisk campus, Washington had begun leveraging his influence and familial relationships to raise money for the institution. In a letter to his wife, Washington reported that Carnegie was “especially glad to give it as you had been a student there.”¹²⁴ If his marriage to Margaret Murray Washington inextricably linked the two, his son and namesake Booker T. Washington, Jr.’s enrollment in Fisk cemented the elder Washington’s relationship to the Nashville liberal arts college.

Coincidentally, Washington had also been elected to the Fisk Board of Trustees in 1909. Soon after his appointment, Washington teamed-up with Paul D. Cravath, the son of former Fisk President Erastus M. Cravath, to raise \$300,000 for Fisk in four short years. While the amount was considerable, the school’s financial challenges remained. Coupled to them, was Gates’ penchant for rubbing black Nashvillians the wrong way.¹²⁵ Just a little more than a year into Gates’ administration, he had offended a friend visiting *Nashville Globe* publisher Henry Allen Boyd. As a representative of the Baltimore daily *Afro-American Ledger*, the visitor to the Fisk campus probably expected to be accorded the curiosity and respect a black man of his station had earned. Instead, Gates ordered the visitor to leave his belongings in his office during his stay on campus and forced him to attend chapel. The visitor’s sentiments were soon after printed in the

¹²³ See Isabel Smith Gates, *The Life of George Augustus Gates* (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1915); Harlan, *Booker T. Washington*, 183; Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 63.

¹²⁴ Washington to Margaret Murray Washington (New York) 13 March 1905, *The Booker T. Washington Papers* 8, 216.

¹²⁵ Harlan, *Booker T. Washington*, 185.

Globe: “If it had been a colored president of a college who has thus addressed me I would have said he was uncouth, impolite and I hardly know what else I should have said.”¹²⁶

Gates’ relationship with the *Globe*’s editorial board continued to worsen later that spring. In an effort to attract white philanthropic funds, Gates reportedly promised white attendees that the school’s June 1911 Commencement exercises would be strictly segregated. Despite recognizing the possibility that Gates’ motives were well-intended, the *Globe* was quick to point out that even given the auspices of the American Missionary Association, Fisk’s successes were owed to self-determination rather than white philanthropy. “Negroes always looked upon Fisk University as theirs,” contended *Globe* editors. “It is a fact that the famous Jubilee Singers, through their songs raised the money to build Jubilee Hall and a great portion of that to erect some of the other buildings, so in truth,” they boldly contended, “the Negroes of this country can say that Fisk University is theirs.”¹²⁷

In addition to this debacle, the *Globe* also charged that Gates fired six of the school’s twelve black faculty members. Black newspapers across the country reprinted the *Globe*’s accounts and made their own assessments of the shared future of the two. In one such instance, the *New York Age* noted: “President Gates will find that it will do him no harm to hold the confidence of the colored people of Nashville, to whom Fisk has always been the child of their pride.” Likewise, the editorial was careful to advise: “He [Gates] may gain all the applause from his white neighbors, he may have heaped upon him unstinted praise from the daily press and the Confederate veterans, but if he is unfortunate in his relationship with Nashville colored people, he will find his usefulness greatly impaired. He will find later that his work at Fisk is over.”¹²⁸

The following spring, the editorial’s prediction was realized, but not necessarily for the reasons they supposed. Injured in a railroad accident during the previous fall, Gates suffered a

¹²⁶ *Nashville Globe*, 7 April 1911.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 23 June 1911.

¹²⁸ *New York Age*, n.d.; Quoted in the *Nashville Globe*, 7 July 1911.

mental breakdown which made it impossible to continue his work at Fisk. Gates' departure seemed to have presented a golden opportunity for militant black Nashvillians to push for the appointment of a black president. Predictably, the campaign was lead by the editors of the *Globe*. Having helped to secure the establishment of Nashville Normal, black Nashvillians were proud of the school's success under the headship of its black President William Jasper Hale. Unlike the earliest days of their founding when white missionaries toiled alongside their black students, the *Globe's* editors charged that Fisk's white administrators no longer "come in personal contact" or "get to know" their black students and the wider black community.¹²⁹

As Lester C. Lemon observed: "The founders of institutions such as Fisk were gone, and their replacements were men of a different spirit." The changing cast of white administrators and faculty as well as their approach to black education not only lead to feelings of "restlessness and discontent" among students. The *Globe* contended, the "friendliness which should exist between teachers and pupils is missing, and as a consequence, there is a constant unrest on the part of the students."¹³⁰ Despite the *Globe's* pronouncements, Fisk would not have a black president for more than two additional decades. The Fisk board managed to convince Gates to remain on staff long enough to hire Fayette Avery McKenzie as president in 1915.

At first, it seemed that McKenzie was dedicated to furthering the aims of all who had come before him. Under the motto, "Let us dare to be a university," McKenzie focused on continuing the expansion of the school's curriculum and the raising of its standards.¹³¹ Yet, raising the university's standards to the "highest standards of collegiate education irrespective of color," inadvertently caused resentment among students.¹³² Meanwhile, McKenzie went to great

¹²⁹ *Nashville Globe*, 15 November 1912.

¹³⁰ Lester C. Lamon, "The Black Community in Nashville and the Fisk University Student Strike of 1924-1925," *The Journal of Southern History* 40, No.2 (May 1974), 229; *Nashville Globe*, 15 November 1912.

¹³¹ Quoted in Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 30.

¹³² Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 73-74.

lengths to strengthen ties between Fisk and the local white community. Some members of the alumni were not pleased with what they viewed as “white good will gained at too great a price.”¹³³ Their feelings may have been justified as McKenzie’s plan “frankly had no place for black assertiveness. While he decried violence, injustice and segregation, gaining white trust was the major thrust of his program,” concluded Joe M. Richardson. “He [McKenzie] suppressed “radical” ideas and encouraged students to be unobtrusive.”¹³⁴

Despite alienating Fisk further from the black community, McKenzie’s penchant for endearing himself to whites, combined with his tireless fundraising efforts produced a million dollar endowment by 1924. But the financial successes of McKenzie’s campaign did little to ease the pains of the school’s black students and alumni in particular. In the shadow of World War I, blacks across the nation endured the rash of racial violence at the hands of disgruntled whites. The demands of black servicemen “fresh from the front” for democracy at home, infuriated poor whites and fed existing racial tensions over large-scale black migration north as well as increased job competition. These white mobs targeted both individual blacks whom they lynched and black communities were destroyed. Dubbed “Red Summer” by journalist and poet James Weldon Johnson, the “bloody” summer and fall of 1919 had seen white-initiated race riots in both northern and southern cities including most notably Chicago, Illinois, Washington, D.C. and Elaine, Arkansas. Tennessee however, was not left untouched, as Memphis and Knoxville suffered race riots in June and August respectively.¹³⁵

Poet Claude McKay coincidentally wrote “If We Must Die,” his seminal poem in 1919.¹³⁶ While it may be reasonably conjectured that the poem was written in response to the race riots, it is clear that its content addressed themes resonating from the experiences of black veterans. With

¹³³ Ibid., 75.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 78.

¹³⁵ Jan Voogd, *Race Riots and Resistance: The Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 1.

¹³⁶ See Claude McKay. “If We Must Die,” in *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, ed. James Weldon Johnson (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), 134.

militancy and pride, they demanded the respect of all who benefitted from their service. In the decade that followed, these themes reverberated among blacks. Nowhere was this truer than in the black community of Harlem, New York, where a flowering of black writers, poets, musicians, dancers and artists during the 1920s constituted the Harlem Renaissance. Unsurprisingly, Johnson and McKay were among the principal figures of the cultural movement. Added to them were other literary greats such as Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Arna Bontemps and Alain Locke.

At a time when black cultural critics were feverishly working to cast out white stereotypes of the “Negro” as “other” and “less than” their white counterparts, Fayette McKenzie’s efforts to transform Fisk into “the leading institution of its kind in the world” would reinforce southern traditions of white paternalism. Fisk was indeed “winning the confidence of its neighbors”—its white neighbors. It was important to McKenzie that “Fisk professors are being given opportunities of interpreting the best Negro thought to white neighbors who are coming to regard the institution as the house of kindly and philosophic thinking on matters related to race.”¹³⁷ While white financial support of McKenzie’s vision for the future of Fisk may have been hailed by the *New York Times* as “an awakening realization of the need of thoroughly equipped professional [white] men and women to serve and to guide the [black] masses,” it served as yet another telling example that the cost of accommodationism was too high for blacks.¹³⁸

An austere disciplinarian, McKenzie stood firmly within the tradition of white presidents of black institutions of higher education. Similarly, the strict rules governing all spheres of student life at Fisk were neither peculiar to McKenzie’s administration or to Fisk. Regulations governing social interaction across gender lines were especially harsh. Male and female students

¹³⁷ “Confidence of Community,” *Fisk University News* XIV, No.5 (February 1924), 5.

¹³⁸ *Nashville Tennessean*, 4 June 1924; *New York Times*, 20 July 1924; Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 33.

walking alongside each other without even touching could result in expulsion. The uniform code for female students demanded that cotton stockings be worn with one white and one navy set. The uniform was to be worn in and out of class, as well as on and off campus.¹³⁹ And as Joe M. Richardson observed, “it was only natural that Fisk students, aware of the [cultural] revolution [of the Harlem Renaissance], would rebel against...regulations more appropriate for 1866 than 1925.”¹⁴⁰ Yet, not even these Victorian and puritanical restrictions alone could have incited protest from Fisk students.

“Worst than the rules, the students thought,” wrote Richardson, “was the atmosphere of distrust and suspicion created by the watchfulness of the faculty. Even worst still, was the charge that McKenzie was “dictatorial and intolerant of dissent.”¹⁴¹ But, in addition to mandatory chapel attendance, restricting student press, barring black fraternal organizations and deemphasizing athletics, McKenzie had revived his predecessor Gates’ tradition of providing special seating for white benefactors. Instead of easing concerns that the “special” provision amounted to segregation, Paul D. Cravath, chairman of the board of trustees hailed “complete segregation” as “the only solution to the Negro problem.”¹⁴² McKenzie’s decision as well as Cravath’s statement added insult to injury in light of the institution’s well-known position on the Du Bois-co-founded National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In 1920, just two years after the Nashville NAACP’s founding, McKenzie refused to support the chapter’s efforts to establish a campus-arm of the organization at Fisk on the grounds that “we want the historic type of societies made more efficient, rather than weakened by distribution of time and energies.”¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 86-87; “Fisk President States Policy,” *Nashville Banner*, 8 February 1925, 1.

¹⁴⁰ Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 90.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 89-91.

¹⁴² Quoted in *Cleveland Times*, 2 June 1923; Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 34.

¹⁴³ Quoted in Lamon, “The Black Community in Nashville and the Fisk University Student Strike,” 232.

In some ways, McKenzie and his cohorts should have anticipated a time when the simmering tensions would boil over. But even when black Nashvillians were outraged at the wrongful conviction and subsequent life imprisonment of World War I veteran and Meharry Medical College student Oswald Durant for the rape of a white telephone operator in the spring of 1923, the community did not break out in violent protest.¹⁴⁴ By the spring of 1924, Fisk's most august son W.E.B. Du Bois had grown restless with the conditions at Fisk. He alluded to his frustrations in a March 1924 piece in the *New York Amsterdam News*, when he hailed student's "fight" as "a fateful step in the development of the American Negro."¹⁴⁵ Still, no one could have anticipated that Du Bois' visit to the campus in June 1924 to witness the graduation of his daughter and only surviving child Yolande would signal the beginning of a student uprising, the likes of which Fisk had never seen before, and would not soon see again.

As the head of the NAACP and editor of its *The Crisis* magazine, Du Bois' preeminence had moved beyond the shadow of his intellectual advisory of Booker T. Washington. The campus must have been abuzz with talk of Du Bois' impending arrival. Whether they knew it or not, Du Bois had no intention of being a mere doting father during the commencement exercises. As the biggest event of the university calendar, commencement weekend drew many alumni back to the campus grounds. It was from their ranks that Du Bois was extended an invitation to give an address in the Fisk Memorial Chapel on June 2, 1924. In the past, Du Bois admittedly offered "perfunctory remarks" as he assumed "nothing further was expected." However, on this day Du

¹⁴⁴ Handled by the Legal Defense Fund of the NAACP, the conviction was reversed by the State Supreme Court and remanded for a new trial. Released on a "small bond," Durant was never brought back to trial. "Legal Defense," *The Crisis* 31, No.5 (March 1926), 230; "National Medical Association Activities," *Journal of the National Medical Association* 19, No.1 (January-March 1927), 30; Lamon, "The Black Community in Nashville and the Fisk University Student Strike," 234.

¹⁴⁵ *New York Amsterdam News*, 17 March 1924. Quoted in Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 92.

Bois boldly declared to the Fisk community, “I have come therefore to criticize and to say openly and before your face what so many of your graduates are saying secretly behind your back.”¹⁴⁶

Entitled “Diuturni Silenti,” Du Bois’ address maintained “the great duty of the Negro college is to say to [its] students that the little sordid things of earth and ordinary life where they lack so much of freedom are as nothing compared with the great free realm of the spirit.”

According to Du Bois, the opposite was true at Fisk: “discipline is choking freedom; threats are replacing inspiration, iron clad rules, suspicion, tale bearing are almost universal.” While the challenge to afford discipline and guidance at Fisk were “no greater than the problems presented everywhere in the training of youth...If a student even feels disagreement with the policies of Fisk he is given to understand that he is not wanted.”¹⁴⁷ Du Bois’ extensive discussion of grievances included subjects that Fisk coeds knew all too well. He asserted that the restrictive nature of women’s uniforms, student press, athletics, fraternities and sororities “choked freedom” and disallowed “teaching the truth about the race problem.”¹⁴⁸

“Self-expression and manhood,” proclaimed Du Bois, “are choked at Fisk in the very day we need expression to develop manhood in the clothed race.”¹⁴⁹ Equally damaging was Fisk’s embrace of “propaganda which discredits all of the hard work which the forward looking fighters for Negro freedom have been doing.” Such propaganda not only “overpraises the liberal white South. It continually teaches its students and constituency that this liberal white South is in the ascendancy and that it is ruling; and that the only thing required of the black man is acquiescence and submission.”¹⁵⁰ The administration’s policy of accommodationism may have required black acquiescence and submission, but a challenge to it required that the Fisk alumni

¹⁴⁶ W.E.B. Du Bois. “Diuturni Silenti,” *The Fisk Herald* 33, No.1 (1924), 2.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

support Fisk students. “The duty of rescuing Fisk rests upon us as graduates,” declared Du Bois. “It is a duty which we may not shirk and before which we can not hesitate.”¹⁵¹

While disgruntled students and alumni must have felt emboldened by Du Bois’ support, the charges did little if anything to detour McKenzie and his supports. Ironically, it seems like Du Bois’ critique may have also emboldened McKenzie. As Raymond Wolters pointedly observed: “The criticism from Du Bois—a certified outside agitator—steeled the president’s always strong will and reinforced his self-righteousness to the point that he became, in fact, immobilized.”¹⁵² Privately, McKenzie characterized Du Bois’ attack as evidence of “bolshevistic, if not anarchistic elements of society.” These “elements” were according to McKenzie, determined “to get rid of white participation in Negro education.”¹⁵³

McKenzie’s certitude was not completely without reason. McKenzie had telegraphed the members of Fisk board of trustees about Du Bois’ address the morning after the affair. Yet, despite being well aware of the looming charges against McKenzie (and by extension themselves as board members), they offered a statement at the close of the 1923-24 college year that could not be deemed as anything less than an unequivocal endorsement of McKenzie and his motives. On July 17, 1924, they wrote to McKenzie, hailing that the school’s landmark fundraising and academic successes “are all in great measure traceable to your insurmountable courage and perseverance in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles.”¹⁵⁴ Instead of questioning McKenzie’s methods, the board declared: “We believe that the standards which you have held aloft at Fisk University, compelling as they have the admiration and endorsement of men and educators of the South as well as business men and educators of the North, have attracted the

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 10.

¹⁵² Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 41.

¹⁵³ Quoted in Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 41-42.

¹⁵⁴ “Statement from the Trustees of Fisk University to Dr. F.A. McKenzie, at the close of the College Year, 1923-24,” Executive Committee Minutes of the Board of Fisk University, 22 October 1924, 86.

attention of forces both material and spiritual which will go far toward providing the educational opportunity which the Negro is so ambitious to achieve.”¹⁵⁵

By the fall of 1924, the charges against McKenzie were well-established. Submitted to the board of trustees on October 22 by a committee of seven students, a list of student grievances included all of the charges Du Bois outlined earlier. Not only were the rules “multitudinous and complex...many of them were unwritten.” The president “arrogates to himself all power,” resulting in a “spirit of oppression” and an atmosphere where “the distrust of the students on the part of the faculty, the distrust of the faculty on the part of the students, the disposition of the president to libel and accuse the whole Negro race, the atmosphere of fear and suspicion, the factions and discontent among both teachers and students, are but reflections of the failure of President McKenzie as an executive.” His “evident disregard of Negro public opinion” the grievance claimed, “brought comment even from white Southerners and astonishment at the president’s lack of faith in the Negro race or regard for what it thinks.”¹⁵⁶

Glimpses of possible trouble ahead would be seen soon after the students’ submitted their grievances. Unsatisfied with the board of trustee’s action (or rather in-action), Fisk students readied themselves for the arrival of the Fisk board to the campus in November. They posted their list of grievances across campus and met the delegation with chants “Away with the czar!” and “Down with the tyrant.” Yet even the students’ cold reception of the board paled in comparison to their response to McKenzie’s repeated pronouncements that he was not going to yield to virtually any of the students’ demands. On February 4, the tension between McKenzie and Fisk students finally and suddenly boiled over. That night, more than 100 male students, all residents of Livingstone Hall broke their 10:00 p.m. curfew. Vowing that they would continue “until the President’s hair was white,” the students shouted, sang and broke several windows.

¹⁵⁵ “Statement from the Trustees of Fisk University to Dr. F.A. McKenzie,” 87.

¹⁵⁶ “Statement of Grievances against Fayette A. McKenzie as President of Fisk University,” Executive Committee Minutes of the Board of Fisk University, 22 October 1924, 75-76.

Even the chapel was trashed and shots were reportedly fired. All the while, the students repeated, “Du Bois!” as well as the old Negro spiritual refrain “Before I’ll be a slave, I’ll be buried in my grave.”¹⁵⁷

McKenzie responded to the students’ protest by calling the police to quell the “riot.” In multiple instances over the course of the previous year, black Nashvillians had suffered violence at the hands of local whites. Consequently, McKenzie’s decision was especially offensive to the local black community. Numerous murders, beatings and even a lynching had gone unpunished, which did not lend itself to black confidence in white police.¹⁵⁸ Luckily, the crowd of students had disbanded before the arrival of the police, but McKenzie offered the names of seven students to the police as the riot’s instigators. Taken by police escort to the president’s office, the seven students were forced to sign a statement denouncing the protest or withdraw from the university and leave the campus. Unfortunately, as McKenzie himself would later admit, he had no actual evidence, only suspicions that the seven students he implicated were involved because they had been the students who met with the board during their visit the previous November.¹⁵⁹

McKenzie’s case quickly fell apart when evidence surfaced that two of the accused students were not even on campus at the time of the unrest. Still, he remained resolute. Just as the black business community rallied around the students, white Nashville including the daily newspapers backed him. As the *Nation* keenly noted: “To white Nashville the student revolt is a Negro uprising. To black Nashville, President McKenzie has become a symbol of white

¹⁵⁷ *New York Times*, 5 February 1924; Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 47-48; Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 95-96; Lamon, “The Black Community in Nashville and the Fisk University Student Strike,” 236.

¹⁵⁸ These events included the murder of a black minister by a white police officer, the shooting of a black entrepreneur in his business by a white bar keeper, the beating of two Nashville Normal students on streetcars, and the lynching of a black youth by a mob of white men. See Lamon, “The Black Community in Nashville and the Fisk University Student Strike,” 236; Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, 49.

¹⁵⁹ Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 96-97.

domination.”¹⁶⁰ There were however, some blacks who sympathized and even supported McKenzie. Chief among the members of this small circle of black Nashvillian supporters was none other than Bookerite J.C. Napier. Having worked to secure the establishment of Nashville Normal, Napier was one of Fisk’s two black trustees. He resented the involvement of Du Bois, a relative outsider, and blamed him for the student revolt.

In truth, Du Bois could not be blamed for the ultimate success of the students’ protest. He knew no more about the students’ plans than McKenzie, and was unaware about most of what transpired until reading printed reports. A report of the alumni committee investigating the incidents later found that a spirit of unrest had long-existed at Fisk.¹⁶¹ The protest’s staying power had more to do with that spirit than any single personality. When Fayette McKenzie tendered his resignation on April 16, 1925, he noted, “I have given perhaps the best ten years of my life to [Fisk] during one of the most difficult decades in the history of the world. What I have accomplished I must leave to you and others familiar with my work to judge.”¹⁶²

There are, however, far more important responsibilities than judging McKenzie’s record. Long considered as the “child” of white paternalism, Fisk was viewed by many as having closer ties with white Nashville than any other local center for black education. It may have even been argued to great effect that the Fisk community had an unspoken loyalty to whites and as such, would never have done anything to jeopardize the system of black acquiescence underpinning that relationship. In part, this perception stemmed from Fisk’s penchant for thinking of itself as being better than its other black institutional counterparts. Indeed, there were members of the Fisk community who thought that the school’s liberal arts mission was superior to that of its

¹⁶⁰ “A Student Revolution,” *Nation* CXX (12 March 1925), 283; Lamon, “The Black Community in Nashville and the Fisk University Student Strike,” 240.

¹⁶¹ “Memorandum of findings of the Greater Fisk Committee, Presented to the Trustees of Fisk University at their Spring Meeting, 25 April 1925,” Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Trustees of Fisk University, 25 April 1925, 96-98.

¹⁶² Fayette A. McKenzie to Paul D. Cravath. 16 April 1925, Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Trustees of Fisk University, 25 April 1925, 92.

black vocational training counterparts. This conviction, however, did little to ease their own sense of outrage when they suffered proscriptions they felt were more aptly suited for persons beneath their station. In the wake of the changes ensuing from World War I, including most notably the Harlem Renaissance, Fisk students and alumni were no longer prepared to soothe white fears at the expense of black rights.

Conclusion

The role of Washington and Du Bois in black pedagogy and intellectual debates at the turn of the century are well established. Yet, the way in which these two towering figures and their respective ideologies affected a specific locality is less well documented. Even in Nashville among a long established community of elite and college educated blacks, the influence of these two men is undeniable. While Du Bois' relationship to Nashville is expected because he was Fisk alumnus, the relationship of Washington to the city is less anticipated and the totality of it was virtually unknown. Not only did Washington make regular appearances at local colleges both black and white, he regularly recruited teachers from Fisk. It was while at Fisk that he met his most important teacher, his third wife Margaret Murray Washington and through her that he developed a lifelong friendship with Nashville most distinguished black native son, James C. Napier.

It was through his relationship with Napier that Washington conducted his tour of Tennessee in 1909. The tour was used with great effect to help to push the founding of Nashville Normal three years later. As the state's first public black center of higher education, Nashville Normal was the result of several years of campaigning and fundraising among Nashville's black community. The establishment of the school was also the realization of black Nashville's call for state-funded black educational opportunities since the Colored Men's Conventions of the 1870s. While white Tennesseans had intended that Nashville Normal restrict its programs to vocational

instruction, the school's black president and faculty would carry out the long-observed mission of black Nashville schools. Education of the mind, hands and heart would enable black college graduates to improve themselves, their communities and effect positive changes in the corporate fate of the black race.

With the coming of World War I, blacks in both the North and South suffered as a result of the resurgence in white violence. Nashville was no exception. As one of the country's leading centers for black higher education, Nashville experienced a rash of violence which coupled with the restrictions on student life at Fisk resulted in a student protest in the most unlikely of places. Having lost the close relationship they had once shared with the school's white missionary founders, Fisk students were no longer willing to dismiss oppressive administrative decisions as paternalistic. Twentieth-century white administrators of black schools like Fisk had made no missionary sacrifices. Still, black Nashville was initially slow to support the protests of Fisk students. In the absence of community support, the students' drew on the Harlem Renaissance's spirit of the "New Negro" as exemplified to them by Du Bois, who supported their cause. Yet, even more important than forcing the firing of McKenzie was the symbolic leadership of Fisk students for the series of black student protests during the remainder of the decade. Together, these developments served not only as indicators of the continued role of education as activism in the black community, but also pointed to the beginning of the transformation of these schools from self-identifying as schools for blacks, to black schools—schools for and by blacks.

CHAPTER V

OF THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE, AND FOR THE PEOPLE:

BLACK ACADEMIA'S MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY GATHERING IN NASHVILLE

The first decades of the 20th century drastically changed the nation and world; Nashville and its educational complex were certainly not immune to these changes. Fisk, Meharry and later Tennessee A & I embraced the challenges of a changing educational landscape while Central Tennessee and Roger Williams struggled to confront a barrage of impediments, which threatened their very existence. Renamed Walden University in honor of Methodist Episcopal Church Bishop John Morgan Walden in 1900, the twentieth century history of Central Tennessee was particularly tragic.¹ When a fire broke out on the top floor of Rust Hall, Walden's women's dormitory on December 19, 1903, it was the first in a series of fires that would signal the end of the school's forty-year history. Four stories high, the Rust Hall had no fire escapes. Awakened from sleep by the fire, "wildest panic" ensued among its forty residents, who "jumped [from the windows] in droves, the dead and injured lying in heaps where they fell, to be fallen upon by those following them from the flaming windows."² The loss of the hall, one of the earliest permanent structures built for the education of blacks in the South, paled in comparison to the loss of human life, as twelve female students lay dead in the fire's wake.³

¹ Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors*, 40; A former teacher and newspaperman, Walden was a lieutenant-colonel in the Civil War and president of the Freedmen's Aid Society. "[L]ong interested in Negro education," he was described as "a friend of the Negro, but not aggressively or at all times, wholeheartedly so." See "A White Bishop," *The Crisis* 8, No. 2 (June 1914), 67-68; For additional biographical information see David Hastings Moore. *John Morgan Walden: Thirty-fifth bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York, Methodist Book Concern, 1915).

² *New York Times*, 20 December 1903; Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville*, 156.

³ *Daily News*, 19 December 1903; *Nashville Banner*, 19 December 1903; *Nashville Tennessean*, 19 December 1903.

For several years, numerous lawsuits against the school ensued, most of which were unsuccessful. The toll of years of legal battles, however, weighed heavily on the school whose successes were fewer and fewer in subsequent years.⁴ Even the 1915 appointment of the school's first alumnus and black president, Edward A. White, who had, by all accounts worked feverously to restore the school's reputation and academic programs, could not prevent the further decline of the school. The very same year that White began his presidency white officials reduced the school's budget to a third of the amount they had previously allocated to it.⁵ Signs of Walden's imminent decline led Dr. George W. Hubbard to secure a separate charter for Meharry's medical, dental and pharmaceutical departments as Meharry Medical College, "including the power to maintain a hospital or hospitals, and also to have and possess such other powers and privileges as are usually possessed and exercised by medical colleges, including the right and power to confer degrees" on October 13, 1915.⁶

Renamed again in 1922, the school became Walden College. A series of reductions to its academic offerings made it feasible for the college to downsize to a smaller campus above the black neighborhood of Trimble Bottom. A self-described junior college, Walden in actuality, served as a normal and preparatory school until its closure in 1929. Caused in part by the establishment and growth of Tennessee State Normal, Walden's closure marked the end of a long and glorious educational tradition. Having educated generations of black professionals, the school's most obvious enduring legacy was the continued work of Meharry Medical College.

⁴ Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee*, 156.

⁵ C.V. Roman claimed this of White's leadership: "By his ineptitude, the new president made peace impossible." See Roman, *History of Meharry Medical College*, 103; Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee*, 156.

⁶ Roman, *History of Meharry Medical College*, 29; Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors*, 57; C. V. Roman wrote that Hubbard's decision to do so "gave him great pain; for many of the graduates of Walden (old Tennessee Central) were inclined to blame him for the failure of the other departments rather than praise him for the successes of his own." See Roman, *History of Meharry Medical College*, 103.

However, the school's contributions reached well beyond medical, dental and pharmaceutical training.⁷

Not only had its legal department produced many of the South's earliest black lawyers, the contributions of its alumni to the nation's burgeoning black legal corps was nothing less than legendary. The department's first graduate, Joseph H. Dismukes, joined the school's faculty following his 1883 graduation to become Tennessee's first black law professor. Graduates George T. Robinson and J.W. Grant also joined the law faculty following their graduations in 1887 and 1890 respectively. Grant subsequently became the school's dean of the law department.⁸ Even so, the school's most notable graduate was neither of these men, it was a woman—Lutie A. Lytle.

A native of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, Lutie A. Lytle was the law school's first female graduate and one of only two graduates in the school's class of 1897. Like so many black college students of her time, she was a teacher who had used the money she earned to finance her own way through college. She too joined the school's faculty the very same year she was graduated. In doing so, she became the first woman of any color to teach at a chartered law school.⁹ Before even beginning her one-year teaching stint, 23 year-old Lytle became the first black woman licensed to practice law in the state of Tennessee and in the South. "With all the aplomb of an old

⁷ Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee*, 156.

⁸ J. Clay Smith, Jr., *Emancipation: The Making of the Black Lawyer, 1844-1944* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 344; "Captain George T. Robinson, A.M., L.L.B.," in *Twentieth century Negro literature: or, A Cyclopaedia of Thought on the Vital Topics Relating to the American Negro*, ed. Daniel Wallace Culp (Naperville: J.L. Nichols & Co., 1902), 108.

⁹ J. Clay Smith, Jr., *Rebels in Law: Voices in History of Black Women Lawyers* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998), 77; Frances E. Willard, *Occupations for Women: A Book of Practical Suggestions, for the Material Advancement, the Mental and Physical Development, and the Moral and Spiritual Uplift of Women* (Cooper Union: The Success Company, 1897), 379-381.

practitioner,” Lytle was also admitted to the criminal court in Memphis as well as Topeka, Kansas that same year.¹⁰

In addition to its trailblazing contributions of its graduates to the legal field, the alumni also made outstanding contributions to the ministry and to education. African Methodist Episcopal Church Bishop Evans Tyree and Colored Methodist Episcopal Church Bishop C.H. (Charles Henry) Phillips were among the school’s most notable alumni.¹¹ The school also produced black college presidents I. B. (Isaiah Benjamin) Scott and R. T. (Robert Turner) Brown. As the first black president of Wiley College in Marshall, Texas (1893-1896), Scott became the only black bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1904. Brown served as the fifth president of Miles Memorial College of Birmingham, Alabama (1918-1922).¹²

Walden’s contribution to black education in the South was glorious but not unmatched by other black Nashville schools. Despite its compelling list of legendary alumni, Roger Williams University also met the same fate as Walden in 1929. Yet, despite their closures, C.V. Roman contended that Nashville remained a “center of culture and rendezvous.” The unfortunate “individual mortality” of some black schools such as Walden and Roger Williams, he argued, had “not prevented the progress of the army of education.”¹³

This chapter explores the process by which Nashville’s centers for black higher education were transformed from schools for blacks to black schools. Employing Roman’s notion of the

¹⁰ “Only Colored Female Lawyer,” *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 9 September 1867. Quoted in Smith, Jr., *Rebels in Law*, 344.

¹¹ Roman, *History of Meharry Medical College*, 33-34; For biographical information on C.H. Phillips see J.W. Smith, “Biography of the Author” in *The History of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America*, ed. C.H. Phillips (1925; reprint; New York, Arno Press, 1972), 7-13; For biographical information on Evans Tyree see “A Visit to Old Friends,” *The Christian Recorder*, 22 October 1891; G. F. Riching, *Evidences of Progress Among Colored People* (Philadelphia: G.S. Ferguson, 1896), 388.

¹² *Ibid.*; For biographical information on I.B. Scott see James Terry White, *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography XIV* (New York: James T. White & Co., 1914), 262; For biographical information on R.T. Brown see “Bishop Robert Turner Brown,” *Leaders of the Colored Race in Alabama*, eds. Joseph H Moorman et al (Mobile, Ala.: News Publishing Company Inc., 1928), 14-15; C H Phillips, “Bishop Robert Turner Brown,” in *The History of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America*, 570-573, 585-586.

¹³ Roman, *History of Meharry Medical College*, 34.

“army of education” as a contextual point, it traces the founding of American Baptist Seminary in 1924 to the leadership of Roger Williams alumni. In doing so, it reveals the longstanding intra-organizational frictions among black Baptists as well as their tensions with the white-run Southern Baptist Convention for control of black theological education.

While Tennessee A & I’s growth from college to university was the product of its second president and first alumnus president Walter S. Davis, Fisk and Meharry were not lead by black presidents until well into the twentieth century. This chapter argues that Fisk and Meharry were similarly transformed by the leadership of its first black presidents Charles S. Johnson and Harold West, respectively. It contends that under their headship, Fisk and Meharry’s emergent campus culture engendered an environment in which modern movement activism could later take hold. It argues that the academic-activist personality of these administrators and their faculty not only offered Nashville black college students powerful role models, it challenged them to join the ranks of the army of education and the nonviolent army for social change.

The Legacy of Roger Williams University: The Progenitor of American Baptist Theological Seminary

Bordering the Vanderbilt University campus on Hillsboro Pike just one mile southwest of the city, Roger Williams University was about as old as Fisk and Central Tennessee. A product of the American Baptist Home Mission Society’s (ABHMS) expanded anti-slavery stance, Roger Williams was one of at least fifteen centers for black higher education established by the ABHMS. Like Central Tennessee, the school had undergone a name change from the Nashville Normal and Theological Institute to Roger Williams in 1883. With the deaths of its white missionary founders came a change in the character of the institution, a change made obvious by a series of student rebellions in the 1880s. As Bobby Lovett observed: “A new generation of northern white administrators became domineering and troublesome forces at the school.” Their

attempts to uphold financial solvency, “showed the effects of the new white supremacy philosophy that decried equality between whites and blacks.”¹⁴

Yet, the damaging effects of any clashes between overly paternalistic whites and younger, more assertive black Baptist constituents, seemed to pale in comparison to the havoc wrecked upon the school by a 1905 fire. When the fire begun around ten o’clock on the night of January 24, the city’s only black firefighter company was several miles away in east Nashville. Despite the help offered by any number of Vanderbilt students who helped white firemen fight the fire, the flames consumed and destroyed Centennial Hall, the campus’ main building. While the fire’s mysterious origins where never discovered, the campus community managed to successfully hold classes in the remaining buildings that spring. Following its spring commencement exercises, another mysterious fire razed Mansion House. The loss of Mansion House seemed to seal the sad fate of the school, which did not re-open for the fall of 1905.¹⁵

The ABHMS sold twenty-five acres of the Roger Williams campus along with its buildings to the George Peabody College in November 1910. The remaining acreage was sold to white real estate developers, who established a segregated residential subdivision. Sales to blacks were barred via deed covenants, except for the neighborhood east of 15th Avenue South, Edgehill.¹⁶ Expectedly, Black Nashville was disappointed at the loss of Roger Williams, a loss that was only deepened by the segregated neighborhood that was created in its wake. The *Nashville Globe* lamented: “Beautiful Roger Williams University is no more...The Negroes have

¹⁴ Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville*, 149-150.

¹⁵ *Nashville American*, 25 January 1905; *Nashville Banner*, 25 January 1905; Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville*, 151; See Eugene TeSelle, “The Nashville Institute and Roger Williams University: Benevolence, Paternalism, and Black Consciousness, 1867-1910,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 41 (Spring 1982), 360-379.

¹⁶ Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville*, 150.

become disgusted with such hypocrisy and have determined to erect a Roger Williams themselves and conduct the same as they see fit.”¹⁷

Lead by William Haynes, president of the Tennessee Negro Baptist Association, black Nashvillians pushed for the reestablishment of Roger Williams at the site of the former Olympic Park grounds on Whites Creek Pike. The initial \$10,000 in funding that secured the property’s purchase was contributed by the ABHMS. Pressured by black leaders who “placed guilt and pressure” on ABHMS officials, the society had little choice but to yield to black demands for the seed money, which came from the insurance payment the ABHMS received following the fires on the former campus. Initially, the ABHMS insisted that they retain the deed to the property, but pressure from the black community ultimately forced them to transfer the deed to the Tennessee Negro Baptist Association’s newly-constituted Tennessee Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention.

Reopened on September 29, 1908, the school boasted a string of accomplished black presidents following its reconstitution, including Nashville physician and minister Arthur Melvin Townsend (1913-1918), who had graduated from the school in 1898.¹⁸ Townsend was succeeded by Inman Edward Page, who was among the first two black students to graduate from Brown University and had previously served as the first president of the Colored Agricultural and Normal University, now Langston University.¹⁹ A widely-respected folklorist and composer of the spirituals, Fisk alumnus and Jubilee Singer troupe organizer John Wesley Work, Jr. served as the school’s president from 1923 until his death in September 1925.²⁰

¹⁷ *Nashville Globe*, 19 April 1907; Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville*, 151-152.

¹⁸ “Arthur Melvin Townsend,” *Who’s Who of the Colored Race: A General Biographical Dictionary of Men and Women of African Descent*, ed. Frank Lincoln Mather (Chicago: [s.n.], 1915), 266; Clement Richardson, ed., *The National Cyclopedic of the Colored Race*, (Montgomery: National Publishing Company, Inc., 1919), 364-366.

¹⁹ Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville*, 150.

²⁰ Musicologist, college professor, and college president John W. Work II (1973-1925) entered Fisk in 1891. While he majored in history, he remained deeply invested in music and received voice lessons from

Even the notoriety of its presidents could not compensate for the dearth of financial support which would ultimately lead to the institution's slow death. The final blow to the viability of the school was struck when the black Baptists split in 1915. Its two subsequent conventions, the National Baptist Convention and National Baptist Convention USA, began fundraising for their own black seminaries. Finally, in December 1928, Roger Williams' teachers and students moved to Memphis, Tennessee, where they united with the Howe Institute to form LeMoyne-Owen College.

At the time of Roger Williams' initial closure in 1905, it had produced approximately 500 graduates. However, its academic repute was not nearly as well known following its fall 1905 reopening. Although the school's faculty during that period was also widely lauded, no single Roger Williams faculty member's influence on black higher education was more keenly felt than John Hope, who began his career at the institution in 1894. Without the luxury of teaching just in his area of specialty, or even in the areas specified in his contract, Hope not only taught a variety of courses from Greek and Latin to history, he also lectured in law, history, business and the sciences. Hope thrived in the school's strict religious environment and enjoyed his role as a mentor to his students. He also donned the hat of fundraiser; his first attempt was an

original Fisk Jubilee Singer Jennie A. Robinson. Encouraged by then-President Erastus Milo Cravath to "concentrate yourself to the development and preservation of the music of your people," Work attended Harvard after graduating from Fisk in 1895. After earning a master's degree and Harvard and another at Fisk, he became an instructor of Latin and Greek at Fisk in 1898. In addition to directing the Fisk Jubilee Singers for a number of years, he assumed the mammoth task of cataloging Negro spirituals at a time when they were declining in "national popularity and general appeal." He penned Fisk's alma mater "The Gold and the Blue" as well as the seminal work *The Folk Song of the American Negro*, one of the earliest extensive studies of the origins of the songs of the African American slave experience. See John W. Work, "Negro Folk Song," *Opportunity* 1 (October 1923): 292-294; Minnie Lou Crosthwaite, "In Memory of Prof. John W. Work," *The Greater Fisk Herald* I, No. 2 (January 1926), 9-10; Linda T. Wynn, "A Family Affair: Three Generations of Black Music," *The Courier* XVIII, No. 1 (October, 1979): 4-5.

effort to build a science lab he had damaged during a foiled experiment when he was the school's science instructor.²¹

By the time Hope left the school to join the faculty of the ABHMS supported-Atlanta Baptist College in 1898, he had amassed an impressive list of mentees including Buck Colbert Franklin and Mollie Parker, who later married. Buck Franklin, who became one of the first black lawyers in Oklahoma's Indian Territory, had an especially close relationship with Hope; he and his wife would name their son John Hope Franklin.²² Yet another mentee, Mordecai Wyatt Johnson, attended Roger Williams from 1903 to 1905 (as well as the Howe Institute) but was most influenced by Hope when he was a student at Atlanta Baptist (which was renamed Morehouse College upon the death of its founder Henry L. Morehouse in 1913). As the Morehouse's president for three decades, Hope, who became its first black and sixth president in 1906, mentored scores of students including Johnson. Following his graduation in 1911, Johnson pursued graduate studies at Rochester and Harvard Divinity schools before becoming the first black president of Howard University in Washington, D.C. in 1926. Under Johnson's thirty-four year headship, Howard was transformed into a world-class university, staffed by renowned black scholars. Howard Law School Dean Charles Hamilton Houston was among these noted academicians who trained almost a quarter of the nation's black law students, including civil rights lawyers Thurgood Marshall, James Nabrit, William Hastie, Spottswood Robinson III, A. Leon Higginbotham and Robert Carter.²³

²¹ Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville*, 151; See Leroy Davis, *A Clashing of the Soul: John Hope and the Dilemma of African American Leadership and Black Higher Education in the Early Twentieth Century* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998).

²² "Roger Williams University," Buck Colbert Franklin, *My Life and an Era: The Autobiography of Buck Colbert Franklin* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 80-106; John Hope Franklin, *Mirror to America: The Autobiography of John Hope Franklin* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 9.

²³ *Ibid*; See Richard I. McKinney, *Mordecai, The Man and His Message: The Story of Mordecai Wyatt Johnson* (Washington, D. C.: Howard University Press, 1998); Genna Rae McNeil, *Groundwork: Charles*

Meharry graduate, professor and historian C. V. Roman noted that schools like Walden and Roger Williams did not close because of the quality of the work conducted by these schools. “Circumstances and not inefficiency quenched the lives of these schools. The quality of work done by a school is reflected in the lives of alumni.” Touting John Hope, Mordecai Johnson, A.M. Townsend as “sufficient vindications of Roger Williams’ standards,” Roman contended, “[t]ruly the quality of their work warranted their survival.”²⁴ Roman anticipated the question: “What then were the circumstances that closed their doors?” Their closures, he responded, were in part because of “[p]etty disagreements, administrative blunders and racial antagonism.” But above all, “[t]heir death was a tragedy of progress.”²⁵

Strange Bedfellows: The Southern and National Baptists, U.S.A. and the Founding of American Baptist

As early as 1845, the Southern Baptist Convention directed the Board of Domestic missions to “take all prudent measures, for the religious instruction of our colored population.”²⁶ Over the course of the next several decades, the convention infrequently made similar declarations about its commitment to black education. Very little materialized in the way of actual support however, until 1904, when a resolution by R. H. (Richard Henry) Boyd, secretary of the Home Mission Board called for the establishment of “The Commission,” which solidified the agreement between the Southern Baptists and black Baptists to work together among blacks. Similarly, it was not until 1913 that “definite action” was taken to establish “a

Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

²⁴ Roman, *History of Meharry Medical College*, 33-34.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁶ *Annual of Southern Baptist Convention, 1845*. Quoted in “Significant Events in the History of Negro Ministerial Education as Promoted By the Southern Baptists with Particular Reference to the Commission on the American Baptist Theological Seminary.” W.C. Fields Papers, ABTS 1959-1972, Southern Baptist Convention Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

Negro Baptist Seminary at Nashville, Tennessee.”²⁷ The resolution pledged the support of the Southern Baptists to the school’s founding as a joint venture with the National Baptist Convention. Each partner was responsible for appointing a standing committee to work with the other’s committee.²⁸

By 1914, the committees agreed to locate the college in Memphis, Tennessee. The Southern Baptists would be responsible for raising \$50,000 for the erection of the school’s first building while the National Baptists were responsible for securing the location. National Baptists planned to organize the new school on the campus of Howe Institute. Their plan was to unite the Nashville-based Roger Williams with the Memphis-based Howe Institute “thereby making Memphis a great educational center with ample funds for maintenance, operation and expansion.”²⁹ That, however, was not to be as divisiveness among those involved ultimately led to the failure of the plan as well as the loss of \$7,500 paid towards acquiring the property which was lost to foreclosure.³⁰

The failure of the black Baptists’ Memphis plan, paled in comparison to the havoc the 1915 fallout in National Baptist Convention had on the black Baptist community. Established in 1895, the convention was a loosely organized federation of most of the black churches in the United States. Led by Arkansas-based Reverend E. C. (Elias Camp) Morris³¹ since its founding,

²⁷ A. M. Townsend, “Some Observations on the History of the American Baptist Theological Seminary (1913-1951).” Southern Baptist Convention Archives, Nashville, Tennessee, Certificate of Incorporation & Historical Papers, Box 3, File 24.

²⁸ “Proceedings of the 58th Session, 68th year held at St. Louis, Missouri, May 16, 1913,” *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1913*.

²⁹ See Thomas Oscar Fuller, *History of Negro Baptists of Tennessee* (Memphis, Tenn.: Haskins Print, 1936).

³⁰ “The Baptist Controversy,” *The Crisis* 11, No. 6 (April 1916), 314-316; Powell, *Lights and Shadows*, 16.

³¹ Elias Camp Morris (1855-1922) was a minister, church leader and educator. Born a slave in Georgia, Morris was largely self-educated before attending Roger Williams University. The recipient of honorary degrees from the State University in Louisville, Kentucky and Alabama State Normal University (now Alabama Agricultural & Mechanical University), Morris founded the Arkansas Baptist College (an HBCU still in operation in Little Rock, Arkansas) in 1884. In addition to serving as president of the Arkansas Baptist Convention for three decades, Morris became president of the National Baptist Convention, the

the convention boasted two and a half million persons in its union by 1915. Similarly, the convention's National Baptist Publishing Board was lead by R. H. Boyd since its 1896 founding. Located in Nashville, the publishing board's primary function was to produce literature for denominational use but it also published denomination histories as well as books on a number of secular subjects. In addition to being the first publisher of Baptist literature for blacks, the publishing board had produced more than 128 periodicals and amassed a physical plant valued at more than \$350,000 by 1913.³²

The struggle for control over the convention and by virtue of it, also control over the publishing board, reached a fever pitch at the annual session in Chicago, Illinois. Morris' camp claimed that the convention unequivocally owned and hence, should control the publishing board. Boyd and his supporters argued that the publishing board had been established against the will of Morris and had been built without any noteworthy aid from Morris and his cohorts. The publishing board, Boyd contended, was an independent entity, incorporated in the state of Tennessee, with its own board of directors.³³

In an attempt to solidify its control, the Morris camp formally organized as the National Baptist Convention of the United States of America, Incorporated (National Baptist, U.S.A), while the Boyd faction continued as the National Baptist Convention of America, unincorporated. In the years following the 1915 rift, the "disturbing financial and economic conditions of the country, and the bitter strife between the divisions of the Negro Baptist

largest denomination of black Christians in the United States—a position he held until his death in 1922. See "Reverend Elias Camp Morris, Ph.D., D.D." in *Who's Who Among the Colored Baptists of the United States*, ed. Samuel William Bacote Kansas City: Franklin Hudson Publishing Co., 1912), 14-17, E.C. Morris, *Sermons, Addresses and Reminiscences and Important Correspondence, With a Picture Gallery of Eminent Ministers and Scholars* (Nashville, Tenn.: National Baptist Publishing Board, 1901).

³² *Negro Baptist History U.S.A. 2*, ed. Lewis D. Jordan (1930; reprint; Nashville; The Sunday School Publishing Board, 1995), 113-126; Leroy Fitts, *A History of Black Baptists*, 92-93; See also Bobby L. Lovett, *A Black Man's Dream: The First One Hundred Years* (Jacksonville, Fla.: Mega Corp., 1993).

³³ See James D. Tynms, *The Rise of Religious Education Among Negro Baptists* (New York: Exposition Press, 1965), 165-166.

conventions” prevented any notable progress toward the founding of a black Baptist school in the state.³⁴ When an attempt to unite both black National Black conventions at a meeting in 1918 dubbed the Peace Commission failed, representatives of the white Southern Baptist Convention aligned themselves with the National Baptist, U.S.A, Inc, because of their shared belief in denominational control of denominational institutions.³⁵

Founded by the National Baptist, U.S.A., the National Baptist Theological Seminary and Bible Training School opened in Memphis, Tennessee under the leadership of T. O. (Thomas Oscar) Fuller³⁶. By the time he assumed the school’s leadership, Fuller, who had been principal of Howe Institute since 1902, was the only black senator in the North Carolina senate during his tenure. For two years the school though “poorly equipped and lacking in support, stood as the beacon light” in the city.³⁷ In 1918, National Baptist, U.S.A. fulfilled a recommendation of the Peace Commission to move the Seminary from Memphis to Nashville. In connection with Roger Williams University, the school opened in Nashville on December 18 with Roger Williams alumnus A. M. Townsend as its president.³⁸

The following year a special Joint Commission was established at the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention to work out the agreement for the seminary between the

³⁴ Powell, *Lights and Shadows*, 19.

³⁵ “Meeting of the Peace Commissions at Memphis, Tennessee, March 19, 1918,” in *Negro Baptist History U.S.A.* 2, ed. Lewis D. Jordan, 130-132; Townsend, “Some Observations on the History of the American Baptist Theological Seminary,” 2; Powell, *Lights and Shadows*, 21; Lewis Garnett Jordan, *History of Negro Baptists, U.S.A. 1750-1930* (Nashville, Tenn.: Sunday School Pub. Board, N.B.C., 1930), 138.

³⁶ Thomas O. Fuller (1867-1942) was an educator, minister and state senator. Born to ex-slaves, Fuller’s parents were literate and believed in the value of education for their children. Educated at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, Fuller graduated as class valedictorian in May 1890. He earned a M.A. from Shaw in 1893 and was elected to the North Carolina State Senate in 1898. As the state’s only black senator, Fuller faced white racism and black disgruntlement with his accommodationism. Two years later, Fuller moved to Memphis, Tennessee to assume the pastorate of the city’s First Colored Baptist Church. In 1906, he earned a Ph.D. from the Agricultural and Mechanical College at Normal, Alabama (now Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University) followed by a D.D. from Shaw University in 1910.

³⁷ *Home and Foreign Fields*, January 1917. Quoted in Powell, *Lights and Shadows*, 20.

³⁸ *Home and Foreign Fields*, July 1918. Quoted in Powell, *Lights and Shadows*, 22.

Southern Baptists and National Baptist, U.S.A.³⁹ The school had opened at the last site of Roger Williams University but by July 1921, the Joint Commission announced plans to erect its campus on land adjacent to the campus. By December of the same year, the commission announced that a “perfect agreement” had been reached on “all matters affecting the building, organization and conduct of the [s]eminary.” In addition to its plan to erect the school’s first building, the commission vowed “[t]he President and Faculty of the Seminary will be Negroes as a matter of course.”⁴⁰ The agreement also detailed that the management of the seminary property and assets be controlled by a board of twelve members—eight from the Southern Baptists and the remaining four from the National Baptist, U.S.A.⁴¹

The commission’s black members included former National Baptist President E. C. Morris, former Howe Institute Principal T. O. Fuller, minister and novelist Sutton E. Griggs, Roger Williams graduate W. F. Lovelace, Bishop College graduate, editor and publisher of the Star Publishing Company (which was associated with the black newspaper *Dallas Express*) E. W. D. Isaac and Charles H. Parrish, Sr. president of State University in Louisville (1918-1931) (now Simmons College of Kentucky).⁴² This progress was followed by a few setbacks, perhaps none more damaging than the perception by some that “the [s]eminary was not really a [n]ational [t]heological necessity but a Nashville theological project.”⁴³

The commission’s single most important white member was Orren L. Hailey. Heralded by A. M. Townsend as a “leader, teacher, helper of everybody and the special friend of colored

³⁹ *Minutes of the 64th Session of the Southern Baptist Convention, May 1919, Atlanta, Georgia*; Powell, *Lights and Shadows*, 22-23.

⁴⁰ “Report of the Joint Commission Meeting,” Chattanooga, July 6, 1921, Certificate of Incorporation, etc., SBCA; *Nashville Banner*, 14 July 1921; *Nashville Tennessean*, 30 December 1921; Powell, *Lights and Shadows*, 23-24.

⁴¹ Townsend, “Some Observations on the History of the American Baptist Theological Seminary,” 2-3; Powell, *Lights and Shadows*, 25.

⁴² Other members included L.K. Williams, E.M. Lawrence and William Haynes. See *1922 Convention Action—Condensed Statement of Agreement between National Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention*.

⁴³ Powell, *Lights and Shadows*, 26.

Baptists,” Hailey was a Tennessee native who had selected Southern Baptist Theological Seminary President E. Y. Mullings to offer the 1913 resolution responsible for initiating the first discussion about a black seminary. Having also begun a writing campaign that same year, the realization of his dream began in earnest when he served as one of the Southern Baptist Convention’s first commissioners in 1914. Despite a one-year stint as president of Wayland Baptist Church in Plainview, Texas, Hailey maintained long association as a secretary and later general secretary to the board governing the school.⁴⁴

Hailey’s role as a powerful force behind the school’s founding cannot be over-emphasized. In the years between the conceptualization of the seminary and the actual opening of its doors on September 14, 1924, publishing board leader R. H. Boyd and National Baptist, U.S.A. President Morris died in August 1922 and September 1922 respectively. In the wake of Morris’ death, Vice President Dr. Wesley G. Parks, a Roger Williams graduate who had been ordained at Nashville’s Spruce Baptist Church assumed the convention’s leadership as interim president from September until December 1922. Morris was narrowly defeated in his bid for president at the convention’s 42nd session and died suddenly soon after on September 13. “His death,” observed Ruth Powell, “left another big gap in the Baptist ranks.” Having had close ties with Nashville’s Baptist community and been a strong supporter of the seminary, Parks’ death “also raised the question in the minds of many as to whether the strain of the convention or the heartbreak of losing the election was the cause of his untimely death.”⁴⁵

Despite the unexpected deaths of these three Baptist giants, the convention in general and Nashville black Baptists in particular, were able to advance the cause of the seminary. “[I]n

⁴⁴ Townsend, “Some Observations on the History of the American Baptist Theological Seminary,” 3-4; “In Memoriam,” *Baptist and Reflector*, 15 February 1934, n.p., O. L. Hailey, Baptist History File, SBCA; Powell, *Lights and Shadows*, 166; O. L. Hailey, “The Genesis and Progress of the American Baptist Theological Seminary,” (c.1925) ASTS, Baptist History File, SBCA.

⁴⁵ “W.G. Parks, D.D., LL.D.” in *Who's Who Among the Colored Baptists of the United States*, ed. Samuel William Bacote (City: Franklin Hudson Publishing Co., 1912), 22-24; Powell, *Lights and Shadows*, 26-27.

harmony with the genius and true spirit of Baptists and mandates of the convention,” the Tennessee legislature helped the seminary secure forty acres of land for its establishment. Two boards were established for this purpose: “The Holding Board,” which was responsible for all the seminary’s assets and “The Governing Board,” which was responsible for the organization and management of the seminary’s educational and internal affairs.⁴⁶

On September 14, 1924, the school officially opened as American Baptist Theological Seminary at White’s Creek Pike. The seminary’s opening was the climax of the 44th annual session of the National Baptist, U.S.A., which was held in Nashville, Tennessee. Educated at Bishop College and Arkansas Baptist College, the Reverend Dr. L. K. (Lacey Kirk) Williams, the convention’s president, characterized the seminary’s opening as “a contribution to the reduction of the supply of lyncher’s ropes to the development of the Negro race, and to a better understanding and fuller co-operation between the negroes and whites of America.”⁴⁷ Further, Williams “assured his white brethren that their debt to the black race had not yet been paid.” Characterizing the seminary as the “greatest contribution of the South...to their negro brethren...because the genius of the negro race is its religious tendency,” Williams claimed “white Baptists are paving the way for a more intelligent, cooperative and religious people.”⁴⁸

Williams’ tone of accommodationism was even stronger the following day, during his closing address to the convention. Newspaper reports in the *Nashville Banner* and *Evening Tennessean* both reflected Williams’ praise for Nashville’s white media and condemnation of black criminality rather than any commitment to social justice.⁴⁹ “We must have a common

⁴⁶ *Journal of the 43rd Session of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.*, September 9-10, 1923, Los Angeles, California; *1923 Convention Action of the Southern Baptist Convention Condensed Statement of Agreement Between National Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention*, 2; Powell, *Lights and Shadows*, 28.

⁴⁷ Merah Steven Stuart, *An Economic Detour: A History of Insurance in the Lives of American Negroes* (College Park, Md.: McGrath Pub. Co., 1940), 97-99; *Nashville Banner*, 15 September 1924.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Nashville Banner*, 15 September 1924; *Evening Tennessean*, 15 September 1924.

ground on which we can meet and discuss conditions and the propaganda of the demagogue, who says that the negro sees social intermingling with the white race as consigned to the lowest part of hades, the place where he belongs.” Black southerners, he claimed, “would rather remain right here and help to make this country what God intended it to be...good schools, protection of life and property, the free and untrammled use of the franchise are the things we seek and not the monster called social equality.”⁵⁰

It is difficult to if not impossible to know whether Williams’ description of social equality as a “monster” was a true reflection of his philosophy or merely a tactic he employed to secure white support. James Melvin Washington, for example, has pointedly noted that “separatist rhetoric, widely publicized in black newspapers” since the late-nineteenth century, “created more problems than black leaders expected.”⁵¹ Williams was undoubtedly aware of the ambiguous nature of white support for black endeavors, as were the school’s small but eminent faculty of just three men—O. L. Hailey, who was white and J. H. (James Henry) Garnett and Dean and Acting President W. T. (William Thomas) Amiger—had a long history of educational activism.

Black Baptist Educational Activism Heritage and Inheritors: Early American Baptist Faculty

Despite being a former college president, O.L. Hailey’s experience paled in comparison to that of J. H. Garnett and W. T. Amiger. A Lincoln University, Wayland College and Newton Theological Seminary graduate, Amiger, was president of the State University of Louisville (now Simmons College of Kentucky) from 1908 to 1915. Garnett’s experience was even more legendary, he too had been president of Louisville’s State University from 1890 to 1894. He was

⁵⁰ *Evening Tennessean*, 15 September 1924.

⁵¹ James Melvin Washington, *Frustrated Fellowship: The Black Baptist Quest for Social Power* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1986), 157.

also the president of Arkansas Baptist College in Little Rock, Arkansas (1886-1887), Guadalupe College in Seguin, Texas (1887-1891) and Houston College in Houston, Texas (1895-1899).⁵²

In 1925, the short list of faculty included Sutton E. Griggs, who was elected as the seminary's president.⁵³ While Garnett and Amiger's academic training and administrative leadership in black colleges prior to their arrival at the seminary signal the interdependent nature of black college educational experiences, the election of Griggs in particular, offers an undeniable indication of the fledging seminary's institutional culture. His father the Reverend Allen R. Griggs, was a former slave turned Baptist minister whose pioneering work in the Texas black Baptist and black educational arenas included aiding in the founding of Bishop College in Marshall, Texas, cofounding the North Texas Baptist College in Denison, Texas as well as establishing the state's first black high school and first black newspaper.⁵⁴

"Through his private teachings and public example," observed Griggs biographer Finnie D. Coleman, "Allen significantly shaped and molded his son's professional and personal lives."⁵⁵ Educated at Bishop College, Sutton Griggs graduated from Bishop in 1890 and from Richmond Theological Seminary (now Virginia Union University) in Richmond, Virginia in 1893. Having first moved to Nashville in 1899, Griggs served as corresponding secretary of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. and assumed the pastorate of the East First Baptist Church, whose

⁵² "William Thomas Amiger," in *Who's Who Among the Colored Baptists of the United States*, 30-32; "William Thomas Amiger," *Golden Jubilee of the General Association of Colored Baptists in Kentucky*, ed. C. H. Parrish (Louisville, K.Y.: Mayes Printing Co., 1915), 261; *Progressive Americans of the Twentieth Century: Containing Biographical Sketches of Distinguished Americans*, ed. Standard Biographical Works and Original Sources (Chicago: Progressive Publishing Company, 1910), 14; Powell, *Lights and Shadows*, 157-158.

⁵³ *Minutes of the 45th Annual Session of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.*, Baltimore, Maryland, September 9-14, 1925; Powell, *Lights and Shadows*, 33.

⁵⁴ At the time of his death in 1922, Griggs was the dean of North Texas Baptist College. For additional biographical information on Allen R. Griggs see Josie Hall, *Hall's Moral and Mental Capsule for the Economic and Domestic Life of the Negro as a Solution of the Race Problem* (Dallas: R. S. Jenkins, ca. 1905), 147-149; Peggy Hardman, "GRIGGS, ALLEN R.," *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fgrax> (20 December 2010).

⁵⁵ Finnie D. Coleman, *Sutton E. Griggs and the Struggle Against White Supremacy* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 17.

founding pastor Randall B. Vandavall had worked with white Baptist missionary Daniel W. Phillips more than thirty years earlier to found Nashville Normal and Theological Institute.⁵⁶

Still, his most enduring legacy in Nashville is probably the Orion Publishing Company, which he established in 1901. Characterized as a period of “unprecedented productivity,” Griggs published five novels between 1899 and 1908; due in no small measure to the fact that he owned and operated his own publishing company, which also served as the primary distributor of his books.⁵⁷ As precursors to the “New Negro” movement, Griggs’ works addressed a variety of themes including race, class, miscegenation, racial pride, black militancy and separatism and were widely read by black audiences. While subsequent generations of literary critics have debated the degree to which Griggs personally embodied the militancy of his characters, it is improbable that his white contemporaries viewed him as anything less than his characterizations.⁵⁸ Literary scholar Robert E. Fleming, noted Griggs spoke out “against racial injustice more openly and forcefully than most of his contemporaries and does so by employing a variety of techniques, which range[d] from open denunciation to ridicule.”⁵⁹

Griggs’ *Imperium in Imperio* offers excellent examples of his rhetorical style. By tracing the lives of two black friends, one poor and dark-skinned, the other, wealthy, light-skinned and of

⁵⁶ Ibid., 18; See Sutton E. Griggs, *The Story of My Struggles* (Memphis: National Public Welfare League, 1914); Helen R. Houston, “Sutton E. Griggs (1872-1933),” in *A Profile of African Americans in Tennessee History*, eds. Bobby L. Lovett and Linda T. Wynn, 55; Powell, *Lights and Shadows*, 156; Bobby L. Lovett, “First Baptist Church East Nashville (1866-),” in *A Profile of African Americans in Tennessee History*, eds. Bobby L. Lovett and Linda T. Wynn, 43-44;

⁵⁷ Coleman, *Sutton E. Griggs and the Struggle Against White Supremacy*, 18; The five novels Griggs published between 1899 and 1908 were *Imperium in Imperio: A Study of the Race Problem—A Novel* (1899), *Overshadowed: A Novel* (1901), *Unfettered: A Novel* (1902), *The Hindered Hand; or, The Reign of the Repressionist* (1905) and *Pointing the Way* (1908).

⁵⁸ While Griggs’ earliest vehement critiques included Sterling Brown’s *Negro Poetry and Drama and the Negro in American Fiction* (1932; reprint; New York: Atheneum, 1972), Hugh Glouster helped to reassert Griggs’ militant posture and subsequent legacy in his Preface to Sutton E. Griggs, *Imperium in Imperio* (New York: Arno Pr. & The New York Times, 1969). See also Robert E. Fleming, “Sutton E. Griggs: Militant Black Novelist,” *Phylon* 34 (1st Quarter, 1973): 73-77; Wilson J. Moses, “Literary Garveyism: The Novels of Reverend Sutton E. Griggs,” *Phylon* 40, No. 3 (3rd Qtr., 1979): 203-216; Maria Karafilis, “Oratory, Embodiment, and US Citizenship in Sutton E. Griggs’s “Imperium in Imperio”” *African American Review* 40, No. 1 (Spring, 2006): 125-143.

⁵⁹ Fleming, “Sutton E. Griggs: Militant Black Novelist,” 74.

mixed-race ancestry, Griggs revealed the nuances of color distinctions in American society despite the ubiquitous nature of Jim Crowism. Both the dark-skinned Belton Piedmont and light-skinned Bernard Belgrave were articulate, intelligent and promising students when they competed against each other in an oratory contest at graduation. Their lives continue in divergent paths as Belton attends college in the South while Bernard attends college in the North. While Bernard becomes a lawyer and ultimately argues before the Supreme Court, Belton begins a career as a school teacher in Richmond, Virginia where he also establishes a black newspaper to provide supplemental income for himself and his new wife. Having upset local whites with what they perceived as the political content of the paper, Piedmont is fired. He secured a job in the post office, only to be fired again when he refused to support the congressional bid of his boss' racist friend.

The similarities between Griggs' life and Belton's imagined life were particularly startling. As Fleming noted, "Griggs frequently intrude[d] his own voice to make explicit comments on the results of racial prejudice." Consider the way in which Griggs responded to Belton predicament after being fired for honoring his convictions:

Belton began to cast around for another occupation, but, in whatever direction he looked, he saw no hope. He possessed a first class education, but that was all. He knew no trade nor was he equipped to enter any of the professions. It is true that there were positions around by the thousands which he could fill, but his color debarred him. He would have made an excellent drummer, salesman, cashier, government official (county, city, state or national), telegraph operator, conductor, or anything of such nature. But the color of his skin shut the doors so tight that he could not even peep in."⁶⁰

In addition to demonstrating the restrictions on Piedmont's employment possibilities, Griggs utilized the realities of the character to allude to the ways in which racism limited the possibilities of blacks in multiple facets of their lives. In doing so, Griggs conveyed the hopelessness often experienced by even the best-educated blacks. This revelation is particularly useful, as it

⁶⁰ Sutton E. Griggs, *Imperium in Imperio: A Study of the Race Problem—A Novel* (1899; reprint; Teddington, London: The Echo Library, 2006), 56.

demonstrates Griggs' contention that even middle class blacks with the benefit of higher education, did not escape the afflictions of racism and Jim Crowism.

Imperium in Imperio is undoubtedly, as Larry J. Frazier suggested, "more than just the sum of its plots." It is unsurprising then, that "[b]y emphasizing certain themes, Sutton Griggs revealed something of the desires, frustrations, and perspectives of black Americans at the turn of the century."⁶¹ These themes included the "loyalty of black Baptists to the nation," "cooperation and patience, especially between the races," the "promot[ion] [of] patience and reject[ion] [of] violence and revenge" as well as the "reality of separation and the possibility of violence and rebellion." Frazier successfully argued that these themes were all ever-present in the black Baptist tradition, in order to "indicate that room existed in black Baptist life for expressions of radicalism."⁶² Despite the tendency of some scholars "to castigate the black churches in the South for abandoning the prophetic call of radicalism," Frazier observed that Griggs "never lost his popularity or prominence in the convention."⁶³

The latter observation is particularly important considering Finnie D. Coleman's assertion that "in his nine years as a novelist, Griggs barely disguised the political pamphlets that rested at the core of his fiction." Hailed as "a political thinker who used the novel as a vehicle for his political activism," Griggs' election as the seminary's first president, indicates at least two important truths.⁶⁴ First, it reinforces Frazier's contention about the resonance of Griggs' ideology with convention members in general. Second, it serves as an indicator of the intended

⁶¹ Larry J. Frazier, "Sutton E. Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio* As Evidence of Black Baptist Radicalism" *The Free Library*, 22 March 2000, [http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Sutton E. Griggs's Imperium in Imperio as evidence of black Baptist...-a094160822](http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Sutton+E.+Griggs's+Imperium+in+Imperio+as+evidence+of+black+Baptist...-a094160822) (20 December 2010).

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., (emphasis original); Despite his preeminence, Griggs undoubtedly must have had his fair share of detractors, especially when one considers that he was arrested for illegally obtaining money for sale of stock in his Orion Publishing Company in 1914. Concomitantly, Griggs was also accused of owing money to the National Baptist Publishing Board for printing costs and leaving First Baptist Church \$2,500 of debt for a mortgage secured for his company. See Lovett, *A Black Man's Dream*, 100-101.

⁶⁴ Coleman, *Sutton E. Griggs and the Struggle Against White Supremacy*, 38.

character of the school. As if his presidency was not evidence enough of his preeminence, the naming of the first building erected on the seminary campus as Griggs Hall, serves as further proof of both Griggs' popularity among black Baptists.⁶⁵ Built in 1925, the naming of the building reinforced the elder Griggs' legend as "an indefatigable builder, a cocksure leader, and a tremendous minister," and demonstrated at the very least, Sutton Griggs's legend as the "professional writer" and "the more proficient public speaker."⁶⁶

Griggs' presidency was sadly short-lived. When illness forced him to resign just one year following his appointment, Amiger served as acting president and then as president from 1927 until his death in 1929.⁶⁷ The loss of Amiger was compounded by the relocation of Roger Williams to Memphis the same year. Because Roger Williams provided academic and collegiate training for the seminary, its move meant American Baptist students needed to secure instruction at other Nashville black colleges. The student's inability to travel the substantial distance to the city, combined with the National Baptist and Southern Baptist conventions' failure to meet the seminary's financial obligations resulted in its relocation to the Meharry Medical College campus in some of Walden's former buildings.⁶⁸

The commission reasoned that the seminary "was not being given encouragement and support, either financially or morally, by the Baptists and citizens of Nashville" because of its distance from the city.⁶⁹ As a part of a Trevecca College scheme to acquire the campuses of American Baptist and Roger Williams, school officials signed an agreement in 1932 for Trevecca to purchase the seminary property. Despite occupying the property for two years, Trevecca defaulted on its \$15,000 purchase agreement; in turn the seminary's financial problems persisted.

⁶⁵ Powell, *Lights and Shadows*, 33.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 17-18; Coleman, *Sutton E. Griggs and the Struggle Against White Supremacy*, 18.

⁶⁷ Powell, *Lights and Shadows*, 33-36.

⁶⁸ Townsend, "Some Observations on the History of the American Baptist Theological Seminary," 22-23; Powell, *Lights and Shadows*, 40.

⁶⁹ , "Some Observations on the History of the American Baptist Theological Seminary," 23.

Unable to pay its rent to Meharry, American Baptist's deficit included teachers' salaries, which alone were almost \$8,000 in arrears.⁷⁰ When Trevecca vacated the property in June 1934, the seminary was finally able to return to its original site.

During these difficult years the school was guided by Garnett, Dean of the Seminary, who began serving as acting president in 1930, until the election of Roy A. Mayfield as president in 1932. For four years, Mayfield did the best he could to advance the cause of the seminary, traveling across the country to attend church meetings, recruit students and above all, to raise money.⁷¹ Even so, it was General Secretary Hailey who was chiefly responsible for the school's fundraising efforts. Lauded at the seminary's opening as the person who "more than any other individual perhaps was responsible for the inception of the idea of the seminary and pushing it through the Southern Baptist convention," Hailey was a powerful force behind the seminary for more than two decades.⁷² In a 1925 pamphlet entitled "The Genesis and Progress of the American Baptist Theological Seminary," Hailey attempted to answer the anticipated question: "Why build this seminary?" He responded, "[t]he Negroes, themselves, feel deeply the need of it, and beg us to do it...It would show such a fine spirit of brotherly helpfulness on the part of the strong for...us to lend our help, so as to insure the success of the [s]eminary."⁷³

Hailey's job was by no means an easy task. As A. M. Townsend pointedly noted, "perhaps the greatest of all difficulties...[that] confronted the Seminary, at least the most paralyzing, has been its lack of definite and reliable financial support."⁷⁴ The difficulty of raising money grew exponentially in the wake of Hailey's death on February 10, 1934. A memorial in *Baptist and Reflector* noted, "Hailey spent the last fourteen years of his life in advancing the

⁷⁰ Ibid., 23-24; Powell, *Lights and Shadows*, 40-41.

⁷¹ Powell, *Lights and Shadows*, 36-40.

⁷² *Nashville Banner*, 15 September 1924.

⁷³ Hailey, "The Genesis and Progress of the American Baptist Theological Seminary."

⁷⁴ Townsend, "Some Observations on the History of the American Baptist Theological Seminary," 21.

interests of religion among Negroes all over the country.”⁷⁵ At 81 years old at the time of his death, Hailey had outlived most of his black Baptist contemporaries in the fight for the seminary’s founding. “[T]he death of most of the loyal and devoted pioneers, and promoters of the Seminary, who were saturated with the spirit of the purpose and need of the seminary to help especially the underprivileged negro preacher and leader,” asserted Townsend, was among the “many difficulties and besetments [by which] its progress has been greatly handicapped.”⁷⁶

At the end of its first decade the dearth of financial support for the seminary caused a series of interconnected realities. An “inability to pay continuous surmounting debts,” made it difficult “to secure a qualified faculty, to provide adequate equipment and facilities to carry on, or, to bid for a higher type of students.”⁷⁷ The difficulties posed by the passing of these important figures compounded the challenges of “the rapid shifting of Presidents, its teaching force, and the moving of Roger Williams College”⁷⁸ These challenges to the seminary’s viability continued to gnaw at its attempts at development and growth. The seminary’s successes therefore, were hard-fought testaments to the commitment of a core of supporters who primarily included pioneering black college founders, administrators and graduates.

Black Renaissance at Fisk: The Presidency of Thomas Elsa Jones and the Gathering of Black Academia

While American Baptist struggled to find its niche well into the 1930s, Fisk, which had long carved out its place among the leading black colleges in the South, struggled to repair its fractured relationship with its white benefactors. Upset over the 1924-1925 student rebellion and subsequent resignation of Fayette McKenzie, white Nashville was especially miffed at Fisk. Not only had they temporarily “lost faith in Fisk,” observed Joe M. Richardson, “[s]everal local

⁷⁵ “In Memoriam,” *Baptist and Reflector*.

⁷⁶ Townsend, “Some Observations on the History of the American Baptist Theological Seminary,” 21.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

whites, especially those who believed blacks should stay in their “place,” refused to pay pledges promised for the endowment.”⁷⁹ Recognizing the utility, if not essential nature of friendships with local whites, the Fisk Board of Trustees was slow to pick the school’s next president. While they did so, “the burden of putting together the pieces left from the demonstration, strike and resignation” fell to a six-person administrative committee of board, faculty, and staff and alumni representatives.⁸⁰

Serious matters left unresolved in the wake of the debacle, meant that the committee was responsible for determining whether or not expelled student activists would be readmitted. Committee members did not shirk their duty to be fair in their considerations. This was especially evident when they decided the fate of George Streater, the “leader” of the student activists. Board of Trustees Chairman Paul D. Cravath was strongly opposed to Streater’s re-admittance and he had no qualms making sure the committee knew his position on the matter. In a letter to Executive Chairman and Dean Professor Augustus F. Shaw, Cravath who “was by far the most powerful man on the board of trustees,” charged that no college would compromise its dignity to reinstate “leaders in a movement who pursued a course of such rowdyism and lawlessness”—leaders no doubt like Streater and his cohorts.⁸¹

In the first of several indicators demonstrating their courageous defiance of the *status quo*, the committee readmitted the student activists in 1926. L. (Levi) Hollingsworth Wood, who represented the Fisk board on the interim administrative team, praised the committee for having

⁷⁹ Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 101.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*; Thomas M. Brumsfield, assistant professor of Greek and Latin and Minnie Lou Scott Crosthwaite (1860-1937), registrar were both Fisk graduates. Crosthwaite completed Fisk’s Normal School program in 1877 and served faithfully as registrar from 1910 to 1926. The following year, Crosthwaite became the first Fisk alumna to serve on the Fisk Board of Trustees, remaining on the board for eight years. See Jessie Carney Smith, “Minnie Lou Crosthwaite,” in *Notable Black American Women, Book II*, ed. Jessie Carney Smith (Detroit: Gale Research, 1996), 156-158.

⁸¹ Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 101-102; Paul D. Cravath to Augustus F. Shaw, 27 November, 1925 in Thomas Elsa Jones Collection, John Hope and Aurelia Franklin Library at Fisk University, Special Collections and Archives (hereafter cited as Jones Papers).

the “backbone” to reinstate the students despite the fierce opposition of many powerful detractors.⁸² Their decision to do so, may have pointed to an effort to meet the demands of unhappy Fisk alumni. Similarly, this may have been at least in part, motivation for their decision to employ more black teachers. On at least one occasion, Richardson noted that the committee’s attempt to do so meant that “a white woman was dismissed to make a place for a black faculty member.”⁸³

On February 18, 1926 the Fisk board announced the selection of Thomas Elsa Jones as the university’s fifth president. However, controversy over his appointment ensued immediately in the press. Just one day following the announcement, Paul D. Cravath, in a letter to the editor, attempted to dispel claims “indicating there was a preference by the students and alumni for a negro president.”⁸⁴ Maintaining that, “no race issue was involved” in the student protest of previous years, Cravath asserted, “students and alumni shall agree that Fisk shall continue its tradition of a white president and a mixed negro and white Faculty.”⁸⁵

Born in Fairmount, Indiana, Jones was a graduate of Earlham College (A.B., 1912) in Richmond, Indiana and Hartford Theological Seminary (B.D., 1915; M.A., 1917). Having taught in Indiana public schools, he went to the Society of Friends’ mission in Tokyo Japan where he taught economics at Keio University; he also served a stint as the Young Men’s Christian Association in Vladivostok, Siberia before assuming the Fisk presidency. He returned from Tokyo in 1924 and enrolled in Columbia University’s doctoral program. Even so, his administrative experience was more limited than his predecessors’. As Richardson observed,

⁸² L. Hollingsworth Wood to Augustus F. Shaw, 23 November, 1925, Jones Papers; Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 102.

⁸³ Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 102.

⁸⁴ See *New York Times*, 18 February 1926; *New York Times*, 25 February 1926.

⁸⁵ *New York Times*, 27 February 1926.

“President Jones had no experience in race relations and less as an administrator in educational institution.”⁸⁶

When he arrived at Fisk Jones was indifferent to his expected role as the solver of Fisk’s racial challenges. Described by Fisk alumnus H.H. (Henry Hugh) Proctor as a “Saxon, without the superiority complex,” Jones’ impending arrival was anticipated as “an ambassador[ship] of friendship.”⁸⁷ He may have self identified as an educator, but the “young, vigorous and bright” soon found out that in order to be a successful administrator he would have to lead the unification of the fractured Fisk family.⁸⁸ On December 4, representatives of more than 100 educational institutions all over America began arriving in Nashville for Jones’ inauguration. Met with a standing ovation as he took his position on the platform of the Fisk Memorial Chapel, Jones declared in his address:

“For sixty years Fisk University has stood at the forefront of higher education of colored people...Its name has been heard throughout the world; it has symbolized the struggles of the race to overcome difficulties and to find a larger place in life, and it has inspired hundreds of thousands who never have become students here to strive to be like Fisk men...Let us not close our eyes to the fact that the simple-minded, ambitionless ‘Uncle Tom’ type of negro is passing and in his stead is arising an American citizen who owns his own home, operates his business and provides for his own.”⁸⁹

In addition to keenly understanding what W.E.B. Du Bois called “the strivings of negro people,” Jones also clearly articulated his vision for the future of Fisk.⁹⁰ Declaring that the institution had “come to a new day,” Jones maintained:

“[w]e are as a runner stripped for a race. Before us lies the goal of a great university, well organized, well equipped, and capable of voicing the aspirations of thirteen million American citizens...The essentials for Fisk’s success are already about us and within us.

⁸⁶ “Education: President Jones,” *Time*. 1 March, 1926; “Dr. Thomas E. Jones, Earlham Ex-head, 85,” *New York Times*, 6 August, 1973; Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 102-103.

⁸⁷ “Thomas Elsa Jones,” *The Greater Fisk Herald* II, No. 1 (October 1926), 7; Collins, *One Hundred Years of Fisk University Presidents*, 94-95.

⁸⁸ Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 103.

⁸⁹ *New York Times*, 5 December, 1926; *New York Times*, 8 December, 1926; See “Inaugural Address of President Jones,” *The Greater Fisk Herald* II, No. 4 (January 1927), 14-18.

⁹⁰ See W.E.B. Du Bois, “Strivings of Negro People,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 80 (August 1897): 194-198; “Inaugural Address of President Jones,” *The Greater Fisk Herald*, 16.

We have a faculty, student body and alumni which have been tested and have refused to let Fisk die.”⁹¹

Dubbed “the last missionary” by alumnus and Fisk Professor of English L.M. Collins, Jones set out to meet some student and alumni demands. Among his most meaningful concessions was to hire a black dean. A graduate of Knoxville College, Ambrose Caliver had been working at Fisk since 1917 to implement Fisk’s vocational educational program. During the summer of 1927, Jones promoted Caliver to dean, making him the first black dean in the school’s history.⁹² The board of trustees’ decision to permanently reserve three of its seats for Fisk alumni in June 1926 was probably also inadvertently credited to Jones’ leadership.⁹³ The same year, a faculty committee on which the president served, tried to appease student demands that the Jim Crow regulations of the McKenzie era be abolished. Not only were students, for example, able to walk together across campus, “a few well chaperoned and carefully managed dances on campus” were also permissible. At Jones’ urging, the ban on the establishment of black fraternities and sororities was also removed. This decision was especially important to Jones’ efforts to unite the campus community as many students were already members of these organizations at other locations throughout the city.⁹⁴

The following year, the student government was reinstated and Jones’ image as a “progressive president” was similarly further advanced by the establishment of the *Fisk News* as

⁹¹ “Inaugural Address of President Jones,” *The Greater Fisk Herald*, 16.

⁹² L.M. Collins, *One Hundred Years of Fisk University Presidents, 1875-1975* (Nashville: Hemphill’s Creative Printing, Inc.), 89-135; *Greater Fisk Herald*, December 1927, 11; Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 103; Later appointed by President Herbert Hoover as Senior Specialist in the Education of Negroes in the U.S. Office of Education in 1930, Ambrose Caliver also worked in the same capacity as a part of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s “Black Cabinet.” Through extensive travel and tedious surveys, he raised national awareness about the funding failures of public schools and revealed the disparities in education between blacks and whites, especially in the rural South. For more information on Caliver see Theresa B. Wilkins, “Ambrose Caliver: Distinguished Civil Servant,” *Journal of Negro Education* 31, No. 2 (Spring, 1962), 212-214.

⁹³ The first three alumni members of the Fisk Board of Trustees were Dr. Henry Hugh Proctor, Dr. Ferdinand Augustus Stewart and Mrs. Minnie Lou Crosthwaite. See Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 103.

⁹⁴ “Minutes of the Fisk Board of Trustees of Fisk University,” 6 December 1926; *Fisk University Catalog, 1927-1928*; Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 107-108; See also Mildred De Jarnette Thomas, “Fisk’s First Year With Dr. Jones,” *The Greater Fisk Herald* II, No. 9 (June 1927), 10, 16, 23.

an alumni organ.⁹⁵ Although even when weighed together, these changes in Fisk policy would “provoke an unbelieving chuckle from present Fisk students,” observed Joe M. Richardson, “but at the time they seemed momentous.”⁹⁶ Several members of the alumni, however, were very impressed with Jones’ headship almost immediately. In addition to characterizing the new president as possessing “the modern viewpoint in college life,” the October 1926 editorial of President of the Greater Fisk Committee of New York alumnus H.H. Bennett declared of Jones:

“He believes in the largest possible liberty for students consistent with the good of the institution as a whole, and he may be expected to expand the present student activities. . . While deeply appreciative of the benefactors of the institution, he desired to have Fisk really representative of its constituency, a school of the people, by the people, and for the people in whose interest it was built.”⁹⁷

L.M. Collins suggested that Fisk students responded similarly to Jones’ leadership. Not only did these changes in policy “represent the Jones sagacity, brand of sophistication, and rationality in his approach to student affairs,” contended Collins, “[t]he students themselves responded with smiles and evident goodwill when they honored the President and Mrs. Jones at Fisk’s first dance, and the Jubilee Singers sang to the new successes under the direction of John W. Work [III] in 1927.”⁹⁸

The hiring of John Wesley Work III⁹⁹ was yet another sign of Jones’ commitment to rectifying the injustices committed by the McKenzie administration as well as to his commitment to the cultivation of Fisk as an academic and cultural leader in black higher education and black America. Within the space of five years, Work had lost the guiding presence of three of the most influential figures in his life and work. His grandfather John Wesley Work I, who was born a slave, had a keen musical appreciation which he passed on to his son. His involvement in music

⁹⁵ Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 103, 105, 108; R. Leon Campbelle, “The Student Council,” *The Greater Fisk Herald* 2, No.1 (October 1926), 24.

⁹⁶ Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 106.

⁹⁷ *Fisk Herald*, March 1926; Collins, *One Hundred Years of Fisk University Presidents*, 95.

⁹⁸ Collins, *One Hundred Years of Fisk University Presidents*, 95; “John W. Work New Music Director of Jubilee Music,” *The Greater Fisk Herald* II, No. 6 (March 1927), 15-16; Thomas, “Fisk’s First Year With Dr. Jones,” *The Greater Fisk Herald*, 23.

⁹⁹ John W. Work III (1901-1967)

included choir direction in the Reverend Nelson G. Merry's First Colored Baptist Church. When Work I died at age 93 in 1923, none could have imagined that his son Work II, who was elected to the presidency of Roger Williams University the same year, would die just two years later. However, in his memorial of Work II, fellow Fisk alumnus W.E. B. Du Bois contended that "on the day he signed that resignation [from Fisk] his heart literally broke." Despite his "deep interest in the welfare of the students, his intimate associations with them" as an alumnus, professor, and director of music, "suspicion, dislike, innuendo and cold approval in the seats of power" in the McKenzie administration drove him out.¹⁰⁰

There was, as Du Bois observed, "nothing sadder in the tragic history of human souls than those years from 1915 to 1923 when at Fisk University the soul was slowly being crushed out of John Work."¹⁰¹ Despite resignation and subsequent sudden death, the Work family either felt no animus towards Fisk or felt such deep devotion for the institution in general and for the preservation of the Negro spiritual, that Work II's widow Agnes Haynes Work, served as director of Jubilee Music until her death in 1927. Once "bowed with grief" because of Mrs. Work's passing, the Fisk family's sorrow was matched by joy felt because of John III's appointment.

Alumnus S.K. Edminston noted:

"Fisk feels quite fortunate and proud that she still has a Work directing her Jubilee program... What could be more fitting than that the son of Prof. John W. Work who bears his father's name should take up the trowel, not yet dried from service, and continue building even more loftily, more beautifully, the movement of Jubilee music to serve as an inspiration to unborn generations and is a reminder of the one great contribution of the Negro to the work—his folk songs."¹⁰²

Like Dean Ambrose Caliver, Work III represented the earliest members of President Jones' black faculty acquisitions. Having secured the employ of white Yale anthropologist Paul Radin and arranged a visiting professorship for "Father of the Harlem Renaissance" Alain Locke,

¹⁰⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, "John W. Work: Martyr and Singer," *Crisis* (May 1926): 34; *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁰² "John W. Work New Music Director of Jubilee Music," *The Greater Fisk Herald* II, 15-16.

Jones began to court St. Elmo Brady, the first black American to earn a Ph.D. in chemistry and sociologist Charles Spurgeon Johnson in the spring of 1927.¹⁰³ “[R]eady to begin life anew at Fisk,” Brady wrote to Jones to accept the offer a few weeks later, “I want you to feel that with my coming to Fisk you will have my full cooperation in every detail to help you make the University what you have in mind.”¹⁰⁴ As the director of research for the National Urban League in New York city since 1921 and the editor of *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life*, which he founded just two years later, Johnson was excited about Jones’ offer but doubtful that Urban League officials would approve the three-month leave necessary for Johnson to teach during the winter 1927 term. Jones assured Johnson that he would do anything necessary to help the process, even volunteering to make a personal request to the league’s steering committee for Johnson’s leave of absence.¹⁰⁵ In a May 1927 letter to Executive Secretary Eugene Kinckle, Jones wrote:

“Mr. Johnson is a key man for our program; first because he is a trained sociologist. Then he has balance of judgment, understands research methods and has the confidence of the Negro race...Indeed his experience and name are so important to us that our work will be seriously handicapped if not practically abandoned if Mr. Johnson cannot come.”¹⁰⁶

Funded by the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, the “work” to which Johnson referred was the establishment of a department of social science at Fisk. In their response to Jones’ request, the steering committee wrote, “we deeply sympathize with your purposes and the work which you are attempting to do at Fisk and we stand ready in every possible way to cooperate with you in feeling the tremendous responsibility which you have in developing a great university at Fisk.” Despite its supposed sympathy and desired cooperation, the committee

¹⁰³ See Thomas E. Jones to Elmer S. Imes, 4 May 1927, Jones Papers, Box 27, File 11; Thomas Elsa Jones to Eugene Kinckle Jones, 31 May 1927, Jones Papers, Box 34, File 20; Christopher Buck. *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy* (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2005), 269; Paul Radin was the mentee of Franz Boas, the “Father of *American Anthropology*.”

¹⁰⁴ St. Elmo Brady to Thomas E. Jones, 23 May 1929, Jones Papers, Box 27, File 11.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Elsa Jones to Eugene Kinckle Jones, 31 May 1927; Eugene Kinckle Jones and Thomas Elsa Jones, 7 June 1927, Jones Papers, Box 34, File 20; Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 138.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Elsa Jones to Eugene Kinckle Jones, 31 May 1927.

denied Jones' request.¹⁰⁷ It was not until the following spring that a proposal by Sears, Roebuck and Company magnate and philanthropist Julius Rosenwald seemed to offer Johnson hope that his appointment to Fisk might become a reality. In March, he wrote Jones to confirm that he had resigned his position at the Urban League to accept the post at Fisk as chair of the Department of Social Sciences.¹⁰⁸

Like Johnson, social scientist Horace Mann Bond was a mentee of pioneering white University of Chicago sociologist Robert E. Park. As early as 1927, Bond had begun unsuccessfully petitioning President Jones for a position at Fisk. Although he had already secured a position as head of the education department at Wiley College, in Texas, Bond wrote Johnson to express his interest in joining him at Fisk: "I should like to go to Fisk, for I believe that no other school at present offers the opportunities to be found there for doing the sort of thing which I have in mind."¹⁰⁹ Jones, who had been corresponding with Bond, cited funding concerns as a deterrent to hiring him. Although "not quite certain of him," Jones asserted, probably at least in part because of Johnson's vote of confidence: "Perhaps Mr. Bond is ready for this post now and if not he could be made ready in the course of two or three years."¹¹⁰

The following month, Jones offered Bond a position on the faculty under Johnson. He began teaching history and education as well as supervising dormitory students at Fisk in the fall of 1928. When Bond left Fisk to assume a post at Dillard University in New Orleans in 1935, he carried with him a connection with Fisk that had begun as a boy growing up in Nashville, grew

¹⁰⁷ Eugene Kinckle Jones and Thomas Elsa Jones, 7 June 1927, Jones Papers, Box 34, File 20; Eugene Kinckle Jones and Thomas Elsa Jones, 15 June 1927, Jones Papers, Box 34, File 20; See also Eugene Kinckle Jones and Thomas Elsa Jones, 22 June 1927, Jones Papers, Box 34, File 20; Ricardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 138.

¹⁰⁸ Charles S. Johnson to Thomas Elsa Jones, 13 March 1928, Jones Papers, Box 34, File 21; Jones replied to Johnson's letter, "I believe you will never regret this step and I think you have taken ample time to assure yourself that this is just the move you should make." See Thomas Elsa Jones to Charles S. Johnson, 20 March 1928, Jones Papers, Box 34, File 21.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in Charles S. Johnson to Thomas Elsa Jones, 13 March 1928.

¹¹⁰ Thomas Elsa Jones to Charles S. Johnson, 20 March 1928, Jones Papers, Box 34, File 21.

during his tenure as a faculty member and was cemented with his marriage to Julia Agnes Washington, a Fisk senior whom he met while teaching there. Bond would later become the first president of Fort Valley State College (now Fort Valley State University) in Fort Valley, Georgia in 1939, then the first alumnus president of Lincoln University in Pennsylvania in 1945.¹¹¹

African American poet, folklorist and anthologist Sterling Allen Brown began a short tenure at Fisk during the 1928-1929 academic year. While his time at Fisk was short, his connections to the university were hard to rival. His father, the Reverend Sterling Nelson Brown, a former slave, was a Fisk student during the 1870s and 1880s, was a professor of religion at Howard University and pastor of the Lincoln Temple Congregational Church, both in Washington, D.C. Introduced to poetry by his mother and Fisk alumna Adelaide Allen, the younger Brown's connection to the university included original Fisk Jubilee Singer Georgia Gordon, his mother's cousin. During his short time at Fisk, Brown immersed himself in the cultural and aesthetic life influences of black Nashville, which would help to define the "folk-based metaphysic of his art."¹¹²

"Brown's year at his parents' alma mater made a lasting impression on what was to him family," noted Joyce A.A. Camper, "for that's all a community is—a large family."¹¹³ As a part of the Fisk family and black Nashville community, Brown's Saturday night gatherings featured faculty, students and local artists. Brown also went on cultural expeditions that included the local barbershop and book collecting. "He found in them," observed Joanne V. Gabbin, "a tragic sense of life, an outlook he later explored and absorbed into his poetry. Brown also found an

¹¹¹ See Urban, *Black Scholar: Horace Mann Bond*.

¹¹² Joanne V. Gabbin, *Sterling A. Brown: Building the Black Aesthetic Tradition* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), 16, 19, 36-37; See Sterling N. Brown, *My Own Life Story* (Washington, D.C.: Hamilton Print. Co., 1924); John Edgar Tidwell, "Sterling A. Brown," in *The Concise Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, William L. Andrews et al, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 53-55.

¹¹³ Joyce A.A. Camper, "Sterling Brown: Maker of Community in Academia," *African American Review* 31, No. 3 (Autumn, 1997), 439.

unbeatable spirit that enabled them to accept and endure life.” These were the people Brown attempted to portray during his life’s work.¹¹⁴

The same year, Jones began a hard-fought campaign to recruit pioneering black physicist Elmer Imes to join the Fisk faculty. A 1903 Fisk graduate, Imes’ relationship to the university stretched back into its earliest days when his aunt Mabel Lewis Imes was an original Jubilee Singer. His wife Nella Larsen had attended Fisk beginning in 1907 but unceremoniously left a year later before graduating. Trained as a nurse and librarian by the time they married in 1919, Larsen was also a writer. Her first novel *Quicksand* (1928) had been met with acclaim and she was in the process of writing *Passing* (1929) which confirmed her place as a premiere novelist in the Harlem Renaissance’s New Negro Movement.¹¹⁵ Imes however, was renowned in his own right. As the second black American to earn a Ph.D. in the field, Imes’ contributions to modern physics would later become legendary.¹¹⁶

Jones must have keenly sensed Imes’ potential, as he offered him a Fisk professorship without any teaching obligations his first year with the promise that he would take a leave of absence to teach at the University of Michigan. Imes “could occasionally run down to the institution and see how things are going” wrote Jones, who agreed that Imes could purchase equipment to “lay the foundation for a real department of Physics” while on leave.¹¹⁷ Jones also offered to make provisions for Imes’ wife Nella Larsen to work in the Fisk library while he finished his work up North. “What he [Imes] could not adequately convey, given Jones’s emphasis on Fisk as a ‘family,’” observed Nella Larsen biographer Thadious M. Davis, “was that Larsen had little interest in leaving New York and that he wanted the move as much to distance

¹¹⁴ Gabbin, *Sterling A. Brown*, 36.

¹¹⁵ See Thadious M. Davis, *Nella Larsen, Novelist of the Harlem Renaissance: A Woman's Life Unveiled* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994).

¹¹⁶ Davis, *Nella Larsen, Novelist of the Harlem Renaissance*, 55-66, 117-120, 251.

¹¹⁷ Thomas E. Jones to Elmer S. Imes, 7 June 1929, Jones Papers, Box 34, File 15; Thomas E. Jones to Elmer S. Imes, 27 February 1929, Jones Papers, Box 34, File 15.

himself from her as to further his scientific research.”¹¹⁸ Imes’ arrival on the Fisk campus in 1930 marked the beginning of a ground-breaking research and teaching career which lasted until his death in 1941.

Meanwhile, Fisk was in serious need of a new library building and Charles J. Johnson “saw the necessity to establish a collection of resources in black history and culture...for the entire [Fisk] university community.”¹¹⁹ The same year, Jones solicited the aid of black bibliophile Arthur Schomburg in securing books and other historical materials to be housed in the Erastus Milo Cravath Memorial Library upon its completion in 1930.¹²⁰ “I want to be useful in helping Fisk library obtain the best collection on Negro life,” wrote Schomburg to Jones, “...the time is ripe for an exhaustive study and presentation of historical material dealing with the Negro in America.”¹²¹ Although Schomburg’s association with Fisk was short-lived, his “remarkable success in a relatively short time” served as the core of Fisk’s emergence as an “outstanding repository of black documentary resources.”¹²²

In preparation for the completion of the Cravath Memorial Library, Jones also had Charles S. Johnson contact acclaimed Harlem Renaissance painter and illustrator Aaron Douglas. Although Jones was eager to commission Douglas to paint some murals for the university, Douglas was initially indifferent about the project. Together the three men committed to Douglas’ return to the campus to paint a mural for the library and to teach a class. Although Douglas returned to Fisk in 1930, it is unsurprising that the class he was to teach never materialized; in its place emerged a series of murals that remain among his most heralded

¹¹⁸ Thomas E. Jones to Elmer S. Imes, 27 February 1929; Davis, *Nella Larsen, Novelist of the Harlem Renaissance*, 336.

¹¹⁹ Elinor Des Verney Sinnette. *Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, Black Bibliophile & Collector: A Biography* (New York: New York Public Library, 1989), 150.

¹²⁰ “[W]e will have to depend largely upon your judgment...I suppose our chief concern is not to allow any of the valuable material to get away...while the building is being erected.” See Thomas A. Jones to Arthur Schomburg, 8 February 1928, Jones Papers, Box 39, File 18

¹²¹ Schomburg to Jones, 9 September 1929, Jones Papers, Box 39, File 18.

¹²² Sinnette. *Arthur Alfonso Schomburg*, 158.

works.¹²³ In his efforts to “show three things which have affected the Negro in his progress in this country—first his religion, second, emancipation, and third, his education,” Douglas was “a pioneer in introducing the world to the Negro spirituals.”¹²⁴

Well aware of the importance of his artistry and the indelible mark his work left on the Fisk community, Douglas, in a 1931 address in the Fisk Memorial Chapel observed, “I must plead guilty to a considerable thrill in returning to Fisk University not only because of the objective view point which I bring to my work in the library, but because this work is to be found in one of America’s great and most significant seats of learning.”¹²⁵ Douglas must have also keenly sensed the progressive movement at work at Fisk as he said: “Allow me to turn aside here to pay tribute to Dr. Jones and the trustees of this institution who have broken with the past and have sought to express a new spirit in this magnificent modern library.”¹²⁶ Douglas later began a distinguished teaching career at Fisk in 1937, until his retirement in 1966.

By the beginning of the 1930s, the successes of the Jones administration were well established. “Within a few years Jones had collected a strong, research oriented faculty at Fisk,” asserted Joe M. Richardson. He had also rejuvenated black cultural expressions as a part of the campus’ culture. In addition to the hiring of John Work III and the commissioning of Aaron Douglas, the Fisk Music School began the Festival of Negro Music and Fine Arts (now Spring Arts Festival) under the direction of Ray Francis Brown, a white organist trained at Oberlin.¹²⁷ Despite Jones’ efforts to create a community of black academicians, insulated as much as

¹²³ Amy Helene Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas: Art, Race, and the Harlem Renaissance* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), 110.

¹²⁴ Rose Henderson, “Aaron Douglas, Negro Painter,” *The Southern Workman*, Clipping, n.d, Jones Papers, Box 31, File 15.

¹²⁵ “Lecture by Aaron Douglas, Painter of the Library Murals, Friday, April 24, 1931, Fisk Memorial Chapel,” Jones Papers, Box 31, File 15, 1.

¹²⁶ “Lecture by Aaron Douglas, Painter of the Library Murals, Friday, April 24, 1931, Fisk Memorial Chapel,” 8.

¹²⁷ “Program of the Festival of Negro Music and Fine Arts, Fisk University, Nashville Tennessee, Saturday, April 20, 1929,” Fiskiana, Fisk Library; “The Fisk Choir,” *The Crisis*, January 1933, 15-16.

possible from the indignities of life in the Jim Crow South, the ever-present specter of racism shook the Fisk campus in the most unexpected of ways in 1931.

The Case of Juliette Derricotte: Medical Racism, Meharry's Emma Rochelle Wheeler and the Tragedy of Jim Crow

Hand-picked by President Jones in 1928, Juliette Aline Derricotte was touring the world as secretary of the National Student Council of the Young Women's Christian Association (YMCA). "It is highly important for her work here that she be put into closest contact with the students of Japan," wrote Jones, who had spent long periods of time in Japan before assuming the Fisk presidency, "that she may know the new thoughts among college students in the Orient."¹²⁸ A graduate of Talladega College with a master's degree from Columbia University, Derricotte was also a widely-respected member of the general committee of the World Student Christian Federation, addressing students of colleges and universities in European and Asian countries.¹²⁹

Described as a "personality of great charm and force and with her broad contacts in religious work," Derricotte became the first female trustee at her alma mater, Talladega in 1929.¹³⁰ The same year, Derricotte joined the Fisk staff as the school's first black dean of women. Described as "tall, well-built [and] attractive," with a "whimsical smile" and "wistful eyes," Derricotte "possessed the class of her name."¹³¹ "She [Derricotte] quickly became a popular administrator," recalled historian and alumnus John Hope Franklin, who arrived at Fisk

¹²⁸ Thomas E. Jones to Juliette A. Derricotte, 27 June 1929, Jones Papers, Box 31, File 3; Thomas E. Jones to Gilbert Bowles, 1 November 1929, Jones Papers, Box 31, File 3.

¹²⁹ Ibid.; Twila L. Cavert, "Juliette Derricotte," Clipping, n.d., Jones Papers, Box 31, File 2.

¹³⁰ Twila L. Cavert, "Juliette Derricotte," Clipping, n.d., Jones Papers, Box 31, File 2.

¹³¹ Winifred Wygal, "An Interpretation," *The Crisis* 41, No. 3 (March 1932), 84; David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois, 1919-1963: The Fight for Equality and the American Century* (New York: H. Holt, 2000), 297.

as a freshman in September of 1931.¹³² In a September 20 letter to her, President Jones wrote, “we are delighted to have you in charge of the women during a year which promises to be full of inspiring hard work...[a]ssuring you of my continued interest and looking forward to a happy and profitable year together.”¹³³

Jones’ wishes, however, were shattered less than two months later. Derricotte, who was traveling to her home in Athens, Georgia, offered a free passage to Fisk coeds, Edward Davis and Nina Mae Johnson who were also from Athens, and Miriam Price, of Atlanta, Georgia. It is highly probable they were traveling by car in order to “avoid the ‘Jim Crow’ [railroad] cars of the South, and the difficulty in getting meals and other transportation,” as well as the other indignities that blacks often faced while traveling throughout the region.¹³⁴ What is certain, however, is that at approximately 4 o’clock on the afternoon of November 6, while driving just outside Dalton, Georgia, the south-bound car driven by Derricotte was involved in a sideswiping accident with a car traveling in the opposite direction, driven by Roy Helton a local white man. The car driven by Helton swerved to the left, striking a mailbox on its stand, Derricotte’s car swerved in the opposite direction, where it turned over and landed in a ditch. Helton and his wife, who was his sole passenger, were unhurt and climbed out of the windshield of their car.¹³⁵

The Heltons went to Derricotte’s car, as she and her passengers were not as fortunate. Both were thrown from the vehicle; Derricotte was semiconscious, Davis, unconscious, lay injured, several feet in front of the car. Johnson lay on the pavement right behind where the car landed, while Price climbed out of the ditch from under the car. Once Davis and Price regained

¹³² John Hope Franklin, “John Hope Franklin: The Fisk Years,” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 49 (Autumn, 2005), 75.

¹³³ Thomas E. Jones to Juliette Derricotte, Jones Papers, Box 31, File 5.

¹³⁴ “Report of the Commission in Interracial Cooperation: Regarding the Automobile Accident in Dalton, Ga., November 6, 1931,” n.p., Jones Papers, Box 31, File 10; W.E.B. Du Bois, “Dalton, Georgia,” *The Crisis* 41, No. 3 (March 1932), 86.

¹³⁵ “Report of the Commission in Interracial Cooperation: Regarding the Automobile Accident in Dalton, Ga., November 6, 1931,” n.p.

consciousness, they attempted to offer aid to Johnson and Derricotte respectively. Helton stated that he “hurried someone off to call for an ambulance.” But no ambulance came. Reports on what happened next differ. At least one newspaper reported that “Price, though badly injured, walked about a half mile to Dalton, and plead with authorities of the white hospital to come to the aid of the injured members of the party.”¹³⁶ Davis recounted that after having been harassed by a white man who identified himself as the owner of the other car involved in the wreck, he “began to make appeals for help from the people standing around. One man,” he recalled, “informed me that they had already sent for an ambulance.”¹³⁷

What is certain, however, is that Mrs. Gordon Mann, a white woman who lived nearby, witnessed the accident and departed the scene only to return shortly thereafter with her husband in her car. The Manns loaded Johnson, who remained unconscious and seemed to be the worst injured of the four, into the backseat of their car. Mrs. Mann said that she had inquired where blacks could get treatment, and was told to go to a doctor’s office. While her husband held Johnson on the seat with one door open to allow her to lie outstretched, Mann drove as instructed to the doctor’s office.¹³⁸ After finding Dr. G.L. Broaddrick out of his office on King Street, the Manns arrived with Johnson at the office of J.H. Steed, another white doctor whose office was a few blocks down on the same street. Another unidentified car and driver carried Derricotte to the office of Dr. O. E. Shellhorse and another still took Davis and Price into Dalton. Their driver, according to Davis, took them to the town center, where “he asked a number of people where the hospital was. A few did not know,” remembered Davis, “others said there was no hospital for Negroes and others said they would have to take us to some doctor’s home.”¹³⁹ They drove

¹³⁶ “Misses Derricotte and Johnson Die from Injuries,” Clipping, n.d., Jones Papers, Box 31, File 11.

¹³⁷ Du Bois, “Dalton, Georgia,” 86.

¹³⁸ Ibid.; “Report of the Commission in Interracial Cooperation: Regarding the Automobile Accident in Dalton, Ga., November 6, 1931,” n.p.

¹³⁹ Edward Davis, Quoted in Du Bois, “Dalton, Georgia,” 86.

further, until asking the same questions of a white boy, who directed them to the office of his father, Dr. G. L. Broaddrick.

“[I]n the rush of time,” Johnson was carried by Mr. Penn a white funeral director, “on his shoulder up the narrow stairs” and placed on Sneed’s operating table. But Johnson never regained consciousness. Assisted by a white colleague named Dr. Wood, Steed worked to save Johnson’s life for more than an hour. Her pupils dilated and bleeding from the nose and ears when her head was raised, Drs. Sneed and Wood concluded that Johnson had a brain hemorrhage due to a fracture at the base of the skull. Derricotte meanwhile, lay on Shellhorse’s operating table, drifting in and out of consciousness. She complained of severe pains in her chest and hip and Shellhorse noting the “seriousness of her condition,” called in Dr. Ault for consultation. The doctors agreed that Derricotte be kept warm, perfectly quiet and given stimulants as treatment for her condition, which they diagnosed as profound shock.¹⁴⁰

Price and Davis received medical care in the Broaddrick home, which housed his office. The doctor’s wife and sons were “very kind and helpful” to the pair as Broaddrick set Price’s dislocated shoulder and Davis’ collar bone, which had been broken. Shortly after six o’clock, Price used the Broaddrick’s phone to call undertaker J.A. Trimble in Chattanooga, Tennessee, with whom they had lunch earlier that day to tell him about the accident. Trimble assured him that he would send an ambulance; and Price also called Fisk to inform people of the accident.¹⁴¹

After treating Derricotte, Shellhouse called a black undertaker and asked him to build a fire in the Emory Street five or six-room cottage-style home of Mrs. Alice Wilson, a black woman whose home was regularly used to house black patients who needed medical care. Wilson was “without formal training or professional standing,” but it was later contended that “for a

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.; “Report of the Commission in Interracial Cooperation: Regarding the Automobile Accident in Dalton, Ga., November 6, 1931,” n.p.

¹⁴¹ Edward Davis, Quoted in Du Bois, “Dalton, Georgia,” 86; “Report of the Commission in Interracial Cooperation: Regarding the Automobile Accident in Dalton, Ga., November 6, 1931,” n.p.

number of years...major operations have been successfully performed there.”¹⁴² Transported to Wilson’s home, in an ambulance that was retired from serving whites, Derricotte was placed on a bed while Johnson was placed on a couch.¹⁴³

When Davis and Price arrived, they found them lying there without a single doctor’s supervision. Johnson was still unconscious. A formerly unconscious Derricotte, however, was “conscious and rather hysterical” when Davis and Price arrived. A while later, a doctor returned; soon after, Trimble arrived from Chattanooga with Dr. Patterson in a caravan of two ambulances (which probably doubled as hearses for Trimble’s funeral home) along with his personal car. Sometime that night, the caravan left for Chattanooga with Derricotte and Johnson each in an ambulance, followed by Trimble.¹⁴⁴

Once in Chattanooga, Derricotte and Johnson were taken to Walden Hospital. Coincidentally, the journey to Chattanooga brought them closer to Nashville literally and figuratively. Walden’s founder Emma Rochelle Wheeler was one of three female members of Meharry medical department’s class of 1905.¹⁴⁵ A Florida native who had been inspired to pursue medicine after receiving treatment from a white female diagnostician when she was a child, Wheeler was a widowed single mother and graduate of Jacksonville’s Cookman Institute¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² “Report of the Commission in Interracial Cooperation: Regarding the Automobile Accident in Dalton, Ga., November 6, 1931,” n.p.

¹⁴³ Descriptions of Wilson’s home vary from a “colored sanitarium” (“Misses Derricotte and Johnson Die from Injuries,” Clipping, n.d.) to a house in “very bad order [with]...no evidence of facilities for handling such cases as this there” (see Elmer S. Imes, Quoted in Du Bois, “Dalton, Georgia,” 86).

¹⁴⁴ *Idid.*; Edward Davis. Quoted in Du Bois, “Dalton, Georgia,” 86.

¹⁴⁵ “Meharry Exercises,” *Nashville Journal of Medicine and Surgery* XCVII, No. 1 (January 1905), 135-136; “From 1891 through 1967, 167 women received medical degrees from Meharry Medical College.” See Women Physicians Graduated From Meharry Medical College, 1891-1967,” *Journal of the National Medical Association* 60, No. 2 (March 1968): 154-155.

¹⁴⁶ Founded in 1872, Cookman Institute was the first in Florida for the higher education of blacks. For a long time it remained the only one of its kind in the state by was later merged with Mary McLeod Bethune’s Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute of Daytona Beach in 1923 to form Bethune-Cookman College. See Sheila Y. Flemming, *Bethune-Cookman College, 1904-1994: The Answered Prayer to a Dream* (Virginia Beach, VA: Donning Co., 1995).

by the time she entered Wheeler's medical department.¹⁴⁷ Married during the week of her Meharry graduation to fellow alumnus Dr. John N. Wheeler (Class of 1903), she and her husband moved to Chattanooga after their honeymoon. There, the Wheelers practiced medicine together, making Emma Wheeler "Chattanooga's first African American physician—and the only one for the next thirty five years."¹⁴⁸

Hailed as "by colored people, for the benefit of colored people," the hospital was opened in 1915. Likely named after her alma mater, Nashville's Walden University, the three-story brick structure, which she shared with her husband, was built, owned and operated by Wheeler. Located on the corner of East Eighth and Douglas streets, the hospital was the "first to be owned, operated, and staffed by African Americans and dedicated to their treatment" in the city.¹⁴⁹ While local white hospitals served black patients in their basements, Wheeler's hospital boasted thirty beds, nine private rooms, a twelve-bed ward as well as surgical, maternity, and nursery departments. Walden "enable[d] the colored physicians to render better service to patients needing the advantages which a hospital affords than has heretofore been possible."¹⁵⁰

The arrival of Derricotte and Johnson at Walden Hospital linked the missions of the neighboring Fisk and Meharry campuses more than 200 miles away in Chattanooga. Fisk professors St. Elmo Brady, Elmer S. Imes and musicologist Warner Lawson who had hurried to Dalton arrived to find the Trimble-led caravan headed to Chattanooga. After hearing that they were denied hospital services, Ethel Bedient Gilbert, a Fisk staff member and longtime friend of Derricotte since their days at the YWCA, frantically called Dalton to impress on the white

¹⁴⁷ See Linda T. Wynn, "Emma Rochelle Wheeler," in *Notable Black American Women, Book II* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1996), 702-704; Susan Sawyer, *More Than Petticoats: Remarkable Tennessee Women* (Helena, Mont.: TwoDot, 2000), 90-96; Rita L. Hubbard, *African Americans of Chattanooga: A History of Unsung Heroes* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2007), 93-96.

¹⁴⁸ Hubbard, *African Americans of Chattanooga*, 93.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 95; Vivian P. Greene, "Walden Hospital," in *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, Carroll Van West, ed. (Nashville, Tenn.: Tennessee Historical Society, 1998), 1025.

¹⁵⁰ *Chattanooga Times*, 30 July 1915. Quoted in Sawyer, *More Than Petticoats*, 94.

attending physicians, their patients' social standing. She also hurried to Chattanooga. When Derricotte "opened her eyes in the Walden Hospital ... Brady, Imes, Lawson, and Ethel Gilbert were at her bedside."¹⁵¹ While the serious condition of Derricotte's heart and thyroid complicated the course of her treatment, she still had a chance at survival. Nina Mae Johnson was not so fortunate. Despite the gallant efforts of Price, Davis and Trimble to get them to Wheeler's hospital for treatment, Johnson died before they reached the city. Sadly, Derricotte fell into unconsciousness and met the same fate around six o'clock in the afternoon on November 7. Her death, and the death of Fisk senior Nina Johnson "was not, unfortunately, an isolated fatality involving automotive misadventure and medical sins of omission" observed historian and W.E.B. Du Bois biographer David Levering Lewis.¹⁵²

Reports, some factual and others sufficiently embellished, helped to infuriate blacks nationwide. Nowhere was the loss more keenly felt than on the Fisk campus. "When the news of their deaths reached Nashville," remembered John Hope Franklin, "the entire campus was plunged into a period of mourning and outrage that the university had lost a student and its young administrator to segregationist practices."¹⁵³ Jones was attending a conference in Knoxville, Tennessee at the time of the accident and sought the very details he was being asked to supply. In a letter to National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) President Walter White, Jones reported that he traveled from Knoxville to Chattanooga, only to learn that Derricotte and Johnson's remains had already been taken to Athens. He then left for Atlanta, but decided to stop and "make an investigation of the accident in Dalton" but "later decided it might

¹⁵¹ Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois, 1919-1963*, 297-298.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, 298; "Report of the Commission in Interracial Cooperation: Regarding the Automobile Accident in Dalton, Ga., November 6, 1931," n.p..

¹⁵³ "Report of the Commission in Interracial Cooperation: Regarding the Automobile Accident in Dalton, Ga., November 6, 1931," n.p.; Franklin, "John Hope Franklin: The Fisk Years," 75.

be better to have the Interracial Commission, together with a member of the Derricotte family, make a thorough investigation of the tragedy.”¹⁵⁴

Meanwhile letters of sympathy from all over the nation poured in to the office of the president back at Fisk. In addition to offering their condolences, representatives from both black and white universities, the YWCA, the AMA, Southern Commission on the Study of Lynching, the Committee of Race Relations among many others sought details about the events that transpired following the accident.¹⁵⁵ A representative from a student committee at the Hampton Institute (now Hampton University) wrote:

“We feel the keenness of your loss very greatly; because we have a similar incident in our family....I trust that you will cooperate with us in the utmost in compiling all the valuable information on the case which is at your hand. In doing so, you will be doing the interested students at Hampton Institute and the Negro race as a whole a great favor.”¹⁵⁶

The Hampton student committee had contacted Jones upon the advice of poet and writer Langston Hughes, who was coincidentally visiting the campus during the weekend of Derricotte’s death. Amid “the wave of sorrow and of anger,” committee members sought his advice over the “double tragedies of color on one day.” The deaths of Derricotte and Hampton graduate and Alabama A & M coach Lonnie Boaz, Sr. he noted, was “most affecting to students and teachers because the victims were ‘of their own class.’”¹⁵⁷

President Jones was particularly concerned about what he characterized as the viscerally angry response of black America to Derricotte’s death. Just a few months after Derricotte’s death, he wrote to Steed to reiterate the debt of gratitude of himself, the Derricotte family and of

¹⁵⁴ Thomas E. Jones to Walter White, Jones Papers, 19 November 1931.

¹⁵⁵ “Juliette Derricotte,” Jones Papers, Box 31, File 13; See also “Juliette Derricotte—Death, December, 1931,” Jones Papers, Box 31, File 6.

¹⁵⁶ Student Committee at Hampton Institute to Hampton Institute,” 16 November 1931, Jones Papers, Box 31, File 6; The “similar incident” to which they referred were the events surrounding the death of alumnus Lonnie Boaz, Sr. ‘25 on November 6, 1931, after a fight with a white mob following a car accident. See Clif Cleaveland, *Healers & Heroes: Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times* (Philadelphia: American College of Physicians, 2004), 77.

¹⁵⁷ Langston Hughes, *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes: Fight for Freedom and Other Writings on Civil Rights* 10 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 216.

Fisk University to Sneed and all the “physicians in Dalton connected with this case.” Jones had previously solicited the aid of the Atlanta-based Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC), which he assured Sneed was “known and highly respected all over America by white and colored alike,” to produce a report on the incidents that occurred in the accident’s wake. “As I feared when I talked to you,” wrote Jones, “misleading statements regarding the treatment of these well known Negroes, would appear in the press and become the subject of much comment, gossip, and platform orations throughout the country. For this reason...it was necessary for me to bring in a third party.”¹⁵⁸

Working along with Derricotte’s brother J. Flipper Derricotte, the commission’s chief investigator Arthur Raper produced a report which Jones happily forwarded to interested persons around the country.¹⁵⁹ While several pages long, the report failed to make clear everything that transpired in the hours between the accident and when Derricotte succumbed to the injuries she sustained the following day. Fisk alumnus W.E.B. Du Bois was unconvinced by the CIC report. In a passionate editorial in *The Crisis*, Du Bois pointed out “irreconcilable discrepancies” but gave Derricotte’s friend Ethel Gilbert the final word on the incident: “I shall always have to compare in my mind all of the things that were done that would not have been done to me if I were injured. I shall always have to remember that, within one-half hour after the accident, I would have been in a modern hospital.”¹⁶⁰

Gilbert’s reflections captured what lay at the heart of the Derricotte affair. Dalton, Georgia was home to George W. Hamilton Memorial Hospital, a public and state of the art hospital that refused treatment to blacks. Joe M. Richardson pointedly noted, “whether they would have lived had they been taken immediately to the hospital is a matter of conjecture,” David Levering Lewis, however, contended that “Derricotte’s obscene death would become the

¹⁵⁸ Thomas E. Jones to J.H. Sneed, 16 November 1931, Jones Papers, Box 31, File 5.

¹⁵⁹ Thomas E. Jones to “Dear Friend,” 5 December 1931, Jones Papers, Box 31, File 6.

¹⁶⁰ Ethel Gilbert. Quoted in Du Bois, “Dalton, Georgia,” 86.

nightmare archetype of all such deaths, of which Bessie Smith's and Charles Drew's highway deaths would be widely interpreted as equally tragic replays" is similarly compelling.¹⁶¹ In truth, "black people were known to die on southern roads as they waited for ambulances that never appeared or came only to take them past the nearest "white" hospital to another Mrs. Wilson's or to some understaffed clinic miles beyond." Most tragedies of these victims' deaths were lost to "statistical anonymity," but "[t]he death of Fisk University's dean of women students offered a case study of such lugubrious senselessness, however, that it expelled a cry of desperation and rage from the Talented Tenth and sent a shudder through several million men and women, whatever their class or racial background."¹⁶² John Hope Franklin may have said it best when he reflected that the "tragedy that befell the dean of women and some Fisk students in Georgia taught all of us what we could expect in the American South."¹⁶³

Builders of the Dream: Progressive Black College Presidencies

The deaths of Derricotte and Johnson served as a powerful reminder of Jim Crow's ability to derail the success of Nashville black colleges' best and brightest members. Even as its faculty, staff, students and alumni enjoyed landmark achievements, the realities of life in the Jim Crow South were undeniable. The near lynching, quick trial and life sentencing of the Scottsboro Boys shortly before Derricotte's death, reinforced the terror and violence against blacks that pervaded the period. Between 1882 and 1930, there was roughly one lynching victim each week in the old Confederate states, including Tennessee. In 1933 a mob captured Cordie Cheek close to the Fisk campus and murdered him somewhere between Glendale and Columbia, Tennessee.¹⁶⁴ The memories of these vicious and often public acts were seared into the

¹⁶¹ Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 114; Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois, 1919-1963*, 298.

¹⁶² Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois, 1919-1963*, 297.

¹⁶³ Franklin, "John Hope Franklin: The Fisk Years," 75.

¹⁶⁴ Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 129.

consciousness of black Nashville. Even more than forty years after the occurrence in 1934, Fisk alumna and trustee Minnie Lou Crosthwaite vividly recalled witnessing the lynching of Ephraim Grizzard on April 30, 1892 in downtown Nashville:

“They went thru Nashville without question at 2 p.m. in the day, marched to the jail, battered down the door, took the prisoner to the bridge leading from Cedar St. and lynched him. My husband stood in the rear of the O’ Bryan Bros. Store on the square, and saw it. Two of my white neighbors, both young lads, came home told me about it, and exhibited, a bit of his clothing as a treasured souvenir. And, if the people who do those things want to come on the campus of Fisk and do the same thing, they will.”¹⁶⁵

Fortunately, the threat Crosthwaite feared was never realized, leaving Jones to continue the recruiting of capable black academicians to Fisk. In same year of Derricotte’s death, Jones successfully recruited famed Harlem Renaissance poet, writer and former United States diplomat James Weldon Johnson. He joined a growing slate of black academicians which included sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, attorney Z. Alexander Looby, father of Gullah studies Lorenzo D. Turner and linguist John R. Cottin.¹⁶⁶ But, he was not always successful. For example, a job offer to Zora Neale Hurston following a 1934 visit to old friends Charles S. Johnson, James Weldon Johnson and Lorenzo Dow Turner on the Fisk campus never materialized.¹⁶⁷

That same year Jones offered a faculty position to University of Chicago graduate student Benjamin Elijah Mays. Mays readily accepted the job until receiving an offer from former Roger Williams student and Morehouse graduate Mordecai Wyatt Johnson to become dean of the School of Religion at Howard University. Mays visited Nashville to share with Jones in person his reasons for wishing to take Johnson’s offer instead, with the hope that he would be honorably released. As Mays later recalled: “For me it was imperative that the first Negro president of Howard University be an unqualified and triumphant success.” Jones released Mays and in doing so allowed him to pursue a course that led him to Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia.

¹⁶⁵ Minnie Lou Crosthwaite to Thomas E. Jones, 22 January 1934. Jones Papers, Box 9, File 23.

¹⁶⁶ Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 114.

¹⁶⁷ Valerie Boyd, *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 260.

There, as its sixth president, Mays later served as mentor to generations of Morehouse men, including most prominently the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.¹⁶⁸

While Jones busied himself amassing a list of black faculty that was second to none, William J. Hale concentrated on several elements of institutional building. As the first president of the state's first public black college, Hale was involved in every step of its early development. Building the physical plant was not the least of these responsibilities, but Hale's commitment to academic excellence earned him the Harmon Award for distinguished service in the field of education by the Commission on Race Relations of the Federal Council of Churches. As an editorial in the *Tennessean* observed: "The story of this boy who fought hatred, adversity, and the prejudice of his race is the story of Moses, the story of Napoleon, of Lincoln, of Franklin, and the notable characters of history."¹⁶⁹

In some ways, the story of Tennessee A & I correlated with that of Hale. The school's enrollment had more than doubled in the decade following its founding. Hale recruited alumna Laura M. Averitte to write the school song in 1918 and Frances E. Thompson to design the school's seal in 1924.¹⁷⁰ The symbolism of school seal was particularly significant, not only because it replaced the school's usage of the state seal, but because its design reinforced the centrality of education to the school's mission. As Thompson later recalled:

"I used the circle and the shield divided into three parts: Agriculture upper left, Industry upper right, Education lower center and larger because we felt that education in each area was the important thing. To emphasize learning further, I placed a hand holding a light with extending rays above the symbol. Our slogan, Think—Work—Serve, I placed beneath the symbol for support."¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Benjamin Elijah Mays, *Born to Rebel: An Autobiography* (New York: Scribner, 1971), 139 & 141; See Lawrence Edward Carter, *Walking integrity: Benjamin Elijah Mays, Mentor to Martin Luther King Jr.* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1998).

¹⁶⁹ Fancher, "Tennessee State University (1912-1974)," 42; *Nashville Tennessean*, 19 February 1930.

¹⁷⁰ Lloyd, *Tennessee State Agricultural and State University*, 40-41.

¹⁷¹ Frances E. Thompson to Evelyn P. Fancher, 20 January 1974, Quoted in Fancher, "Tennessee State University (1912-1974)," 36-37.

The seal helped to reinforce the centrality of academics in the school’s mission—a mission to which white state officials seemed to be oblivious even though Hale’s headship set it in plain view. Secured largely by the will of its black administrators, the school’s growing college curriculum earned it the distinction of being the first college with an all-black faculty and student body to be admitted to the American Association of Teachers Colleges in February 1933.¹⁷² Hale’s masterful ability to secure funding was equally if not more impressive. The school’s tradition of hosting an end-of-year dinner at the college for all legislators and selected education officials from across the state began in 1913 in an effort to “reduce potential antagonism toward the college.”¹⁷³ It was a tradition that Hale continued throughout his presidency. A 1935 *Bulletin* described the origins of the practice:

“Early in its history, the institution was repeatedly exposed to the ‘slings and arrows of outrageous fortune’ as first one group of politicians and then another tried to gain control of the institution. It is truly marvelous how progress was made when the young college was assailed by foes both within and without.”¹⁷⁴

It was precisely Hale’s “administrative ingenuity” that cost him his job. Despite the school’s return of its entire \$100,000 appropriation to the state treasury during the 1940/1941 fiscal year, smart financial practices over several years resulted in an excess of \$300,000. When a 1941 audit by state officials revealed the accumulation of a reserve fund of \$316,000, a lengthy investigation by state auditors followed. While its conclusions were never made public, the State Board of Education “relieved” Hale of the school’s presidency on August 27, 1943.¹⁷⁵

On September 1, Walter Strother Davis became the college’s first alumnus president. A native of Canton, Mississippi, Davis received his high school diploma from Alcorn A & M

¹⁷² Fancher, “Tennessee State University (1912-1974),” 39; Lloyd, *Tennessee State Agricultural and State University*, 47.

¹⁷³ *Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College Bulletin* 23, No. 7 (April 1935), 20; Fancher, “Tennessee State University (1912-1974),” 40.

¹⁷⁴ *Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College Bulletin* 23, 14.

¹⁷⁵ For more on the audit *Nashville Tennessean*, 21 September 1941, *Chattanooga Observer*, 26 September 1941; For more information on Hale’s release see *Nashville Banner*, 25 October 1944; *Nashville Globe and Independent*, 27 October 1944.

College (now Alcorn State University) in Lorman, Mississippi before earning his bachelor's degree from A & I in 1931. Two years later, Davis earned a master's degree before earning a doctoral degree in 1941, both from Cornell University. Having won two General Education Board Fellowships during his graduate school tenure, Davis also began his career as a teacher and coach while at Cornell. In 1933, he began working at Tennessee A & I as an agricultural teacher and football coach. While his stint as the college's football coach lasted just three years, Davis taught agriculture for a decade.¹⁷⁶

As Hale's successor, Davis, who was also one of the thousands of students who attended the school while it was under Hale's leadership, knew all too well that Hale's pioneering efforts set high expectations for him. Davis, however, was up to the challenge. Immediately, he began working to transform the college into "a strong 'A'-Class university." His plan included the restructuring of the school's business affairs, curriculum and administrative organization. The college was reorganized into various schools including those of agriculture and home economics, arts and sciences, education and engineering as well as a Graduate School and divisions of business, field services and air science.¹⁷⁷

While A&I had been lead by a black president since its founding, Fisk and Meharry, which were each steadily approaching their centennials, were finally led by black presidents in 1947 and 1952 respectively. "There was no question about his reputation as a scholar," observed Joe M. Richardson. "Johnson was a famous man of extraordinary talent."¹⁷⁸ As a pioneering sociologist of the black American experience, Johnson founded the world-renowned Race Relations Institute in 1944 and as "Godfather of the Harlem Renaissance," extended opportunities which Jones initially created for displaced writers, poets, artists and thinkers to transmit their proud "blackness" to another generation of aspiring scholars. Despite being cut-

¹⁷⁶ Obituary of Walter S. Davis.

¹⁷⁷ See Fancher, "Tennessee State University (1912-1974)," 46-151.

¹⁷⁸ Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 141.

short by a heart attack in 1956, Johnson's life and legacy loomed large in the minds of Fiskites when Stephen Junius Wright became the seventh president of Fisk in 1957. "If he is to be successful in this venture," wrote Fisk student John R Harper II in the *Fisk News*, "he [Wright] cannot be totally bound by convention and tradition, but must use daring and inventiveness to accomplish his high goals. The challenge lies before him."¹⁷⁹

In many ways, Wright's most pressing challenge was to raise money and increase exposure of the school leading up to its centennial year in 1966. But, the challenge of raising money was not unique to him. As Meharry's fourth president, and the first black president in the school's history, Harold West was well acquainted with Meharry's need to raise additional capital. The college was self-supporting, but the care for the city's indigent patients, who had been disproportionately black and poor, at Hubbard Hospital caused the college "devastating losses." Meharry College historian James Summerville pointedly noted that this "one problem—lack of money led to all others."¹⁸⁰ During his acceptance speech in the Fisk Chapel in December 1957, American Baptist President Maynard P. Turner, Jr., a Fisk alumnus, not only acknowledged financial challenges but also the irony of offering the address on the campus where he was once a student. "Little did I think my path would lead back to this place," admitted Turner, "I accept the challenge [of the American Baptist presidency] to begin planting the seed of democracy."¹⁸¹

Conclusion

The closures of Roger Williams University and Meharry's predecessor Central Tennessee College while devastating, did not discourage the efforts of Nashville's remaining black centers of higher education from continuing their work. As the intellectual leaders of black Nashville,

¹⁷⁹ John R Harper II, "A Charge to Dr. Stephen J. Wright," *The Fisk Forum* v, No. 4 (April 25, 1958), 2.

¹⁸⁰ Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors*, 111.

¹⁸¹ "Fisk Graduate Installed ABT Prexy," *The Fisk Forum* V, No. 2 (February 13, 1958), 16.

members of the city's black college community kept working towards the building of an intelligent, capable and well-educated black middle class. The legacy of Central Tennessee's celebrated list of alumni was second only to its contributions to the success of Meharry. Despite its loss, the continued work of Meharry was a powerful testament to the invaluable place of the school in the history of Nashville and the wider black south.

Undeterred by the loss of Roger Williams, a cohort of black college alumni and early administrators sought to fill the void left by its closure by establishing American Baptist. The college was born out of intra-denominational strife and interracial cooperation with the Southern Baptists, but was secured by its small yet determined black administration and faculty. As graduates and/or founders, presidents and faculty of black colleges across the South, American Baptist's changing core of black faculty and staff was consistent in their commitment to inculcating the seminary's students with a sense of religious and social purpose. In the process of doing so, they helped to shape the seminary's institutional culture and mission which grew in subsequent years.

At Fisk, Charles S. Johnson has long been heralded for the creation of "Harlem South." While his contributions are nothing less than legendary, the university's gathering of pioneering figures in black academia can be traced to the presidency of his predecessor Thomas E. Jones. In doing so, it extends the period for which Fisk is so readily known and suggests that the exceptional concentration of Harlem Renaissance leaders and other black "firsts," built on the college's activist past rather than created its "racial" future. Johnson, while a central figure, was consequently a cause as well as an effect of the school's self-identification as a center of black activism. The deaths of Fisk Dean of Women Juliette Derricotte and Fisk senior Nina Johnson in the fall of 1931 only served to reinforce the truths which Fiskites and the wider black college community knew—their fate as the Talented Tenth rested with the fate of the black masses. It was a fate that they hoped progressive black presidents would be able to improve. Whether or not

they would be able to do so in succeeding decades ironically, depended less upon the colleges' presidents and more on its students.

CONCLUSION

For more than one hundred years, Nashville's black college quartet has stood at the center of a vibrant community of African-American professional and middle class. Founded in the shadows of the Civil War, most black schools across the South were associated with its white missionary founders. Nashville's black schools were no exception to this rule. Predictably, most scholars assumed that the success of these schools was due to the paternalistic whites who served as founders, administrators and teachers. Characterized as institutional builders, paternalistic whites were not only acknowledged for shaping the emergent culture of black schools, but were also credited with inscribing upon blacks, white purposes for black education. Rooted in racist notions that characterized blacks as a deficient race, even the most paternalistic whites viewed education as a means of white hegemony. While the degree to which northern whites influenced southern black schools is arguable, there is little debate over whether or not paternalistic whites helped create black educational opportunities after the Civil War.

Blacks excitedly took advantage of these burgeoning educational opportunities. Indeed, their enthusiasm was hardly surprising given the historic denial of educational opportunities to blacks during slavery. This study, however, argues that the laws, policies and traditions governing what, when and from whom blacks could learn to read and/or write during the antebellum period created more than a mere desire for learning. The intensity of blacks' desire for education, coupled with whites' insistence on restricting black educational opportunities, helped to shape black conceptions of education as activism. Black conceptions of education as activism were bolstered by the harshness of punishments a slave risked facing if his or her efforts to become literate were discovered; even free blacks feared retribution for their efforts to learn.

Nashville's long history of independent black schools from the 1830s up to the dawn of the Civil War serves as a compelling example of the black determination to secure educational

opportunities. Long before the war's first shot was fired or the arrival of the first northern missionary, a series of black teachers owned and operated their own schools in Nashville. Over the course of three decades, black native school teachers such as Alphonso Sumner, Daniel Watkins and Sarah Porter Player taught their students, both free and slave, the importance of education. They imbued their students with a sense of their own possibilities and with the purposefulness of education to their families, community and to their race. This unique black teacher tradition influenced a generation of students who assumed influential roles in the cities post-war black middle and professional class following their collegiate education in white missionary-founded schools.

While their post-war role as Nashville's black middle and professional class demonstrates their important contributions to the city's black community, it was their role as students in black schools-turned-colleges which demonstrated the connectedness of the black teacher tradition to the emergent black culture of white-run black schools. The presence of these students on black college campuses as well as others who either shared their experiences, or admired these students because of their previous educational experiences, undoubtedly helped shape the mission and vision of these schools. It is for this reason, that the successes of southern black schools cannot be solely or even mostly attributed to northern whites. The city's black native schools may have been stronger than in other places across the black South; but it was the tradition of pre-Civil War educational opportunities offered to a handful of blacks, which shaped black expectations of emergent black colleges. The fact that post-Civil War schools were white-administered was not a reflection of the absence of black interest or even ability to run black schools. The case of Nashville's failed Tennessee Manual Labor University demonstrates that a series of challenges, some universal to school administration and others resulting from racism, derailed the extraordinary efforts of blacks to own and operate their own colleges in the era immediately following the Civil War.

The overrepresentation of white aid to black education, then, resulted from the larger social, cultural and racial dynamics of the period in which black colleges and universities were founded. Despite the limits of their ability to provide administrative and financial support for black education, black Nashvillians struggled to be able to afford even the most minimal costs of education for members of its community. When funding difficulties threatened to close the doors of black schools, members of the black community rallied to save them. Nowhere is the case for this clearer than with the pioneering efforts of the Original Fisk Jubilee Singers, who, in the process of saving their school not only ensured the financial viability of the American Missionary Association but also built Jubilee Hall, the first permanent structure for the education of blacks in the South. In the process of assuming this mantle, the singers helped to preserve the spirituals as a prized cultural form, and perhaps more pointedly served as institutional, community, national and international ambassadors of black potentiality.

As early as the 1870s, blacks began demanding two fundamental provisions from the United States government. The first was for protection from the vile and terroristic attacks of white mobs such as the Ku Klux Klan which threatened their livelihoods and their lives. The second demand was for public education on both the normal school and collegiate levels. The primary place of these demands, before those for voting rights, public accommodations or even job opportunities, suggests the predominant place of education in the hearts and minds of blacks during the postwar period. In situations where neither hope was realized, blacks became disenchanted with their possibilities in American society. And as in the case of murdered Central Tennessee student-turned-country teacher Julia Hayden, white brutality against accomplished black academicians personified the worst fears of blacks and tested the limits of black patriotism. It was Hayden's murder that cabinet-turned-casket maker Benjamin Singleton used as justification for his Exodus movement, demonstrating the deep connection between white violence, black education and one of the nation's most celebrated black separatist movements.

Despite white violence against blacks in the wider South, early black college alumni like Fisk's W.E.B. Du Bois and Meharry's R.F. Boyd demonstrated the many ways in which the earliest black college graduates ventured beyond their campuses, using their training to improve the quality of life of blacks across the South. So successful were they, that white proponents of the New South used the achievements of early Nashville black college alumni to demonstrate the city's progressiveness and growing self-identification as the "Athens of the South." Due in no small measure to their successes, the landscape of black education in the South began changing in fundamental ways by the 1880s. Students at Meharry for example, protested against their white administrators and teachers, who enforced strict codes of conduct, which ruled over virtually every facet of black student life. While temporarily thwarted by feelings of deference to their white missionary founders, black students would in the coming decades be freer to challenge the racism that often undergirded white paternalism.

Shortly after the turn of the twentieth century, Du Bois and Booker T. Washington were engaged in a war of words over the future and fate of the nation's black colleges which had lasting implications on Nashville's black educational complex. Their ideological struggle stemmed at least in part, from their divergent opinions on the usefulness of black accommodationism. Washington was principally committed to exploiting white paternalism to win both ideological and financial support for black colleges by any means necessary, while Du Bois was primarily concerned with exposing the limits of any such support. It was perfectly logical, then, that Washington's involvement in Nashville's black educational movement resulted in the founding of Tennessee Normal in 1912, while Du Bois' involvement resulted in an uprising of Fisk students against their white missionary president in 1924.

Fisk student protesters won the support of blacks across the city and South. In doing so, they helped to engender the series of student protests during the 1920s which followed in the wake of their successful ouster of Fisk President Fayette McKenzie. Not only was the decade a

time of growth in black cultural expression as exemplified by the Harlem Renaissance, it also marked the beginning of a transformative period in black college life. The deaths of the last of the schools' missionary founders enabled black students to openly protest against oppressive aspects of black student life without worrying about openly challenging the white men and women who ventured south to offer them a chance of a better life at the close of the Civil War. Just as the legacy of white missionaries continued, so too did the pioneering work of early black college students and alumni. Distinguished graduates who made notable contributions in the fields of business, medicine, religion, law and perhaps most importantly, in education, advanced the fledgling black college mission to not only use education to improve the conditions of black life in the South, but also to re-fashion what it meant to be black and to offer other blacks a sense of their potentiality.

As a product of the long campaign for blacks to have access to the same theological training as whites, the founding of American Baptist Seminary served as a compelling example of black self-determination. Although founded with the help of white Southern Baptists, it was a string of black Baptist ministers who were in some instances black school founders, presidents, faculty and alumni, who shaped the formative character of American Baptist. Meanwhile, Fisk's last white President Thomas E. Jones was busy amassing a faculty of black intellectuals and academicians that was not easily rivaled then or now. The ability of Jones to do so, this study contends, was a testament to Fisk alumni and students' long-standing identification with the purpose of the school as a haven for and producer of activist-intellectuals. The keenness of this observation is especially valuable when one considers the deaths of Fisk Dean of Women Juliette Derricotte and Fisk senior Nina Johnson resulting from a car accident on the rural roads of Georgia in 1931.

As victims of happenstance and medical racism, the loss of Derricotte and Johnson, in the prime of their lives, reinforced the worst fears of blacks, irrespective of their levels of academic

and/or financial achievement. And in the decades that followed, it continued to be more and more clear to blacks that the predominance of whites in administrative positions, for example, was only a symptom of the larger problem—that of racism. The coming of Charles S. Johnson and Harold D. West as black college presidents to Fisk and Meharry respectively, as well as the transformative work of Tennessee A & I President Walter S. Davis and American Baptist President Maynard P. Turner, Jr. did little to redress the bitterness of segregation once students in the late 1950s and 1960s left the safety of their campus' gates. Ironically, the gains made by the black college community may have in fact served to underscore the inequality black college students faced in American society in general, and especially in the Jim Crow South.

Whether they knew it or not, black college student activists in Nashville and across the South during the modern Civil Rights Movement stood in the much longer tradition of black college activism. In Nashville, for example, lawyer and former Fisk professor Z. Alexander Looby served as the primary legal defender of black college student activists; and one of the movement's primary meeting spaces, First Baptist Church Capitol Hill, was led by the Reverend Kelly Miller Smith, who lectured at American Baptist and studied at Tennessee State University before finishing his bachelor's degree at Morehouse College in Atlanta, under the headship of Benjamin Mays and the mentorship of Howard Thurman. While some personalities, such as Sumner, Hayden, Griggs and Derricotte were long forgotten by the time of the modern movement, the work of black college faculty and alumni such as Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, John Hope, Mordecai W. Johnson, Charles S. Johnson, Benjamin Mays and Horace Mann Bond as well as countless others, offered black college students a sense of their own possibilities. Not only did they serve as mentors both in and out of college classrooms, they served as living models of black potentiality and achievement. They imbued them with the notion that "knowledge is power," gave them the ideological tools with which they would help to dismantle Jim Crow, and enlisted them into the ranks of their powerful nonviolent army.

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