ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	CLAIMING PLACE, PLACING CLAIM: AFRICAN AMERICAN LIFE IN WORKING-CLASS NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE, 1861-1900
	Stanley D. Maxson, Doctor of Philosophy, 2023
Dissertation directed by:	Dr. Leslie S. Rowland, Department of History

This dissertation tracks the development of Black Bottom, a working-class neighborhood in Nashville, Tennessee, from the Civil War to the end of the nineteenth century. It examines the lives of African Americans, mostly refugees from slavery, who lived in Black Bottom during and after the Civil War and created one of the city's first Black enclaves. In so doing, it argues for using space and place as analytical categories. Black Nashvillians claimed space by building Black Bottom into a neighborhood of labor, leisure, culture, education, and community. Attention to space offers insight into the lived experience of working-class African Americans and the opportunities and threats that urban life presented. The dissertation traces the racialization of place in a New South city by adopting the focused scope of a neighborhood study. White newspapers depicted Black Bottom as a slum and its residents as a danger to the

entire city. The characterization of Black Bottom as a place of crime, vice, and disease was a crucial tool for those who sought to justify its policing, regulation, or even destruction.

The dissertation also argues for the importance of space and place in the politics of Black claims-making and joins scholarship that has emphasized the collective nature of Black politics in the late nineteenth century. Claiming space brought tangible, real-world benefits for working-class African Americans. Black Bottom was a place where Black Nashvillians exercised freedom in the physical world, on porches and sidewalks, and in churches and dance halls. The physical space of Black Bottom enabled communal relationships among residents, which, in time, became a resource for Black claims-making. African Americans defended Nashville during the Civil War and claimed Black Bottom as their neighborhood. Later, the neighborhood defended the founding generation's claims to the entitlements of wartime service.

CLAIMING PLACE, PLACING CLAIM: AFRICAN AMERICAN LIFE IN WORKING-CLASS NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE, 1861-1900

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2023

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For Ann and Lenny

Acknowledgments

Thanks to the Department of History, the Graduate School, the African American Digital and Experimental Humanities Initiative (AADHum), and the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities (MITH) at the University of Maryland, and the Cosmos Club of Washington, D.C., for providing financial support for this dissertation.

I want to express my gratitude to the members of my dissertation committee, who have each played instrumental roles in shaping this project and my academic journey. A special thanks to my advisor, Leslie Rowland, whose peerless knowledge of history and the historian's practice has sharpened this dissertation from beginning to end. I am immensely grateful to Quincy Mills for his mentorship, guidance, and support at crucial stages of this work. Thanks to Christopher Bonner, who has been a steadfast resource for encouragement and creativity. My appreciation to Michael Ross for always encouraging me to ask the big questions. A special thanks to Mary Sies for her generous mentorship and support for my interdisciplinary scholarship.

I benefited greatly from the support of various departments, programs, and initiatives across the University of Maryland campus and beyond. Thanks to Linda Macri and the Graduate School Writing Center for jumpstarting this project at the summer dissertation prospectus workshop. The guidance from Mary Alexander and Mary Sies as part of the Museum Scholarship and Material Culture graduate certificate program profoundly shaped my historical scholarship. Thanks to Bashar Al Tameemi for helping bring my analysis to life through his cartographic skills. Trevor Muñoz and Jessica Lu at AADHum and MITH deserve special thanks for encouraging me to pursue scholarship that was intentionally digital from the beginning. Thanks to Kim Gallon, whose course "Black Spatial Humanities" at the Humanities Intensive Learning and Teaching Conference was foundational to my understanding of the skills and ethics

of digital historical practice. Angela Sutton deserves special thanks for generously sharing her time and expertise on the history of Black Civil War veterans and Fort Negley. This dissertation could not have been completed without the help of librarians Eric Lindquist at the University of Maryland and Chris Brown at Washington University in St. Louis.

My friendship with graduate colleagues supported this work at every step. I am immensely grateful to Brian Sarginger, Jessica Wicks-Allen, and Sabrina Gonzalez for their incredible friendship, unwavering support, and boundless inspiration. Thanks also to Lauren Michalak, Judith Aaron, Jonathan Brower, and Sylvia Jordan, whose friendship brought joy to Francis Scott Key Hall and beyond.

This project would not have been possible without the love and support of friends and family. As a project about space and place, it is only appropriate to mention that a good portion of this dissertation was written at the dining room tables of my in-laws and parents, who generously allowed my family to move in with them during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thanks to my dear friends, Jeremy Fuzy and Sophie Day, for their encouragement and support. My deepest thanks to my in-laws, Jack and Theresa Ashby, who have supported my family with love and generosity. Thanks to my dad, Rick Maxson, whose love and experience showed me this could be done, and to Karen Maxson for her care and hospitality. Thanks to my siblings, David and Natalie Maxson, who have supported me with stalwart optimism. Thanks for being there every step of the way. It is hard to express my appreciation for my mom, Kittilu Dodds, whose love and support have been unconditional from day one. Thanks for everything, Mom.

Finally, my most profound debt of gratitude is owed to my wife, Ann Maxson, and son, Lenny Maxson. Ann has supported me with enduring belief throughout this entire journey. Lenny is a source of unending joy. This dissertation is a testament to their love and sacrifices.

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Abbreviations Used in Footnotes

AME	African Methodist Episcopal Church
CC	Child's Certificate (Civil War pension file)
LCF-JAK	Legal Case File of J. A. Kellogg
ME	Methodist Episcopal Church
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration
RG 15	Record Group 15: Records of the Veterans Administration
RG 21	Record Group 21: Records of the District Courts of the United States
RG 29	Record Group 29: Records of the Bureau of the Census
RG 276	Record Group 276: Records of the United States Courts of Appeals
SC	Soldier's Certificate (Civil War pension file)
SO	Survivor's Original (Civil War pension file)
TSLA	Tennessee State Library and Archives
TVA	Tennessee Virtual Archives
USCI	United States Colored Infantry
USCT	United States Colored Troops
WC	Widow's Certificate (Civil War pension file)
WO	Widow's Original (Civil War pension file)
XC	Certificate (Civil War pension file)

Introduction

In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, enslaved men cut the streets of Nashville from the dirt of the hillside and the mud of the Cumberland River. The "corporate hands," as one observer called them, lived in log cabins at the corner of McGavock and High streets.[1] Along those streets and around the slave cabins, a neighborhood slowly developed, taking shape as a distinct working-class district in the 1840s and 1850s with the arrival of Irish, German, and Jewish immigrants. Known colloquially as Black Bottom, the neighborhood got its name from the dark alluvial soil of the lowland. In 1862, more than 2,700 Black men and women, mostly refugees from slavery, were hired or impressed by the Union army to construct Fort Negley, the largest inland stone fortification of the Civil War.[2] Situated atop St. Cloud Hill, Fort Negley overlooked Black Bottom, where refugees from slavery resided in tents and ramshackle shelters. Many of these men, women, and children remained in Black Bottom after the war. As refugees, they understood freedom, in part, as a place. Together, they made Black Bottom into a place where freedom was meaningful.

This dissertation tracks the development of Black Bottom from its origins during the Civil War to the end of the nineteenth century. It examines the lives of the neighborhood's African Americans, who created one of Nashville's first Black working-class enclaves. In doing so, it argues for using space and place as analytical categories in historical study. Long before Tennessee abolished slavery in 1865, refugees from slavery arrived in Nashville and claimed the city as a place of freedom. In the years following the war, Black Nashvillians built on the

[1] Jane H. Thomas, *Old Days in Nashville, Tenn*essee (Nashville: Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1897), 83.
[2] Bobby L. Lovett, "Nashville's Fort Negley: A Symbol of Blacks' Involvement with the Union Army," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 3-22.

foundation laid by the refugees and made Black Bottom a vibrant neighborhood of labor, leisure, culture, education, and community. Attention to space offers insight into the lived experience of working-class African Americans in Nashville and the opportunities and threats that urban life presented. Adopting the focused scope of a neighborhood study, the dissertation traces processes such as the racialization of place. White newspapers depicted Black Bottom as a slum and its residents as a danger to the entire city. The characterization of Black Bottom as a place of crime, vice, and disease was a crucial tool for those who sought to justify its policing, regulation, or even destruction.

The dissertation argues for the importance of space and place in the politics of Black claims-making. Claiming space mattered for placing claims. The dissertation joins scholarship that has illuminated the collective nature of Black politics in the late nineteenth century. African Americans relied on kin, comrades, neighbors, and acquaintances in making a wide range of social, economic, and political claims.[3] The dissertation argues that the social and intellectual networks that supported Black claims were spatial by their very nature. The value of relationships, both interpersonal and political, was borne out across space. Refugees from slavery claimed Black Bottom as a neighborhood where enslaved men and women could be free. Later generations engaged in place-making—transforming *space* into *place*—by building life-

[3] On the collective nature of Black political claims, see Brandi Clay Brimmer, *Claiming Union Widowhood: Race, Respectability, and Poverty in the Post-Emancipation South* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020); Noralee Frankel, *Freedom's Women: Black Women and Families in Civil War Era Mississippi* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997). On the neighborhood as a foundation for collective action and mutual aid during slavery, see Anthony E. Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). On the importance of networks of kin for Black claims-making, see Dylan C. Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). On the significance of community networks, see Kate Masur, *An Example for All the Land: Emancipation and the Struggle Over Equality in Washington, D.C.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

sustaining social and cultural institutions and weaving together social networks to make a community. Black veterans and their families drew on the relationships of kin, neighbors, comrades, and acquaintances that were sustained in Black Bottom to make claims for Civil War pensions.

The dissertation is organized in three parts. Part 1, *Wartime Origins* (Chapter 1), examines the experience of African Americans in Nashville during the Civil War. The space claimed by refugees from slavery enabled Black place-making and claims-making in the decades that followed. Part 2, *Claiming Place* (Chapters 2 and 3), examines Black Bottom, a neighborhood built by refugees from slavery, Black soldiers, and their families. Chapter 2 explores the natural and built environment that structured the lives of the neighborhood's Black residents and the institutions they built and sustained. It articulates a sense of historical place that would sustain Black life and claims to Civil War veterans' entitlements. The emerging Black community in Black Bottom faced a backlash from white residents of Nashville who sought to displace residents of the working-class neighborhood. Chapter 3 describes the efforts of white reformers and citizens' councils to denigrate Black Bottom and lobby for its surveillance, policing, quarantine, or even destruction. Part 3, *Placing Claim* (Chapters 4 and 5), examines how working-class African Americans in Black Bottom struggled to obtain Civil War pensions and, in so doing, created a new relationship with the national state. The protracted struggle for emancipation and the blurred line between military service and military labor during the Civil War left many former slaves in Nashville without the documentation necessary to prove eligibility for Civil War pensions. Chapter 4 argues that the neighborhood operated as a vernacular archive of relationships, knowledge, and shared history that residents drew on to prove eligibility for pensions. As with Black place-making, Black claims-making faced

opposition. Chapter 5 examines the Pension Bureau's investigation of applications made by Black residents of Black Bottom. It argues that the Pension Bureau relied on spatial information to investigate the relationships between Black pension applicants and prosecute those who fell afoul of the bureau's information practices.

Space and Place

Space and place are related but distinct concepts. In the discipline of geography, space refers to the physical dimensions of an area, including its distance, size, and shape. In human geography, space is often used to analyze the distribution and movement of people, goods, and information across different regions or territories. Place, on the other hand, refers to the subjective and social meanings that people assign to specific locations. Human geographer Tim Cresswell offers a succinct definition of place as "space invested with meaning in the context of power."[4]

A place can be defined by its physical features, but it is also shaped by the human experiences, memories, and emotions associated with it. A place can be a neighborhood, a city, or a region, but it can also be a lumberyard, a street corner, or a room in a tenement building. Place is influenced by more than the physical environment. Indeed, a significant shift in the study of place since the 1970s has been to illuminate the complex and interconnected ways that place is influenced by such cultural, historical, and political factors as the social identities of the inhabitants of a place, the narratives and myths associated with it, or the power relations that shape its development.[5]

[4] Tim Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 35.
[5] The dissertation adopts a loose distinction between space—a physical reality characterized by distances, sizes, and locations—and place—the personal and cultural attachments ascribed to spaces. Geographers Edward Relph and Yi-fu Tuan offer nuanced theoretical distinctions between space and place in their

The dissertation draws from the toolbox of cultural geographers to offer an important corrective to the decades of hostility that radically transformed and ultimately destroyed the neighborhood of Black Bottom. Black Bottom persisted as a predominantly Black working-class neighborhood into the late twentieth century, when urban renewal displaced its residents in favor of "downtown revitalization" projects.[6] Those who today watch the Nashville Predators play hockey at the Bridgestone Arena, visit the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, or listen to the Nashville Symphony at the Schermerhorn Symphony Center do so in the space that once was Black Bottom. As geographer Katherine McKittrick writes, "Black histories . . . are worked out in geography, in space and place, in the physical world." This dissertation seeks to make visible elements of nineteenth-century Black life, work, religion, and leisure that totalizing narratives of racialized crime, vice, and disease have erased. This erasure, what McKittrick terms "geographic domination," was not a natural outcome of economic progress over poverty or development over destitution; it was the byproduct of over a century of intentional, often boisterous, campaigning by some of Nashville's wealthiest white citizens. The erasure of Black Bottom was neither natural nor inevitable; as McKittrick insists, "we make concealment happen."[7] The dissertation is thus a work of recovery. It illuminates the efforts of Black Nashvillians who built a neighborhood in the heart of the city, the ways such a place sustained Black life and claims for entitlement, and the long history of attempts to conceal, erase, and eliminate the neighborhood.

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foundational publications in the field of human geography. See Edward C. Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976); Yi-fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977). French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre builds on the work of Tuan and Relph by emphasizing the importance of social and political power and historical processes in the production of space. See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991).

[6] *Tennessean* (Nashville, TN), February 19, 1995.

[7] Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xi.

Black Bottom features in several histories of Nashville. Urban historians generally describe the neighborhood as a slum, remarkable only to the extent that it illustrates the extreme disparities that existed between wealthy and poor Nashvillians. It also appears in political histories of the city because Black Bottom was a perennial thorn in the side of late nineteenth-century urban reformers who sought to clean up or eradicate the neighborhood.[8] Scholars of African American history have taken more care to examine the lives of Black Bottom's residents in the context of the political economy of the post-Reconstruction South. Historian Bobby Lovett provides a rich and multifaceted description of the neighborhood in his history of African Americans in Nashville. His measured analysis points to a vibrant community life that was not reducible to the squalor of a tenement.[9]

As a *space,* Black Bottom consisted of no more than ten city blocks, less than a mile square. It was never an official municipal jurisdiction, but most Nashvillians agreed that it was located south of Broad Street and composed most of Ward 6 (renamed Ward 12 in 1890). The closest the neighborhood had to official recognition in the nineteenth century came from the cry "Black Bottom" as streetcar conductors signaled a stop midway between the city's central business district and the new suburban neighborhoods to the south.[10] Black Bottom boasted two of the oldest Black churches in the city and the only public school for African Americans in the

[8] Don H. Doyle, *Nashville in the New South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 80-82; Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 202, 281; Blanche Henry Clark Weaver, "Shifting Residential Patterns of Nashville," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1959): 20-34; James Summerville, "The City and the Slum: 'Black Bottom' in the Development of South Nashville," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (June 1981): 182-192.
[9] Bobby L. Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780-1930: Elites and Dilemmas* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999). Historian Mary Frances Berry makes brief mention of Black Bottom in her study of the ex-slave pension movement. See Berry, *My Face Is Black Is True: Callie House and the Struggle for Ex-Slave Reparations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 55.
[10] *Nashville American,* January 9, 1893. See also William Waller, ed., *Nashville in the 1890s* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1970), 6.

city's urban core. It was also the location of one-quarter of the city's saloons and a concentration of stables.[11] Locked out of higher-quality housing by cost and racial discrimination, poor Black Nashvillians made homes and built communities in Black Bottom. In 1870, nearly half of the neighborhood's residents were African American. By the end of the century, their share had risen to 65 percent.

Articulating a sense of Black Bottom as a *place* is a thornier task made none the easier by the fact that Nashvillians held dramatically different conceptions and experiences of Black Bottom. Reclaiming Black Bottom as a space where Black Nashvillians lived and labored offers an opportunity to recover a sense of place as it may have been understood by the neighborhood's residents. Doing so does not diminish the structural inequalities that shaped the neighborhood, nor its very real health and safety hazards and their adverse effects. The dissertation argues, however, that Black Bottom was not reducible to crime, vice, or disease. Chapter 2 shows that working-class African Americans made Black Bottom a hub for culture, education, and leisure.

It is a much clearer task to reconstruct how outsiders to Black Bottom, particularly white professionals, understood the neighborhood because their opinions were trumpeted across the city's white newspapers. From Reconstruction to the end of the century, the newspapers engaged in practices that discredited or ignored the Black institutions flourishing in the neighborhood. The newspapers employed "Black Bottom" as an anti-Black epithet and wielded the language of race to explain and condemn crime, vice, and disease. Establishing a connection, even implicit, between race and space was a powerful tool for white Nashvillians who wished to imagine their city to be among the enlightened, modern cities of the New South. Plans to rid the city of the "evils" of Black Bottom date back at least as far as 1873, when a contributor to the Nashville

[11] *Nashville Directory* (1881), 50-55.

Republican Banner implored city officials to destroy the neighborhood, then home to hundreds of formerly enslaved people. If the neighborhood was "deemed a necessary one (God save the mark!)," he grumbled, "let it be quarantined—hedged in out of sight of decency and morality."[12]

Part I: Wartime Origins

The dissertation begins with the origins of Black Bottom as a Black neighborhood. Chapter 1 situates the dissertation in the Civil War history of Nashville, arguing that African Americans' wartime and post-emancipation movements were both spatial and political. In so doing, it is indebted to the scholarship of W. E. B. Du Bois, who emphasized the crucial role of enslaved people's physical movement in transforming the war for Union into a war to destroy slavery.[13] More recently, Leslie Schwalm, Amy Murrell Taylor, Chandra Manning, and Thavolia Glymph have uncovered the political worlds of the refugee camps and shown the experiences and labors of Black women and Black military laborers, male and female, to be as crucial to securing and defining freedom as the enlistment of Black men in the Union army.[14] Chapter 1 examines African Americans' experiences in Civil War Nashville, including how wartime emancipation, military recruitment, and the refugee camps structured relationships that would be mobilized in later pension claims. The twin themes of *claiming place* and *placing claims* have

[12] *Republican Banner*, October 14, 1873.
[13] W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (1935; repr., New York: Free Press, 1998).
[14] Leslie A. Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 43-80; Amy Murrell Taylor, *Embattled Freedom: Journeys through the Civil War's Slave Refugee Camps* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018); Chandra Manning, *Troubled Refuge: Struggling for Freedom in the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016), 161-123; Thavolia Glymph, *The Women's Fight: The Civil War's Battles for Home, Freedom, and Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 221-250. See also Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South, from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003) 13-115; Yael A. Sternhell, *Routes of War: The World of Movement in the Confederate South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 93-154.

their origin in the drama of self-emancipation and wartime labor for the federal government. Refugees from slavery occupied space in the city and demanded to live there as free men, women, and children.

Nashville was selected for this study in part because of the decisive role formerly enslaved African Americans played in securing the city for the Union. Federal forces occupied Nashville in February 1862 and, with the assistance of Black men and women, held the city for the duration of the war. More than 20,000 Black men from Tennessee served in the Union army; the vast majority of them had been enslaved. Nowhere else in the Confederate states did a higher proportion of Black men serve as Union soldiers.[15] In addition, 4,151 Black men volunteered or were compelled to work as laborers in constructing the trenches and forts that defended Nashville.[16]

The army's presence created the conditions for self-emancipation in Middle Tennessee, and enslaved men, women, and children pressed to Union lines. As they journeyed to Nashville in search of freedom, many took up residence in Black Bottom. The arrival of thousands of former slaves doubled the neighborhood's population within a year. As the newcomers laid the foundations of the Black community that would shape Black Bottom for the next century, they also forged a new relationship with the federal government. The Black laborers who fortified the city filed for unpaid wages, while Black soldiers applied for Civil War pensions. However, as Chapter 1 shows, the wartime contingencies of labor in Nashville and the inadequacy of military records created significant barriers to African Americans' access to either form of compensation.

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[15] Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *The Black Military Experience*, ser. 2 of *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 12.

[16] U.S. Senate, "Report of the Commissioners of Investigation of Colored Refugees in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Alabama," in U.S. Senate, *Senate Executive Documents*, 38th Cong., 2nd sess., No. 28, p. 13.

In response, Black claimants and their families developed local networks of support in Black Bottom and across the city to secure the entitlements of wartime labor and military service.

Part II: Claiming Place

Viewing the process of emancipation and the efforts of African Americans to build community in the late nineteenth century through a spatial lens requires attention to geography. How did the movement of refugees from slavery shape the development of Nashville's postwar Black communities? What spaces were open to freedpeople, and what kind of places did they create? How did the neighborhood's topography affect the lives of African Americans living in Black Bottom in the late nineteenth century?

Chapter 2 rests, in part, on a digital reconstruction of Black Bottom using data from such traditional historical sources as census records, city directories, newspaper reports, and municipal records and representing it spatially using GIS (Geographic Information System). GIS—sophisticated computer software designed to manage, organize, analyze, and visualize geographical data—is an excellent tool for spatial analysis. A significant breakthrough for analyzing space, GIS has offered less toward understanding place in all of its cultural complexity.[17] This dissertation takes a cue from human, cultural, and political geographers who use spatial analysis as only one tool of many available for excavating a historical sense of place.

The dissertation uses mapping as a critical tool for historical analysis. Those who wished to see Black Bottom destroyed and its residents displaced deployed spatial arguments. Late nineteenth-century white newspapers peddled the idea that virtually any plague in Nashville had its origin in Black Bottom. The logic of the newspaper stories suggested that if Black Bottom

[17] Cresswell, *Place*, 20.

was defined by vice, crime, and disease, then these issues could be solved by eliminating the neighborhood. Reclaiming Black Bottom thus requires more than anecdotal evidence of the vibrant Black community or the long history of Black institutions that once existed in the neighborhood; it requires mapping. Critical cartography *re*-places Black life and community in downtown Nashville where they were displaced by urban renewal and gentrification. Mapping historical Black Bottom anchors Black history to the heart of Nashville and grounds the richness of the neighborhood's social and geographical landscapes in physical space.

Chapter 2 relies on an analysis of a variety of maps of Nashville that date from 1877 to 1908. They provide spatial data that hints at the material environment that set parameters for lived experience. The historical maps were georeferenced—tied to a system of ground coordinates—and digitally layered onto the corresponding physical location in present-day Nashville. Each map displays different pieces of historical spatial data at different scales. Small-scale maps capture data at the city level in a single glance. A 1908 map of the city of Nashville shows a comprehensive projection of the citywide street grid near the turn of the century. A 1903 map displays the spatial development of Nashville's municipal boundaries by drawing and labeling areas of newly incorporated land from 1784 to 1903. Large-scale maps, such as those produced by the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company in 1897, represent data at the street level. Block by block, Sanborn maps present data about the dimensions, construction material, and reported use of each building. Some maps offered glimpses into elements of the natural and built environment that shaped the conditions of life, labor, and lived experience for neighborhood residents—the source of a subterranean spring that flooded annually, the routes of streetcar lines, the plan for a new haymarket to replace tenement buildings.

Spatial analysis illuminates the natural and built environments that structured everyday life for the residents of Black Bottom. Historical maps from 1860 to the turn of the century show that new housing development skipped over the urban core and expanded into the countryside as Nashville grew. Meanwhile, housing stock in Black Bottom deteriorated, and the number of warehouses, stables, and manufactories increased. Mapping the neighborhood's built environment reveals that as commercial real estate encroached on residential space, the neighborhood's housing was relegated to the lowest, most flood-prone land. Home to some of the city's poorest residents, these properties were also the hardest hit during floods in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

The traditional sources of social history—manuscript censuses, city directories, and local newspapers—combined with digital mapping illuminate the historical space of Black Bottom. A street-level analysis of census returns documents demographic shifts in Black Bottom from 1860 to 1900. Used in conjunction with census records, city directories offer a glimpse into the neighborhood's commercial environment and occupational structure. Close reading of newspaper coverage illuminates the ways Black Bottom as a place was made, maintained, and contested in public discourse. Mapping African American life in Black Bottom is an important corrective to newspaper stories that denigrated the neighborhood and its Black residents. Once located in space, the brief sketches of life in Black Bottom gleaned from newspapers begin to capture a sense of place. Men and women lounge on front porches and street corners, fanning themselves to ward off the heat of a Nashville summer or the flies of a nearby stable.[18] Women talk, cook, and care for children while hanging laundry in the courtyard between two brick tenement

[18] *Daily American*, July 7, 1888.

buildings.[19] A barkeeper hands the house guitar to a visiting patron to serenade men and women gathering at a saloon for drinks and an evening of song and dance.[20]

Neighborhoods are always more than spaces of work and residence. Working-class Black Nashvillians developed a rich associational life in Black Bottom. Between 1860 and 1900, the neighborhood drew Black residents from across the city and the surrounding countryside for social and political gatherings. Although such events did not always receive positive coverage in Nashville's white newspapers, they provide a glimpse into the neighborhood's rich ecology of social, religious, and educational activity. Black Bottom was home to the only African American public school in the city's urban core. It was also the location of two of the city's oldest Black churches, St. Paul's African American Episcopal Church and Clark Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church. Chapter 2 examines the activities of these institutions within the context of Black Bottom as a working-class and increasingly African American neighborhood. It argues that their presence in the neighborhood was not anomalous or coincidental. Rather, each institution served crucial social, educational, religious, and political functions that defined the neighborhood for its Black residents. They made Black Bottom a place worth living in.

Black Bottom was also one of Nashville's centers of working-class leisure. Chapter 2 argues that the saloons, dance halls, and gambling dens of Black Bottom provided Black Nashvillians access to secular and communal leisure spaces that were unavailable elsewhere in the city. Many of Black Bottom's saloons and dance halls catered almost exclusively to a Black clientele and became destinations for Black men and women from across the city who sought company, refreshment, dancing, and music. These same social establishments are examined

[19] *Nashville American*, August 8, 1909.
[20] *Nashville Banner*, September 17, 1896.

again in Chapter 3 as they appeared in discourses denigrating the neighborhood as a threat to public morals, health, and safety.

Chapter 3 examines the racialization of space in Nashville. In a backlash against Black Bottom, white Nashvillians sought to reclaim the land and displace the neighborhood's Black residents. Drawing chiefly from detailed newspaper research, the chapter argues that racialized discourse regarding crime, vice, and disease had serious consequences for African Americans in Black Bottom. Newspapers published accounts of crimes in the neighborhood almost daily. In most stories, African Americans featured only as the alleged perpetrators. The regularity of Black Bottom crime reportage encouraged readers to think of the neighborhood as both "a Negro settlement" and a "den of iniquity."[21] Such narratives displaced the role the neighborhood's residents—Black veterans and military laborers—had played in safeguarding the city during the Civil War. Also obscured was the tapestry of community woven by the neighborhood's Black churches, schools, and social establishments. By the late nineteenth century, the neighborhood's association with Black-perpetrated crime became so prevalent that the name Black Bottom became a shorthand for the alleged criminality of African Americans.

Chapter 3 argues that attention to place is essential to understanding what historian Khalil G. Muhammad calls the condemnation of blackness. Muhammad argues that the social conditions of Black life and elements of Black culture that white observers regarded as peculiar or threatening were taken as evidence of innate moral deficiency and criminality among Black Americans. Early criminologists gathered statistics on race and crime that reinforced *a priori* conceptions of Black criminality and justified greater police surveillance and criminal

[21] Recollection of Mrs. George H. Price, quoted in Waller, ed., *Nashville in the 1890s*, 178 (Negro settlement); *Daily American*, July 22, 1890 (den of iniquity).

prosecution of African Americans.[22] Chapter 3 argues that the physical space of Black Bottom represents what historian Anthony Gregory describes as a "feedback loop" in Muhammad's thesis, in which "racist enforcement propelled racist criminology propelled racist enforcement."[23]

Black Bottom's location—directly between the central business district and new suburban development in South Nashville—meant that white Nashvillians could neither ignore nor fully quarantine themselves from a neighborhood they increasingly regarded as morally repugnant and potentially dangerous. Nashville's busiest streetcar lines passed through the heart of Black Bottom, a route the city's white commuters considered a daily indignity. The constant barrage of crime stories in the press influenced the way they experienced frequent passage through Black Bottom via streetcar. In 1886, white residents of South Nashville formed a Law and Order League to augment the presence and power of city police operating in Black Bottom and impel the criminal justice system—particularly prosecutors and judges—to undertake more criminal prosecutions and impose harsher sentences. In the context of racialized space and the criminalization of Blackness, the networks of community and local relationships maintained by the neighborhood's Black residents were subject to growing pressure and assumed added significance.

Part III: Placing Claim

Chapters 4 and 5 draw on the methods of microhistory to explore Black Bottom's historical connection to emancipation and Black military service during the Civil War. They examine the interactions of Black Nashvillians with the U.S. Pension Bureau and the ability of

[22] Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).
[23] Anthony Gregory, "Policing Jim Crow America: Enforcers' Agency and Structural Transformations," *Law and History Review* 40, no. 1 (Spring 2022): 91-122 (quotation on 115).

Black southerners to draw on wartime experiences and social relationships to claim the recognition and entitlements they had earned. The chapters demonstrate that the ability to maintain and communicate information over space and time was an essential component of African American struggles for Civil War pensions. These chapters are indebted to the work of historian Brandi Brimmer, who argues that the politics of Black pension claims were decidedly local.[24] Brimmer also points to the crucial role of Black claims agents in making pension applications accessible to working-class Black women. To draw on community knowledge as evidence for pension eligibility, African Americans had first to locate community members. Black pension networks existed over space, and the mobilization of shared information required movement through space. Put simply, Black pension claims were reliant on the applicant's ability to draw on communal resources dispersed across space. Chapter 4 analyzes the work of Richard Blanton, a Black minister and Civil War veteran, and Joseph Kellogg, a white notary public, who together processed more than one hundred pension applications for African Americans in South Nashville, including Black Bottom. It follows Blanton as he walked the streets of Black Bottom and its vicinity making house calls on Black claimants, soliciting future clients, and evangelizing the value of a federal entitlement. Local to Black Bottom, Blanton mobilized collective memory of Civil War service and labor by moving across space.

The Pension Bureau also recognized the importance of geographical knowledge. When the federal government sought to rein in pension expenditures at the end of the century, the bureau undertook several high-profile investigations into allegations that organized rings of criminals were submitting false and fraudulent pension applications. The bureau tracked the location of individual claimants in order to identify, investigate, and prosecute alleged pension

[24] Brimmer, *Claiming Union Widowhood*.

fraud. Black claimants were cast as both the leading perpetrators and principal victims of such fraud. Chapter 5 recounts the Pension Bureau's investigation of Blanton and Kellogg and the spatial strategies employed to surveil and investigate Black pension claims in Nashville. It argues that the geographically dispersed nature of Black pension networks rendered them susceptible to accusations of fraud.

Although they were written in non-discriminatory language, the requirements set by the Pension Bureau meant that African Americans faced greater barriers to entitlements than white applicants. Black veterans often struggled to prove the legitimacy of their military service. In 1883, one bureau official explained to the commissioner of pensions that the records of the U.S. Colored Troops "are very meager" and special examination was therefore often required to "obtain the testimony necessary to make up for the lack of an official record."[25] This problem was especially severe in Nashville, where the chaos of war and the confused distinction between military laborers and enlisted soldiers meant that the Pension Bureau viewed every claim from a Black Nashvillian with deep skepticism. Widows of Black soldiers faced even greater evidentiary challenges. In 1890, Congress radically expanded the number of individuals eligible for a pension by enacting a law that waived the requirement that the death or disability of a veteran had to be war-related. Known as the Disability Act or simply the "new law," the act transformed Civil War pensions from a service-related disability and survivor's benefit into an old-age entitlement for Union war veterans and their widows. While the 1890 law widened eligibility, it also exposed applicants to new forms of surveillance and examination.[26] Veterans faced medical tests of increasing specificity. Special examiners evaluated not only the legitimacy

[25] L. E. Dickey to Commissioner of Pensions, August 15, 1883, quoted in Dale Kretz, *Administering Freedom: The State of Emancipation after the Freedmen's Bureau* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 116.
[26] Kretz, *Administering Freedom,* 200-201.

of a widow's domestic relationships but also her respectability, asking family members, past and present acquaintances, employers, and former enslavers questions about her intimate and domestic relationships.[27]

At the first hint of inconsistency, functionaries of the Pension Bureau ordered special investigations into the claims of Black pension applicants. Historian Donald Shaffer estimates that nearly half of Black applicants were subjected to special examination, compared to only a quarter of white applicants.[28] Meanwhile, the 1890 law spurred political backlash from Democrats and others who opposed government spending. At a time when veterans' entitlements should have been more available than ever, the Pension Bureau faced even greater pressure to root out claims suspected to be false or fraudulent. As Chapters 4 and 5 show, Black claims were often the first to be investigated.

Chapter 4 explores the work of Richard Blanton, a Black pension sub-agent, to expand pension access to working-class African Americans in Black Bottom and the efforts of the Pension Bureau to improve its bureaucratic and investigative techniques to evaluate new claims. Brandi Brimmer argues that Black claims agents were vital to the success of pension applications submitted by the widows of Black soldiers. Brimmer's analysis of the efforts of Black women in New Bern, North Carolina, found that many Black women "hired claims agents to navigate the time-consuming, protracted, and difficult-to-understand claims process." Claims agents, also known as pension attorneys, assisted applicants in their interactions with the Pension Bureau. They helped them "assemble witnesses, affidavits, and other evidence and corresponded directly

[27] Brimmer, *Claiming Union Widowhood*, 163-182; Tera W. Hunter, *Bound in Wedlock: Slave and Free Black Marriage in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017), 261-299.
[28] Donald R. Shaffer, *After the Glory: The Struggles of Black Civil War Veterans* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 129.

with the bureau or acted as go-betweens with the national firms that represented claimants." Although claims agents needed to be able to read, write, and have a basic understanding of the pension laws, the Pension Bureau did not require them to have legal or other formal training, and Brimmer found that Black claims agents in New Bern held a variety of occupations well outside the legal profession. Claims agents, she reports, worked as "farmers, barbers, teachers, ministers, grocers, and retailers; most combined two or three of these occupations."[29]

The economy of Civil War pensions could be boom or bust for poor applicants. On the one hand, a pension provided long-term financial security that was out of reach for most unskilled laborers, much less men with disabilities and single mothers. On the other hand, the complicated application process created a cottage industry of professions that offered help to applicants for the right price. In 1900, the median amount disbursed among all Civil War pensioners was $12 per month. Those who could prove that their qualifying disability resulted from wartime service received even higher monthly allotments.[30] Claims agents could also profit from processing pension applications, though only if their clients were awarded pensions. They were allowed to charge clients a one-time fee of up to $10 for every successful pension application.[31] Claims agents were, therefore, incentivized to be selective about whom they chose to serve. Many worked only with applicants they believed had the greatest chance of success. Many pension applicants used their first entitlement check to pay their claims agent. Other

[29] Brimmer, *Claiming Union Widowhood*, 1-8 (quotation on 7).
[30] Dora L. Costa, *The Evolution of Retirement: An American Economic History, 1880-1990* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 200. The online comparative worth calculator, Measuring Worth, estimates that $12 in labor earnings in 1890 is equivalent to a wage of $2,240 in 2022. See, "Relative Labor Earnings Calculator," Measuring Worth, accessed, July 7, 2023, https://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/uscompare/.
[31] U.S. Pension Bureau, *A Digest of the Laws of the United States Governing the Granting of Army and Navy Pensions and Bounty-Land Warrants, Decisions of the Secretary of the Interior, and Rulings and Orders of the Commissioner of Pensions Thereunder* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1890), 50.

members of the legal profession also sought financial gain from the economy of pensions. The Pension Bureau required that witness affidavits be executed before a notary public, justice of the peace, or attorney registered to practice before the bureau.[32] Unlike claims agents, notaries received compensation for their services upfront, regardless of the outcome of the application. Though smaller than the fees collected by claims agents, notary fees were not insignificant. Usually less than $1, the cost of notarizing official documents could be high for applicants whose claims relied on community testimony.[33]

Chapter 4 examines the practices developed by local claims agents and sub-agents (who worked with claims agents but did not correspond directly with the Pension Bureau) to make pensions available to residents of Black Bottom and other poor Black Nashvillians. Richard Blanton, a Black minister, worked as a sub-agent of Joseph Kellogg, a white claims agent and notary public, in Black Bottom. The chapter theorizes both Black neighborhoods and the Pension Bureau as archives that could be browsed, searched, and read for information. It argues that Blanton practiced a vernacular form of information-gathering, one akin to browsing, that was oppositional to the task-based system of information retrieval used by the Pension Bureau. The particularities of Black military labor and enlistment in Civil War Nashville and the poor record-keeping of the Union army created staggering barriers to successful pension claims. Even claimants with the time, documentation, and bureaucratic savvy to sustain a multi-year correspondence with the bureau were not guaranteed success. Blanton, however, served the poorest Nashvillians, including residents of Black Bottom whose claims had been rejected or

[32] *Digest of the Laws*, 1890, 214.
[33] Richard Blanton told one pension applicant that Kellogg charged a notary fee of $1 for each affidavit he notarized. See R. H. Blanton to Albert Henderson, n.d., in Legal Case File of J. A. Kellogg, Case Files of Attorneys, Agents, Pensioners and Others Relating to the Prosecution of Pension Claims and the Investigation of Fraudulent Practices 1862-1914, Law Division, Records of the Bureau of Pensions and Its Predecessors, 1805-1895, RG 15, NARA, Washington, DC.

tabled by previous claims agents. His actions seeking out working-class and poor African Americans to apply for pensions and gathering vernacular sources of information to document their claims tell a significant story of how African Americans mobilized community relationships across space and engaged with the federal government in the late nineteenth century. The chapter thus joins scholarship arguing that through sustained and long-term interaction with the Pension Bureau, Black claimants played a significant role in shaping the development of the bureaucratic state.[34]

Blanton's ability to enlist the politics of space to enable residents of Black Bottom to apply for a Civil War pension opened the door to a backlash against claims that relied on vernacular information-gathering. Chapter 5 argues that Blanton's vernacular information-gathering put his pension practices at odds with the documentary standards of the Pension Bureau. The bureau's investigation into Blanton's and Kellogg's practices illustrates the extent to which it developed techniques to surveil Black pensioners and police the boundaries of legitimate claims. Whereas Blanton's practices were evidence of the extent to which individual applications were products of communal and shared information, the bureau's investigative strategies sought to atomize and isolate individual claims. Chapter 5 argues that the politics of space was central to the bureau's ability to bring charges against Blanton and his business partner, Kellogg, in a high-profile investigation into allegedly widespread pension fraud among Black pension applicants in Nashville. It took a team of clerks and special examiners, as well as cooperation from other government departments to comprehend the shared knowledge mobilized by Black applicants to support their claims. Ultimately, seven special examiners were dispatched to Nashville at the request and under the leadership of Albert Roome, a seasoned bureau

[34] Kretz, *Administering Freedom*, 6-13.

investigator. Together, they undertook a months-long secret investigation into Black pension claims in Nashville. In order to assist Roome's investigation, clerks at the Pension Office in Washington, D.C., poured over applications that originated from Nashville. They copied hundreds of postal addresses to portable cards and shipped them to Roome and his investigative team, which was then ordered to audit African American claims first.

Because they served applicants with the greatest need and the least ability to prepare a successful pension claim, Blanton and Kellogg were quickly identified as targets of the investigation, which culminated in criminal charges. In 1899, both Blanton and Kellogg were convicted of pension fraud and sentenced to the Tennessee State Penitentiary. Chapter 5 examines the investigation and prosecution of the two men, arguing that Blanton's vernacular information-gathering and his ability to connect claimants and witnesses across space opened the door to federal investigation and prosecution of the Black pension networks of Middle Tennessee.

Refugees from slavery claimed space in the heart of Nashville and created a place of freedom for themselves and generations to come. They built Black Bottom into a place of life, labor, and leisure for Black Nashvillians. Place-making in turn laid the foundation for collective claims-making. Shared neighborhood space fostered communal socialization, which, in turn, sustained strong relationships among neighborhood residents. Black pension applicants relied on the social resources nurtured in Black Bottom to prove their eligibility for Civil War pensions.

Place-making, like claims-making, rarely proceeded in a linear fashion. African Americans faced obstacles when creating a neighborhood in Black Bottom. Despite the challenges posed by the natural and built environment, they proceeded to invest in local space

and build a community. Each new generation of neighborhood residents faced opposition to their presence near downtown Nashville. In the 1880s, affluent white Nashvillians used the city's newspapers to malign the neighborhood. Frustrated by their inability to control Black Bottom through policing, they sought to reclaim the neighborhood by controlling the discursive space it occupied in local press and politics. Black Bottom's Black residents successfully withstood the initial nineteenth-century backlash, but the tropes deployed by the neighborhood's opponents persisted into the twentieth century and fed into justifications for urban renewal and redevelopment.

Vernacular methods of claims-making—reliance on communal relationships—faced a backlash similar to white Nashvillians' attempts to destroy Black Bottom. In 1899 the Pension Bureau made the neighborhood's Black residents the target of a criminal investigation. Influenced by the disparaging depictions of Black Bottom in the city's newspapers, bureau functionaries viewed pension applications from its residents with suspicion. The ensuing criminal investigation relied on the bureau's ability to understand how Black social relationships were sustained across space and eventually called into question the legitimacy of communal claims-making.

Claiming space brought tangible, real-world benefits for working-class African Americans. Black Bottom was a place where Black Nashvillians exercised freedom in the physical world, on porches and sidewalks, and in churches and dance halls. The physical space of Black Bottom enabled communal relationships among its residents, which, in time, developed into a resource for Black claims-making. African Americans defended Nashville during the Civil War and claimed Black Bottom as their neighborhood. Later, the neighborhood defended the founding generation's claims to the entitlements of wartime service.

Part I

Wartime Origins

Chapter 1

Emancipation and the Foundations of Black Claims-Making

On August 13, 1863, the day after his enlistment in the 13th U.S. Colored Infantry, Private William Rankin was careering through the midnight Tennessee air on a flatbed railcar. He and others from his company sat precariously atop the cargo, which consisted of pontoons that were to be used as bridges by the Union army further south. The train had too few boxcars to transport the entire company. Instead, many men rode in the open, sitting in whatever space they could find. Rankin had little time to contemplate the emotions inspired by the roaring train and rushing wind. Did he experience a refreshing sense of freedom in the night air? Was his mind burdened by concerns for those he had left behind? Was he disgruntled by his consignment to riding atop freight rather than in a boxcar?

Whatever Rankin's thoughts, they were interrupted by calamity as the train approached the Elk River. A tie securing the cargo broke, and Rankin felt the pontoons shift beneath him as the train neared a curve in the track. As it rounded the turn, centrifugal force sent both men and freight cascading from the car. Rankin and the others landed on the ground, among the pontoons. The train stopped, and fellow soldiers rushed to assist those who had fallen. Benjamin Armstrong, a longtime friend of Rankin, had also been cast off the train but escaped with only a sprain. He found Rankin "lying on the ground with one of the pontoon bridges across his belly." Armstrong and others rescued Rankin from the wreckage. Unfortunately, there was no doctor on the train, but at least Rankin traveled the remainder of the journey in the safety of a boxcar.

William Rankin was only one of thousands of enslaved men in Middle Tennessee who experienced emancipation through flight to Union lines, labor for military employers, and enlistment in the Union army. Prior to the accident on the railroad, Rankin had worked as a

military laborer in Franklin, Tennessee. When a recruiter for the United States Colored Troops approached him and his co-workers, they enlisted in the 13th U.S. Colored Infantry. The railroad accident cut short Rankin's career as a soldier and permanently hampered his ability to perform manual labor, but at least he was enslaved no more. He was a U.S. soldier and entitled to the benefits thereof. In 1894, thirty-one years later, the same men who had lifted pontoons to rescue him came to his aid once again. Five fellow riders from the train provided evidence in his claim for a Civil War pension. Some of them had labored alongside him in Franklin before enlistment; some of them had known him during slavery. Their relationships had been sustained through the trials and trauma of wartime emancipation and remained vital sources of support.[1]

This chapter examines the process of emancipation as it unfolded in Nashville, Tennessee, in three overlapping phases. Phase one, February 1862 through November 1863, consisted of Union occupation and the work of African American military laborers who fortified the city. The Union army occupied Middle Tennessee in February 1862 and held the state capital, Nashville, for the remainder of the war thanks in part to the fortifications constructed by Black laborers. The presence of the Union army created the conditions for self-emancipation in Middle Tennessee, and enslaved men, women, and children pressed to Union lines. Even so, emancipation progressed in the region as an unintended consequence of Union occupation rather than as a result of official policy. In the early years of the war federal officials adopted a policy of noninterference with slavery and took pains to preserve the property rights of unionist slaveholders. Union troops were ordered to exclude enslaved people who approached Union military lines in search of freedom. Some troops actively assisted slaveholders in locating and

[1] Deposition of William Frearson, December 24, 1894, Deposition of Ben Armstrong, December 24, 1894, Deposition of Joseph Armstrong, January 5, 1894, and Deposition of Richard Blanton, January 11, 1864, all in claim of William Rankin, Co. A, 13th USCI [CC 393354], Civil War and Later Pension Files, RG 15, NARA, Washington, D.C.

apprehending their slaves. Andrew Johnson, who was appointed military governor shortly after the occupation of Nashville, successfully negotiated with President Lincoln to exempt Tennessee from the Emancipation Proclamation, but even as slavery continued to live in Tennessee law, the institution steadily crumbled.

The recruitment of Black soldiers in Middle Tennessee, which began in September 1863, inaugurated a second phase in the death of slavery. Enlistment offered a new route to freedom for Black men and created steep competition for both military and civilian employers who wanted to employ former slaves as laborers. The organization of Black regiments in Nashville brought even greater numbers of formerly enslaved men and women to the capital city. Recruitment also came at a time when unionist slaveholders in Middle Tennessee had begun to see abolition as inevitable.

A third and final phase began in February 1864, when the Union army formally established a camp in Nashville for the relief of refugee slaves. Nashville had been a destination for freedom seekers since the first days of Union occupation. The establishment of refugee camps in Nashville and the surrounding area was a belated solution to what had been a long-standing problem. Then, in December 1864, a final Confederate campaign into Middle Tennessee offered many Black soldiers their first test of combat. Their role in crushing the Confederate offensive was crucial to the final destruction of slavery in Tennessee. In January 1865, a state constitutional convention approved an amendment abolishing slavery, and Tennessee's unionist voters ratified the amendment the following month.

Wartime emancipation, military labor, and the enlistment of Black men as soldiers established a new relationship between African Americans and the federal government. The actions of enslaved men and women fleeing slavery and claiming Nashville as a place of

freedom shifted Union policy from exclusion to emancipation. Black Tennesseans demanded the benefits of freedom: security from re-enslavement, safety for families and individuals, wages for labor, and the entitlements of military service. Soldiers and laborers insisted that their service to the Union entitled themselves and their families to both freedom and citizenship.

Self-emancipation was a spatial process. Wherever enslaved people asserted their freedom, they were claiming a right to be free in a physical world. During the Civil War, refugees from slavery arrived in Nashville by the thousands. Collectively, they laid the foundations for the city's future Black communities. The concentration of Black veterans and their widows in Black Bottom made the neighborhood a reservoir of resources for men and women who made claims for the entitlements of wartime service. Social relationships established during the war and sustained in Black neighborhoods after the conflict buoyed Black claims. During the war, Black laborers and their families grounded their appeals for unpaid wages on the testimony of comrades, neighbors, and acquaintances. Late into the nineteenth century, former soldiers and their families did the same. They drew on relationships developed during the war and nurtured in Black Bottom to claim Civil War pensions.

The Destruction of Slavery

The self-emancipatory struggles of enslaved men and women combined with the military necessity of securing Tennessee for the Union to destroy slavery in the state. The Union army occupied Middle Tennessee in February 1862, eager to use Nashville as a springboard for campaigns deeper into the Confederacy. Union troops under General Don Carlos Buell, commander of the Army of the Ohio, arrived at the outskirts of Nashville on Sunday, February 23. On Monday, the mayor and a small delegation of prominent citizens visited Buell and

surrendered the city.[2] Nashville remained under Union control for the duration of the war. As historian Stephen Ash points out, "No other major Southern region, except northern Virginia, endured enemy occupation during the Civil War for as long as Middle Tennessee."[3]

The Union presence in Nashville did not mean emancipation for the enslaved men and women of Middle Tennessee. Initially, the Union army refused to harbor fugitive slaves and attempted to avoid interfering with slavery. Soldiers were ordered to exclude slaves who fled to Nashville seeking freedom behind Union military lines. "We are in arms," General Buell reminded the occupying troops, "not for the purpose of invading the rights of our fellow-countrymen anywhere, but to maintain the integrity of the Union and protect the Constitution under which its people have been prosperous and happy."[4] Buell and other officers in Nashville went beyond the policy of exclusion by allowing soldiers to help slaveowners locate and recapture fugitive slaves.[5] But military support for rendering slaves to slaveholders did not last long. A new article of war adopted by Congress in March 1862 prohibited the use of Union soldiers to return refugees to their enslavers.[6] In July 1862, the Second Confiscation Act made Union military lines the boundary between slavery and freedom by freeing the slaves of rebel

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[2] Peter Maslowski, *Treason Must Be Made Odious: Military Occupation and Wartime Reconstruction in Nashville, Tennessee, 1862-65* (Millwood, NY: KTO Press, 1978), 15.
[3] Stephen V. Ash, *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 1860-1870: War and Peace in the Upper South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 85.
[4] Brigadier-General Don Carlos Buell, General Orders, No. 13a., February 26, 1862, in U.S. War Department, *The War of The Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), ser. 1, vol. 7, 669-670.
[5] Maslowski, *Treason Must Be Made Odious*, 99.
[6] Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Thavolia Glymph, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *The Destruction of Slavery*, vol. 1, ser. 1, *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 252-253. The change in Union policy did not diminish the desire of slaveholders to apprehend escaped slaves. Nashville newspapers published notices to slaveholders of fugitive slaves residing in Nashville as late as August 7, 1862. See Bobby L. Lovett, "Nashville's Fort Negley: A Symbol of Blacks' Involvement with the Union Army," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 10.

owners in all Union-occupied territory. Such slaves "shall be deemed captives of war," the act decreed, "and shall be forever free of their servitude, and not again held as slaves."[7] In addition to liberating the slaves of disloyal owners, the act forbade soldiers from returning fugitive slaves to their former owners, authorized the army to employ Black laborers, and promised freedom and wages to slaves so employed.[8] So did the Militia Act, which had also been approved in July 1862.[9] Together, the Second Confiscation Act and the Militia Act signaled a crucial shift from the policy of noninterference with slavery. Following their enactment, military officials were not only required to accept slaves into Union lines, but also encouraged to employ them at military labor.

The apparent ease with which the Union army had occupied Nashville was due in no small part to the failure of Confederate authorities to fortify the city.[10] Union officials recognized that any successful defense of Nashville would require the construction of massive defense works, which would require the mustering of labor at an equally significant scale. The army's Engineer Department planned to construct a fort of stone on St. Cloud Hill, overlooking the city, and smaller defensive fortifications located strategically in the vicinity of Nashville. St. Cloud Hill, a prominence to the south of the city's major railway depot, had a commanding view of the surrounding countryside and also of the capitol building to the north. The fortification was named Fort Negley, after the commanding officer in Nashville at the time of its construction, General James S. Negley. The fort, when complete, would be the largest masonry fort in the

[7] U.S., *Statutes at Large, Treaties, and Proclamations of the United States of America*, vol. 12 (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1863), 589-592.
[8] See Ira Berlin, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor*, vol. 2, ser. 1, *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 370.
[9] See Freedmen and Southern Society Project, "Chronology of Emancipation during the Civil War," accessed July 15, 2023, http://www.freedmen.umd.edu/chronol.htm.
[10] Maslowski, *Treason Must Be Made Odious*, 14.

United States. The labor needed to accomplish its construction was correspondingly unprecedented.

On August 6, 1862, General Buell ordered Captain James S. Morton, the chief engineer in Buell's department, to fortify Nashville by impressing slaves. Morton accordingly instructed slaveholders to deliver their enslaved men to him. He published notices in the *Nashville Dispatch* calling for a total of 1,000 men and requiring every slaveholder in Davidson County to provide a specified number. The slaveholders were to provide their impressed slaves with subsistence and tools for the duration of their service. To those slaveholders who were loyal to the Union, Morton promised compensation for the labor of the men they enslaved, but, because he did not have the cash on hand, the manner of the payment would be decided at a later date.[11] Perhaps unsurprisingly, few slaveholders willingly furnished the enslaved men required of them, and Morton grew impatient.

A large-scale Confederate counter-offensive into Kentucky in late August and September, 1862, and the Union army's near-total evacuation of Middle Tennessee in pursuit escalated the need to fortify Nashville without delay. Frustrated by the noncooperation of local slaveholders, Captain Morton resorted to securing labor in whatever way he could. Some Union soldiers remaining in Nashville were assigned fatigue duty and worked alongside free and enslaved Black men who had volunteered themselves or been provided by slaveholding unionists. Most Black laborers were impressed from Nashville and the surrounding countryside.[12] One Union officer later recalled that Morton "pushed forward with . . . construction most vigorously, employing the soldiery, and 'pressing' the negroes of Nashville

[11] Maslowski, *Treason Must Be Made Odious*, 100. See also Lovett, "Nashville's Fort Negley," 7-8.
[12] See Berlin et al., eds., *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor*, 370.

and vicinity and teams of all kinds without stint or scruple."[13] From August through October, 1862, Union officers in Nashville rounded up nearly every Black man in Nashville and the surrounding vicinity for military labor. General Negley ordered patrols in Nashville to "impress into service every Negro you can find in the Streets of this City who can not prove that he is owned by any person loyal to the government of the United States and residing in and about the City."[14]

Both free and enslaved African Americans became victims of aggressive impressment. A Union officer who later concluded that the construction of Fort Negley "unquestionably contributed greatly to the safety of the city" remarked that "the colored population of that city have probably not yet forgotten the suddenness" of impressment. Union troops impressed Black men "from barber-shops, kitchens, and even churches, and set them at work upon St. Cloud Hill," he recalled.[15] Impressment continued under the oversight of General Buell's successor, General William S. Rosecrans, who became commander of the renamed Department of the Cumberland in October 1862.[16] A second wave of impressments occurred shortly after Rosecrans's appointment, and Black men remained the target. In late October, Union cavalry interrupted the services of the city's Colored Baptist Church, seized every able-bodied man in attendance, and marched them to a military worksite.[17] As early as September, the brutal

[13] John Fitch, *Annals of the Army of the Cumberland Comprising Biographies, Sketches, Descriptions of Departments, Accounts of Expeditions, Skirmishes and Battles; also its Police Record of Spies, Smugglers, and Prominent Rebel Emissaries* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1864), 182. The "teams" in question were horses and mules.
[14] Order by Gen. J. S. Negley to the Commander of City Patrols, October 14, 1862, quoted in Maslowski, *Treason Must Be Made Odious*, 100.
[15] Fitch, *Annals of the Army,* 182.
[16] Maslowski, *Treason Must Be Made Odious*, 47.
[17] Lovett, "Nashville's Fort Negley", 9. A third impressment occurred in August and September of 1863 when Union forces needed men to work on the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad. See Maslowski, *Treason Must Be Made Odious*, 100-101.

efficiency of impressment was evident: Morton was in command of more than 1,300 free and enslaved African Americans, the vast majority of whom had been compelled into service.[18]

Three circumstances made impressment the primary means by which Morton secured the labor of Black men. First, the Confederate counter-offensive of August and September 1862 left Nashville extremely vulnerable. The Union army abandoned nearly all the territory it had held in northern Alabama and middle Tennessee except Nashville, where a small garrison was left to defend the city.[19] Second, Tennessee was exempted from the Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863, which made the Second Confiscation Act the legal foundation for emancipation in Middle Tennessee.[20] Emancipation thus came in exchange for military labor for which payment was promised. Third, Morton did not receive the necessary funds to entice laborers with wages. Even when the Engineer Department finally sent cash to Nashville to pay the Black laborers in November 1863, Morton and his successor held back because they were uncertain as to whether the pay should go to the enslaved laborers themselves or to their enslavers.[21] Black men therefore labored month after month while promised wages never materialized.

Morton's labor regime, which relied almost exclusively on African Americans for unskilled labor, was uncompromising and often brutal. Black laborers cleared four wooded acres surrounding St. Cloud Hill. Black masons blasted deep into the stone foundations of the hill and

[18] Captain of Engineers James St. C. Morton to General Joseph G. Totten, September 5, 1862, in *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor*, ed. Berlin et al., 389-390.
[19] Berlin et al., eds., *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor*, 370.
[20] Lincoln's preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, issued in September 1862, promised to exempt from the final proclamation any state then in rebellion that held elections and sent loyal representatives to Congress before January 1, 1863. Military governor Andrew Johnson petitioned Lincoln on behalf of slaveholding unionists in Middle Tennessee and asked for a special exemption for Tennessee. Johnson argued that Tennessee unionists would gladly hold elections, but active engagements with the Confederate army made elections unsafe. Lincoln agreed, and Tennessee was exempted from the Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863. See Berlin et al., eds., *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor*, 370-371.
[21] Captain of Engineers J. St. C. Morton to Gen. Jos. G. Totten, March 2, 1863, in *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor*, ed. Berlin et al., 392-394.

excavated ground for the fort's interior. Black women and young adults hauled dirt, felled trees, and prepared food for the laborers. Impressed laborers worked under armed guard and lived in a camp on the side of St. Cloud Hill. Food and shelter were scarce. Some of the laborers had to "lay out upon the works at night under armed guard," and most lacked blankets. Military supervisors demanded a grueling pace. Between September 1862 and November 1863, about 800 workers died. Of those lucky enough to survive, few ever received payment for their labor.[22]

Captain Morton explained that the exigencies of wartime emancipation made compensating the laborers difficult. Free African Americans and those formerly enslaved by rebel slaveholders were eligible to receive payment for their labor, but Unionist slaveholders had been promised compensation for the labor of any of their enslaved men who were impressed. "The Dept. has no doubt observed that no wages have been paid to negroes working on the Fortifications," Morton reported to the army's chief of engineers on March 2, 1863. "In the first place, it is very difficult to decide, in the majority of cases, whether the money is due to them or to their owners, or whether they have any owners: and secondly, they steal tools and provisions whenever they can, to an extent that they deserve the loss of their wages, in many cases: and above all, they elude their guards and desert in such numbers that there is no keeping any accounts with them." Morton had promised a total of $20,482 in wages for work on the fortifications of Nashville between July 1862 and February 1863. He understood that failure to deliver payment caused low morale and high rates of desertion. "Had I the means of paying negroes wages, as the Q.M. and other Dep^{ts} of this army do," Morton informed his superior, "I could secure many more, and would not lose them by desertion."[23]

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[22] Berlin et al., eds., *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor*, 370-371; Fitch, *Annals of the Army*, 633 (quotation).

[23] Capt. Of Engineers J. St. C. Morton to Gen. Jos. G. Totten, March 2, 1863, in *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor*, ed. Berlin et al., 392-394. Morton expressed a desire to pay both enslaved and free Black

Morton forged ahead, compelling unpaid labor for the promise of payment later. He lacked cash for wages and also lacked clear orders as to whether Black laborers should be paid. Finally on May 1, 1863, the Engineer Department forwarded $27,000 to be paid to Black laborers for their work on the fortifications. Along with the cash, Morton received a promise that his questions regarding payments to enslaved laborers impressed by the army would be forwarded to the War Department for guidance. Morton was reassigned later that month and turned the money over to Lieutenant George Burroughs. Like Morton before him, Burroughs refused to pay the Black laborers until he received explicit orders to do so. Six months passed before the War Department approved the recommendation of General George H. Thomas, who had superseded Rosecrans as commander of the Department of the Cumberland, for an order to "pay the negroes themselves the amounts due them respectively."[24] The War Department's order, issued in November, came too late for most Black workers. Recruitment of Black troops, underway in West Tennessee since the spring of 1863, began in Middle Tennessee in September 1863—two months before the Engineer Department was authorized to pay impressed Black laborers. By that time, a majority of the Black laborers had been recruited into military service as soldiers and dispersed across Middle Tennessee. On October 24, Lieutenant Burroughs reported that "about five hundred negroes, employed by the Engineer Dep^{mt} at Nashville," had been mustered into the first Black regiment and were now in service away from the city.[25]

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laborers. "[T]he slaves require, it would seem, some inducement to prevent their being disgusted with such hard labour, as well as free negroes," he wrote, "and whether their masters are ever paid or not, I think such slaves ought to get this pittance."

[24] Endorsements of Maj Gen Geo. H. Thomas, November 13, 1863, and P. H. Watson, Acting Secretary of War, November 25, 1863, on L. Col. E. C. Brott to A. A. Gen., October 14, 1863, in *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor*, ed. Berlin et al., 410.

[25] Lieut. Engineers George Burroughs to Brig. Gen. Smith, October 24, 1863, *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor*, ed. Berlin et al., 410-411. Burroughs was writing the chief engineer of the Department of the Cumberland to complain that the laborers had not been returned to Nashville, as General Rosecrans, the previous department commander, had said they would. "Laborers are greatly needed at this post," wrote

Although work on the city's fortifications represented the earliest and most dramatic example of military labor in Union-occupied Nashville, Black men and women were employed in a myriad of other military occupations throughout the war. On August 5, 1863, the quartermaster at the Nashville Depot estimated that between 10,000 and 11,000 Black men were at work in the Department of the Cumberland, 800 of them at the Nashville Depot, 5,000 as teamsters and laborers with troops in the field and at posts in the department, 1,000 with the Engineer Department, and 3,700 as cooks and servants with troops in the field.[26] Several thousand more worked on the Northwest Railroad between Nashville and the Tennessee River, approximately seventy-five miles west of the city.[27]

Military occupation created opportunities for adjacent private employment as well. Hundreds of Black men worked for contractors cutting cordwood and crossties for the railroads upon which military movements depended.[28] Some Black men, like Samuel Larkin, avoided both military labor and private employers and instead carved out their own businesses. Larkin followed a regiment of Union troops from Huntsville, Alabama, to Nashville in 1862, then remained with the regiment several months. After earning some $500, he settled in Nashville, where he purchased a mule and four horses (one of which was blind). Possession of the animals enabled Larkin to work as a self-employed teamster. Years later, he testified before the Southern Claims Commission that he drove his animals "in teams hauling different stores &c. for

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Burroughs, "as well for the effective maintainance of this Engᵗ Depot as for pushing the Fortifications, Depᵐᵗ, Depot, Magazines &c; If it can be done I would respectfully request that those men or an equal and if possible greater number be ordered back."

[26] Cap. F. S. Winslow to M. C. Meigs, August 5, 1863, in *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor*, ed. Berlin et al., 398.

[27] According to historian Bobby Lovett, nearly 5,000 Black laborers were employed in the fall of 1863 to complete the railroad. Bobby L. Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780-1930: Elites and Dilemmas* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 56.

[28] Berlin et al., eds., *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor*, ed. Berlin et al., 375.

merchants and others . . . and did an express business." In August 1863, however, a squad of Union soldiers seized his animals, two wagons, and a dray for military use. He recovered only the wagons and the blind horse.[29]

The Union army had an insatiable need for labor, first to construct defenses, then to maintain them. The demand for labor and the evolution of military policy regarding slavery outpaced the reluctance of officials such as General Buell and Governor Johnson to use the army as a mechanism for emancipation. The persistent threat of Confederate attack led the Union army to put immense pressure on laborers constructing fortifications in and around Nashville. Even after the completion of Fort Negley in December 1862, the army still required a seemingly unending supply of labor in Nashville as the city became a major supply depot for troops advancing deeper into the Confederacy. According to historian Peter Maslowski, "the city had become the logistical heart of the western theater of the war, necessitating the services of many thousands of civilian government employees."[30]

The Recruitment of Black Soldiers

A unique blend of slaveholding unionism and military emancipation set Tennessee apart from other Confederate states. Immediately following Union occupation of Nashville in February 1862, President Lincoln appointed Andrew Johnson, de facto leader of Tennessee's unionists, military governor of the state. Johnson was an advocate of mustering Black men into labor gangs, but was less enthusiastic about recruiting them as soldiers. He believed African

[29] Testimony of Samuel Larkin, February 9, 1872, in *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor*, 403-404. The commission awarded Larkin $350 for the mule and the other three horses.
[30] Maslowski, *Treason Must Be Made Odious*, 142-143 (quotation on 143).

Americans were better suited to labor than to soldiering.[31] As late as November 1863, when Black military recruitment was in full swing, Johnson elaborated on his belief that military service was not a benefit to Black men. "I have thought it was better to set the negroes to work, paying them wages, than to make soldiers of them," he stated, "because a soldier's life is a lazy one."[32] Johnson was also concerned about the effect of Black enlistment on the sentiment of proslavery unionists.[33] From 1862 through the spring of 1863, Nashville's role as a supply depot for the Union armies advancing into East Tennessee and Northern Alabama created an insatiable need for labor. Union military authorities in Nashville fell back on Governor Johnson's racial assumptions and hoped that employing Black laborers would free white troops to defend the region.[34] Johnson's opposition to the immediate abolition of slavery in Tennessee and his hesitancy to approve Black enlistment complicated routes to freedom for refugees from slavery. As discussed below, in Chapters 4 and 5, the blurred lines between military enlistment and labor in Nashville also created future challenges for African Americans seeking Civil War pensions.

Throughout 1862, Confederate operations in Tennessee tested what historian Bobby Lovett calls the "uneasy alliance" between the Union army's willingness to employ African Americans as military laborers and the desire of free and enslaved African Americans to destroy slavery more directly. While federal officials in Middle Tennessee delayed the recruitment of

[31] Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *The Black Military Experience*, ser. 2 of *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 123. Johnson expressed his commitment to employing Black men as laborers rather than as soldiers in a September 17, 1863 telegram to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton. See *The Black Military Experience*, ed. Berlin et al., 172-173.
[32] Testimony of Gov. Andrew Johnson before the American Freedman's Inquiry Commission, November 23, 1863, in *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor*, ed. Berlin et al., 411-415. When asked to evaluate the Black troops already enlisted from Tennessee, Johnson nevertheless acknowledged that "[t]hey have performed much better than I expected." "I was very agreeably disappointed," he added.
[33] Berlin et al., eds., *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor*, 375.
[34] Lovett, *Nashville's Fort Negley*, 10.

Black soldiers, Black laborers were eager to take up arms against the Confederacy. On November 5, 1862, Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest and a force of approximately 3,000 approached Nashville and engaged Union troops along the Lebanon and Murfreesboro pikes. Black laborers at work on Fort Negley asked Captain Morton for guns to defend the unfinished works. He denied that request but did not prevent them from arming themselves with "axes, shovels, and spades."[35] Black laborers lining the bastions of a fort they had themselves constructed was a powerful image for those who favored enlisting Black men as soldiers. Even to those hesitant to arm former slaves, the threat of Confederate attack signaled that the Union would need more than laborers and fortifications to maintain its possession of Nashville. The city's defense required soldiers.

As the laborers who rallied to defend Fort Negley demonstrated, Black men were eager to serve as soldiers. Johnson, however, remained steadfast in his belief that African Americans should provide the Union army with laborers, not soldiers. Accordingly, when Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas arrived in the Mississippi Valley in the spring of 1863 to oversee Black recruitment, he limited his operations in Tennessee to the state's western counties.[36]

By August 1863, however, Secretary of War Stanton, seeing the success of Thomas's efforts in West Tennessee and elsewhere in the Mississippi Valley, became frustrated with Johnson's refusal to extend recruitment into the rest of the state. Stanton sent Major George L. Stearns, an abolitionist and successful recruiter of Black soldiers in the North, to Nashville with instructions to organize the recruitment of Black men in Middle Tennessee.[37] "Stanton has

[35] Lovett, *Nashville's Fort Negley,* 10.
[36] Berlin et al., eds., *The Black Military Experience*, 123.
[37] John Cimprich, *Slavery's End, 1861-1865* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1985), 82; Frank Preston Stearns, *The Life and Public Services of George Luther Stearns* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1907), 137.

waked up and ordered me to plump myself down in Tennessee, right in the centre of the accursed institution, and go to work," Stearns told his wife on August 17.[38] Arriving in Nashville in September, Stearns almost immediately encountered opposition from Johnson.[39]

"Governor Johnson is afraid of me (or rather was) and opposed my work, and I have been laboring to bring him over to the faith, and think I have succeeded, but can't tell yet," Stearns wrote after an initial meeting with Johnson. Under pressure from President Lincoln, Secretary of War Stanton, local white unionists, and African Americans themselves, Johnson agreed to allow Stearns to establish a network of recruiting stations across Middle Tennessee.[40] But he did not mince words about his disapproval of Stearns's operations. "I must be frank in stating my opinion that Maj Stearns['s] mission with his notions will give us no aid in [the] organization [of] Negro Reg'ts in Tennessee," he telegraphed Stanton on September 17, only days after Stearns arrived.[41]

The disagreement between Johnson and Stearns revolved around whether Black men should contribute to the war through labor or combat. "We need more laborers now than can be obtained for the prosecution of works that are indispensable to sustain the Rear of Genl Rosecrans['] Army," Johnson explained to Stanton in the same letter in which he expressed his disapproval of Stearns.[42] Stearns, a fervent abolitionist, believed that Black military service provided the swiftest means to bring about slavery's end and Union victory. He was also

[38] Stearns, *The Life and Public Services*, 308.
[39] Maslowski, *Treason Must Be Made Odious*, 105.
[40] Stearns established recruiting stations at Fort Donelson, Clarksville, Gallatin, Nashville, Murfreesboro, McMinnville, Columbia, Wartrace, Shelbyville, Lynneville, Pulaski, Pikeville, and Chattanooga. Cimprich, *Slavery's End*, 83.
[41] Andrew Johnson to Hon. E. M. Stanton, September 17, 1863, in *The Black Military Experience*, ed. Berlin et al., 172-173.
[42] Andrew Johnson to Hon. E. M. Stanton, September 17, 1863, in *The Black Military Experience*, ed. Berlin et al., 172-173.

concerned that impressment and nonpayment had soured African Americans' relationship with the federal government in Middle Tennessee. "[I]mpressment is working evil in this Department," Stearns informed Stanton on September 19. He called particular attention to the army's failure to pay Black laborers. "Men who are pressed in the service are rarely enrolled and in consequence not paid," he wrote.[43]

Johnson and Stearns reached an understanding after Stanton clarified Stearns's status as subordinate to that of Johnson.[44] Stearns would proceed with the recruitment of Black troops in Middle Tennessee, but Johnson would have full authority over how such troops would be used within the state. Once this agreement had been reached, Johnson was less concerned about recruitment because he believed he could limit Black soldiers to fatigue duty.[45]

Thereafter, Stearns proceeded with recruitment in Middle Tennessee. "I have at last obtained Gov. Johnson's consent to the advertisement enclosed," Stearns wrote to Stanton, "and have commenced recruiting with good prospects of success." The "advertisement" announced that the army would enlist all free Black volunteers as well as enslaved men whose masters were disloyal, the enlistees to receive their freedom "at the expiration of their term of service." Policy regarding enslaved men whose owners were loyal to the Union required more nuance. Such men were eligible to enlist only if the owner consented, and the owner would receive the enlistment bounty, not the recruit.[46] Stearns was permitted to enlist men enslaved by loyal slaveholders

[43] Major George L. Stearns to Hon. Edwin M. Stanton, September 19, 1863, in *The Black Military Experience*, ed. Berlin et al., 173-174.
[44] "He is while in your State your subordinate bound to follow your directions and may be relieved by you whenever his action is deemed by you prejudicial," Stanton telegraphed. Edwin M. Stanton to Brigadier General Andrew Johnson, September 18, 1863, in *The Black Military Experience*, ed. Berlin et al., 173n.
[45] Berlin et al., eds., *The Black Military Experience*, 124.
[46] Major George L. Stearns to Hon. Edwin M. Stanton, September 25, 1863, enclosing recruitment notice [September 1863], in *The Black Military Experience*, ed. Berlin et al., 176-177.

without the owners' consent only if and when military necessity required it; in such circumstances, the slaveholder was to receive compensation.[47]

A souring relationship with Secretary of War Stanton, as well as business in the Northeast, led Stearns to leave Nashville in February 1864. He was succeeded as head of Black recruitment in Middle and East Tennessee by Captain Reuben D. Mussey, formerly Stearns's chief assistant.[48] Recruiters working under both Stearns and Mussey complained that the employment of enslaved men as military laborers hindered their recruitment. Many laborers rejected the recruiters' appeals because laborers received higher wages than soldiers. At the time, Black soldiers were paid $10 a month, minus $3 for their uniform.[49] In 1863, for example, enslaved men were employed at "an average of $12 per month" by Brigadier General Eleazer A. Paine, the Union commander at Gallatin, Tennessee, to chop wood along the railroad.[50] Competition escalated when military employers, recognizing they were losing out to recruiters, raised wages for labor beyond what the recruiters could offer. "The Quartermasters Schedule of prices for colored laborers in this town [Nashville] is $25 per month and a Ration," Mussey observed. "For doing precisely the same duty, as a soldier, and for the same Quartermaster, he will receive $10 per month." "Of Course no laborer with his eyes open will join the Invalid Regiment or Regiment for 'fatigue duty.'" By April 1864, recruiters were also in competition with farmers, planters, and other private employers who had begun offering wages to former

[47] Berlin et al., eds., *The Black Military Experience*, 123.
[48] Stearns was confident that Mussey would continue Black recruitment enthusiastically and regarded him as a "true friend of the cause." Stearns, *The Life and Public Services*, 319. For the time of Stearns's departure, see *The Black Military Experience*, ed. Berlin et al., 124-125.
[49] Captain Reuben D. Mussey to Lieutenant George Mason, April 11, 1864, in *The Black Military Experience*, ed. Berlin et al., 181-182. Black soldiers were also paid less than white soldiers; white privates, received $13 per month, plus clothing.
[50] Brigadier General E. A. Paine to Captain B. H. Polk, January 26, 1864, in *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor*, ed. Berlin et al., 426-429.

slaves. Mussey reported that "the high price commanded by laborers as Compared with Soldiers operates disadvantageously to Recruiting."[51]

The agreement reached between Johnson and Stearns did little to prevent competition between recruiters intending to make soldiers out of Black men and military employers seeking to retain their labor. It was not long before some recruiters resorted to conscripting laborers. Recruiters of antislavery persuasion believed that military service would bring about the demise of slavery more swiftly than employment as laborers. Others turned to conscription in order to increase the commissions they received for each enlistment they secured. [52] With so many Black men employed as military laborers in the Department of the Cumberland (10,000 in June 1863 by one quartermaster's estimate), it was inevitable that some recruiters would seek to turn laborers into soldiers. In March 1864, when recruiters conscripted an entire repair crew of former slaves on the Union-controlled Tennessee and Alabama Railroad, General Ulysses S. Grant, commander of the Military Division of the Mississippi, acted quickly to end the interference of recruiters with the needs of military employers. He issued an order forbidding recruiters from interfering with labor gangs formed by military employers.[53]

In a few short months, Major Stearns had organized the enlistment of three full regiments of Black soldiers in Nashville and the surrounding countryside.[54] Recruitment continued to proceed so rapidly under the oversight of Captain Mussey that in October, 1864, he advised that

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[51] Capt. R. D. Mussey to Lieutenant George Mason, April 11, 1864, in *The Black Military Experience*, ed. Berlin et al., 181-182. "Invalid Regiments" were regiments made up of men unfit for field duty. These regiments were enlisted specifically for noncombat duties such as fatigue and guard duty. See Cimprich, *Slavery's End*, 91.
[52] Cimprich, *Slavery's End*, 85.
[53] Cimprich, *Slavery's End*, 86. On competition between military employers and military recruiters, see Berlin et al., eds., *The Black Military Experience*, 13.
[54] Testimony of Maj. Geo. L. Stearns before the American Freedman's Inquiry Commission, November 23, 1863, in *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor*, ed. Berlin et al., 415-421 (three regiments on 417).

no more Black regiments could be formed in Middle Tennessee.[55] Recruitment continued until June 1, 1865, but only to fill existing regiments. By that time, ten Black regiments had been wholly or partially organized in Middle Tennessee, and others had been formed in other parts of the state. In total, 20,133 Black men enlisted as Union soldiers from across Tennessee.[56]

Refugees

The presence of the Union army in Middle Tennessee destabilized slavery. First as refugees, then as laborers and soldiers, enslaved men and women transformed Union forces from an army of occupation into an army of emancipation. Refugees from slavery poured into Nashville almost as soon as Union troops secured the city. Seeking to maintain the support of unionist slaveholders and induce secessionists to return to the Union, federal authorities initially sought to prevent the city from becoming a harbor for fugitive slaves. General Buell, commander of the occupying Union troops, excluded fugitive slaves from Union lines and allowed slaveholders to reclaim them.[57] Before long, however, the persistent efforts of the enslaved and shifts in federal policy saw the establishment of refugee camps in and near the city.

Enslaved men and women flocked to Nashville in search of safety and security for themselves and their families. As they did so, they claimed the city as a place of freedom, with or without the support of Union officials. When the army impressed thousands of enslaved Black men to construct defensive fortifications in Nashville, many of their families sought refuge in the city as well. Excluded from labor camps as a rule, these refugees, mostly women and children, had to seek food, shelter, and safety from re-enslavement on their own. Meanwhile, the city's

[55] Maslowski, *Treason Must Be Made Odious*, 109.
[56] Cimprich, *Slavery's End*, 86. For the number of Black troops credited to Tennessee, see Berlin et al., eds., *The Black Military Experience*, 12.
[57] Cimprich, *Slavery's End*, 34-35.

newspapers continued to publish advertisements for fugitive slaves throughout 1862. For former slaves in Nashville, safety existed primarily in their ever-increasing numbers.[58]

Black refugees from slavery, not Union military officials, transformed Nashville into a place where African Americans could find refuge. They sought freedom in the city even when they were excluded from Union camps and vulnerable to re-enslavement. Other than the Black men employed at military labor and, later, enlisted as soldiers, Black refugees in Nashville were left to improvise. Most were forced to shelter wherever they could. Many moved into abandoned outbuildings and abandoned houses.[59] Historian Bobby Lovett writes that Black refugees lived "under railroad trestles, on public steps, and in cellars and abandoned buildings."[60] Most Black refugees in Nashville survived without any assistance from federal authorities. Even in 1864, after the army had belatedly established three refugee camps in or near the city, they housed only an estimated one-third of Nashville's refugees. Most refugees claimed space in the city's working-class neighborhoods, such as Black Bottom.[61]

In West Tennessee, the Union army established refugee camps beginning in late 1862. Army-supervised camps came much later to Middle Tennessee, in part because much of the region remained a contested war zone into 1863. Even after federal forces gained full control, military governor Andrew Johnson feared that refugee camps would encourage slaves to flee. In January 1864, he acquiesced to the establishment of refugee camps in Nashville only after the post commander at Stevenson, Alabama, shipped Black refugees from there to Nashville without notifying anyone of their impending arrival. Reuben Mussey, by then a colonel, found the

[58] Cimprich, *Slavery's End*, 35.
[59] Cimprich, *Slavery's End*, 47.
[60] Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville,* 55.
[61] Cimprich, *Slavery's End*, 47. "Until 1864," Bobby Lovett writes, "fewer than 3,000 of some 8,000" Black refugees in Nashville resided temporarily in refugee camps. See Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 55.

Stevenson refugees shivering in the cold near the railroad station and immediately wrote to General Grant to convey how dire the situation of refugees had become in Middle Tennessee. Upon receipt of Mussey's letter, Grant ordered Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas to establish a refugee camp in Nashville.[62]

On February 4, 1864, Thomas ordered that "[a] camp for the reception of contrabands at once be established in the vicinity of Nashville, Tennessee," and announced regulations governing refugee camps across the Department of the Cumberland. Captain Ralph Hunt, an officer in the 1st Kentucky Infantry, was appointed superintendent of the camp near Nashville and given "entire control and supervision," subject to the orders of the commander of the Department of the Cumberland. "The quartermaster's department will furnish all the materials and supplies necessary to shelter and protect the negroes destined to be located in this camp," Thomas ordered, adding that, "[i]f practicable, the contrabands will be quartered in log houses, to be constructed by the negroes themselves; but in the interim, tents will be furnished for their accommodation." Refugees arriving at any camp in the Department of the Cumberland, Nashville included, would be required to work for wages, and all Black men "capable of bearing arms, will be mustered into companies and regiments of colored troops in process of organization." "All others," Thomas specified, "including men incapable of bearing arms, women and children, instead of being permitted to remain in camp in idleness, will be required to perform such labor as may be suited to their several conditions, in the respective staff departments of the army, on plantations or farms, leased or otherwise, within our lines, as wood-choppers, teamsters, or in any way that their labor can be made available."[63] Thomas's order

[62] Cimprich, *Slavery's End*, 50-52.
[63] L. Thomas, Order 2, February 4, 1864, in Hood and Bostwick to Hon. Edwin M. Stanton, "Report of the Commissioners of Investigation of Colored Refugees in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Alabama," *Senate Executive Documents*, 38th Cong., 2nd sess., No. 28, pp. 1-3.

signaled a significant shift in Union policy. For the first time the army assumed at least nominal responsibility for the safety and housing of refugees from slavery in Middle Tennessee.[64]

Refugees who fled to Nashville arrived to shocking scenes in the city's refugee camp. Available shelter, clothing, and rations never met demand. Negligence by the camp superintendent, Captain Hunt, and subsequent supervisors left the camp in constant need of supplies. One resident of the camp, Nat Black, described sleeping in a dirt-floor tent on a bed consisting of three blankets. According to Black, refugees were not allotted enough clothing to stay warm in the winter. They received rations twice a day, but the food was often of extremely poor quality. Black recalled receiving beef "so old . . . that when thrown against a wall it would splatter like mud."[65] The army often relied on donations from benevolent societies to provide enough food, shelter, and clothing to refugees. Historian John Cimprich identified ten secular and religious benevolent societies operating in Nashville between 1863 and 1865, two of which were organized by African Americans. But even with such civilian aid, the number of refugees arriving in Nashville in late 1864 overwhelmed the available resources.[66]

Conditions deteriorated to such an extent that in June 1864 the War Department sent two special commissioners, Thomas Hood and S. W. Bostwick, to investigate the condition and treatment of refugees in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Alabama.[67] They found the Nashville camp "wholly destitute of anything tending to the reasonable comfort of its most unfortunate

[64] Following Order 2 and the establishment of a refugee camp in Nashville, several other refugee camps were established in other parts of Middle Tennessee, including Clarksville, Fort Donelson, Pulaski, Gallatin, Murfreesboro, and Hendersonville. See Cimprich, *Slavery's End*, Table 4.
[65] Cimprich, *Slavery's End*, 52-54 (quotation on 54); *Nashville Tennessean*, August 16, 1936.
[66] Cimprich, *Slavery's End*, 56.
[67] Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 1. Hood and Bostwick arrived in Nashville on June 4, 1864, and remained in the city until October. Hood and Bostwick, n.d., "Report of the Commissioners," 6.

inmates."[68] In their estimation, Captain Hunt, whose superintendency had concluded at the end of May, had shown a blatant disregard for the necessities that camp life required and had used his position for personal gain rather than the safety and security of the refugees. Hood and Bostwick were particularly concerned by Hunt's poor records management. The few records that he kept showed that materials and provisions intended for "destitute contrabands" were never delivered to camp residents. After gathering testimony from soldiers and camp residents, the commissioners found Hunt guilty of usurping provisions and construction materials intended for camp residents for his own use. He had had a house built for himself on Cherry Street "by mechanics and laborers from the colored refugee camp."[69]

While Hunt constructed his brick house near downtown Nashville, African American refugees were dying from inadequate shelter. An agent of the Pennsylvania Freedman's Relief Association told Hood and Bostwick that "the location of the camp is bad, having no shade."[70] Given only "worthless" tents cast out by a convalescent camp for ill and injured soldiers, refugees were exposed to disease and the elements. Hood and Bostwick confirmed the poor state of shelter provided to the refugees. "Although located within view of several fine groves of timber," they reported, "there were no trees in the camp, no shelter from the extreme heat of the summer in that latitude, but these miserable tents."[71] Unfortunately, while Hunt was in command of the camp, the trees offered neither shade nor timber to construct more suitable housing.

Prospects for obtaining clothing were no better. The camp's surgeon acknowledged that "inmates of the camp suffered for want of clothing" but blamed the benevolent societies

[68] Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 3.
[69] Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 3; quotation from testimony of George Cook, n.d., in Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 4.
[70] Testimony of William F. Mitchell, n.d., in Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 7.
[71] Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 5-6.

operating in Nashville, specifically the Freedman's Aid Society. The surgeon told Hood and Bostwick that refugees may have been able to get clothes from the Freedmen's Aid Society store, "but in consequence of the illness of the agent of that society in charge of their goods the store has been closed most of the time." As a result, most refugees had to make do with only the clothes they had on their backs when they arrived. "Many of the women have no change of clothing," the surgeon reported, "and many of the children are entirely destitute of clothing; many others have but one shirt and no other clothing."[72] William F. Mitchell, an agent of the Pennsylvania Freedman's Relief Association, confirmed the surgeon's dire evaluation. He testified that the organization had furnished second-hand clothing to women and children in the camp but that "one-third of the clothing [was] very bad, one-third [was] fair, and one-third [was] good new clothing." The object of the Pennsylvania Freedman's Relief Association was "to sell to all who are able to purchase, at prices regulated by the circumstances of the purchaser—never at a profit" "Lately," he noted, "a good many goods have been sold to colored people about the city who are not in the camp." Mitchell placed blame for "the general economy" of the camp at the feet of the officers who supervised it. "[M]y impression has been that the officers in charge of the camp failed in sympathy with the people they had in charge, and, consequently, have failed in making that provision for them that their necessities required; and, as a further consequence, they have suffered from neglect of those whom the government has appointed to provide and care for them."[73]

Many of the Black refugees were sick when they arrived in Nashville and received little or no medical treatment in the refugee camp. Hood and Bostwick reported that the Nashville camp was overcrowded and many Black refugees, including those who were sick, "died from

[72] Testimony of G. W. Jenks, n.d., in Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 7.
[73] Testimony of William F. Mitchell, n.d., in Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 7-8.

neglect on the part of those whose duty it was to provide and care for them.[74] Refugee camps in Middle Tennessee established ad hoc "Freedmen's Hospitals," but they lacked a sufficient number of professional medical staff to care for the many sick. Camp residents, mostly Black women, volunteered as nurses, and hospitals drew upon the service of army doctors in local garrisons when possible.[75] The mortality rate among Nashville's Black refugees had always been high, but it was worst in the winter and summer months. Historian John Cimprich estimates that nearly 1,400 refugees died in the improvised shanty towns and camps in Nashville during the winter of 1862-63.[76] Conditions were no better in the refugee camp established in 1864. During three months in early summer 1864, the camp surgeon recorded 675 sick men and women in the camp; 167 of them, or about 25 percent, died. This number did not include those sent to the freedmen's hospital located in the Nashville camp.[77] Dr. Justin Romayne, surgeon of the hospital, reported a similarly shocking mortality rate among the 180 refugees there.[78] In December 1864, the Confederate campaign against Franklin and Nashville caused the evacuation of several refugee camps in Middle Tennessee. The evacuees were sent to the Nashville refugee camp, which was quickly overwhelmed. Cimprich estimates that one in six Black refugees in Nashville died of disease, starvation, and exposure to cold during the next three weeks.[79]

Hood and Bostwick pronounced it "difficult to imagine a more deplorably destitute

[74] Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 5. William F. Mitchell told Hood and Bostwick that the Nashville camp has "always been crowded greatly beyond their capacity." Testimony of William F. Mitchell, n.d., in Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 7. Similar accounts are described in Ash, *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed*, 137.
[75] Cimprich, *Slavery's End*, 58.
[76] Cimprich, *Slavery's End*, 57.
[77] Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 8.
[78] Testimony of Justin Romayne, n.d., in Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 9. The number reported sick in the refugee camp were recorded from April 14th to July 15th, 1864. Dr. Romayne reported that "about twenty-five per cent. of the patients brought to the hospital die."
[79] Cimprich, *Slavery's End*, 51-52.

condition of things" than they had found in the Nashville camp. They submitted a damning report to the War Department concluding that the refugee camp "has been, and is, grossly neglected in all things necessary to the reasonable care and comfort of its inmates." They singled out Captain Hunt and his successor, Colonel Robert W. Barnard, by name and argued that the latter "has been culpably negligent in the discharge of his duty in looking to the shelter, food, clothing, schooling, medical attention, and the condition and business of the camp generally and particularly." The commissioners deemed Barnard "wholly unfit for the office of superintendent or, indeed, any other office of trust or confidence." After inspecting the camp in Nashville, Hood and Bostwick moved on to other camps in Middle Tennessee, Northern Alabama, and Kentucky. There they found camp residents similarly destitute of adequate shelter, food, and clothing, though nowhere were the circumstances as dire as they were in Nashville.[80]

Labor and Social Relationships

The relationship building that occurred among refugees from slavery in wartime Nashville laid the foundations for the city's future Black communities. Men impressed into labor gangs or hired by the army did not necessarily work among strangers. Nearly a quarter of the formerly enslaved men who labored on Nashville's fortifications in 1862 and 1863 shared a former owner with at least one other laborer. Of the 1,848 unique names of slaveholders reported on the labor rolls, 433 (23 percent) appeared multiple times. Of these, a majority appeared twice, denoting that two formerly enslaved laborers shared an origin.[81] While most formerly enslaved

[80] Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 5, 9-12 (quotations on 5 and 9).
[81] Employment Rolls and Nonpayment Rolls of Negroes Employed in the Defenses of Nashville, Tennessee, 1862-1863, TLSA, microfilm #1797, reel 2, frames 1-61. There are 2,869 Black men listed in the labor rolls for the fortifications of Nashville. The calculation that one quarter of formerly enslaved military laborers shared a former owner with at least one other laborer omits 142 records where no former enslaver was recorded, or where the former enslaver's name is illegible or incomplete. Special thanks to

laborers had different owners, the labor rolls show many instances of men working alongside people they had known in slavery. In one case, forty former slaves said that they had previously been owned by the slaveholder J. Harding.[82]

Evidence of a shared enslaver provides a concrete, though conservative, estimate of prior relationships among Black military laborers in Nashville. However, Black laborers had maintained an array of social relationships in slavery that was not determined by a relationship with a former slaveholder. The smallholding slave regime of Middle Tennessee meant that the social networks of most enslaved men and women extended well beyond the property lines of enslavers.[83] Many of the men engaged in military labor in Nashville likely knew one another even when they had not been owned by the same slaveholder. More importantly, they had often come to Nashville in social or familial groups, not as single men. Private Michael L. Deaver, who served as commissary for the refugee camp established under Adjutant General Thomas's order, reported that "[v]ery many" of the camp's residents were "the wives and families of colored men who have been enlisted in our army as soldiers."[84] The children in Nashville's refugee camp are further evidence that many Black men and women fleeing slavery arrived in

archivist Natalie Goodwin for transcribing the microfilm records, the Friends of Fort Negley and the Nashville City Cemetery Association for making the transcription possible, and Dr. Angela Sutton for sharing the resource as a companion to the microfilm.

[82] Employment Rolls and Nonpayment Rolls of Negroes Employed in the Defenses of Nashville, reel 2, frames 22, 24-26.

[83] Life in Middle Tennessee prior to the Civil War was overwhelmingly rural and agricultural. In the 1860 census, six in ten heads of free families of Middle Tennessee listed their employment as "farmers, farm laborers, or overseers." Almost half (43 percent) of these farm families owned slaves. Slaveholding in Middle Tennessee was dominated by farms with fewer than five slaves; only 5 percent of slaveholders owned more than twenty. Ash, *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed*, 13-14. Historian Diane Mutti Burke argues that even in areas of small-scale slavery (where the average slaveholder owned fewer than twenty slaves), enslaved men and women maintained strong bonds of family and friendship across households and beyond property lines of their enslaver. Diane Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border: Missouri's Small Slaveholding Households, 1815-1865* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 231-267.

[84] Testimony of Michael L. Deaver, n.d., in Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 7.

family groups. The Pennsylvania Freedman's Relief Association operated a school in Nashville that had served over 100 different children, though only 50 were in attendance during the summer of 1864.[85]

Black men labored on the fortifications of Nashville under the direction of the U.S. army. They also worked to provide for the safety and wellbeing of their kin. In Middle Tennessee, as elsewhere in the slave South, routes to freedom followed lines of personal relationships and kin. Men who arrived at Union outposts and enlisted in the Union army often did so among men with whom they had been enslaved.[86] The number of women and children in Middle Tennessee's refugee camps suggest that those fleeing slavery often did so with kin.[87] The importance of kinship and acquaintance could be seen in refugee camps across the Union-occupied South. Those who were not forcibly impressed labored for the promise of wages that were necessary to pay for goods and services available in freedom. Even educational opportunities at the refugee camp came at a small, though not insignificant cost. Pupils at the Pennsylvania Freedman's Aid Association Schools were required to pay tuition of $1 per month.[88]

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[85] Testimony of Robert R. Wescott, n.d., in Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 8.
[86] Employment Rolls and Nonpayment Rolls of Negroes Employed in the Defenses of Nashville, Tennessee, 1862-1863, TLSA, microfilm #1797, reel 2, frames 1-61.
[87] Ira Berlin and Leslie S. Rowland conclude that enslaved people began to flee in family groups more frequently in the second year of the war, many following kin and acquaintances and finding a more welcome reception at Union lines. Stephanie Camp argues that even the earliest escapees from slavery were supported by a female network of support willing to feed, clothe, and hide truants en route to Union lines. Camp also argues that, in a significant shift from antebellum patterns, "women represented large proportions of runaways" during the war. Whether refugees fled alone or with relatives, the promise of reuniting with separated kin was among the most important possibilities offered by refugee camps. Berlin and Rowland, eds., *Families and Freedom: A Documentary History of African-American Kinship in the Civil War Era* (New York: New Press, 1997), 22; Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 125; Amy Murrell Taylor, *Embattled Freedom: Journeys through the Civil War's Slave Refugee Camps* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 79.
[88] Testimony of Robert R. Wescott, n.d., in Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 8.

Pay Claims of Military Laborers

Black laborers engaged in the grueling and often brutal work of constructing Union fortifications under a promise of wages. Those who survived struggled to receive the compensation they were due. The challenges they faced and the claims-making practices they employed were a precursor of the obstacles Black veterans would later face when applying for Civil War pensions. Most Black military laborers and their families were refused pay on the grounds that they lacked sufficient documentation to establish a legitimate claim. Captain Morton, who oversaw the construction of Nashville's defensive fortifications, had kept a record of the name and number of refugees he employed. His records included the time each laborer was employed, the amount he was due, and what, if anything, had been paid.[89] The laborers received certificates from Morton's office as proof of their labor. The record books of the refugee camp overseen by Captain Hunt and his successors were even more sparse. The camp superintendent recorded each refugee's name, age, sex, and the name of the enslaver he or she had left. Even Hood and Bostwick, tasked with investigating the camp, were surprised by how little information the superintendents maintained about its residents. The record book "does not give the date of their reception at camp," they complained, "nor is it possible to determine how long they remained there, or when or under what circumstances they went away." Names were simply crossed off the list by "a *dash*, with a pen, across their name" to indicate that the individuals in question were no longer in the camp.[90]

[89] Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners,"12.
[90] Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 9. The administrators of refugee camps at Huntsville, Alabama, and Gallatin, Tennessee, showed similar disregard for documentation. Hood and Bostwick reported that the officers at Huntsville kept no "record of the inmates" at the camp. Likewise, Hood and Bostwick found "no book or record remains (if any was made) showing anything of" the history of the Gallatin camp. Both camps had been hastily organized by Union troops in 1863. Only the refugee camp in Clarksville, Tennessee, established by the 16th U.S. Colored Infantry, kept consistent records showing the full name, sex, age, and height of each resident. The name of former enslavers were

Hood and Bostwick carefully investigated reports of Black men who had been employed to work on government fortifications in Nashville and other places in Tennessee who had not yet been paid for their labor. Their report illustrated the scope of the issue to the War Department. Hood and Bostwick found that from summer 1862 to April 1, 1863, Captain Morton employed 2,768 Black men on the fortifications of Nashville. Of that number, only 310 had been paid. They also found that from April 1863 to August 1864, Lieutenant Burroughs had employed 1,383 Black men on the same fortifications, only 387 of whom had received payment.[91] Hood and Bostwick also reported the amount paid and unpaid from the payrolls of Morton and Burroughs. Morton's payroll totaled $85,858, of which only $13,648 had been paid. Burrough's payroll totaled $44,478 due to Black laborers, on account of which only $16,358 had been paid. Hood and Bostwick reported that the balance left unpaid to Black laborers was $72,210 from Morton's payroll and $28,121 from Burrough's. At the time of Hood and Bostwick's investigation, Lieutenant Burroughs had $15,897 applicable to pay Black laborers unpaid wages for work on the fortifications of Nashville.[92]

When the records of the U.S. army failed, Black laborers turned to social relationships. The U.S. army refused to pay relatives of deceased men. Men and women seeking remuneration leveraged relationships to fill the absences in the official record. Men who were employed at

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also recorded along with the date of each resident's admission and the date and reason of their discharge from camp. Identifying information such as height, age, and reason for discharge could prove invaluable for those who contracted to labor for the military and made claims for back pay following the close of the war. Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 9-12.

[91] Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 12. Some Black men were employed for only a short period of time. Hood and Bostwick noted that Black refugees were also employed to work on Nashville's fortifications by Major George L. Stearns in October 1863, and others were employed by Lieutenant Samuel G. Webb "at engineer camp at Nashville, Tennessee." According to Hood and Bostwick, these men "volunteered to serve on the fortifications one month, on condition that they received, at the expiration thereof, ten dollars for their labor, less the amount due from them for clothing, &c." Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 13.

[92] Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 13-14.

Franklin, Columbia, Pulaski, and other places in Tennessee faced challenges claiming unpaid wages similar to those employed in Nashville. Men who worked in Franklin saw white laborers paid while their wages were withheld. Burroughs testified that many of these men "came to us and complained they were not paid, nor could we ascertain there was any evidence of their having performed labor, except their own statements, corroborated by those who labored with them, who were also colored refugees." As Burroughs's testimony illustrates, claimants relied on their compatriots to corroborate their identity and their labor. Social relationships, along with certificates of labor, were offered as evidence to claim payment.[93]

Confronted with such claims, Burroughs adhered to a conservative interpretation of his orders. Only those who had performed the labor could be paid. Furthermore, each claimant must have a certificate documenting the amount due and had to be "satisfactorily identified as the person who did the work, and to whom the certificate issued." The certificate "is not *prima facie* evidence of the holder's right to receive the amount specified in such certificate," Burroughs explained. Burroughs and his clerk, Peter Wright, were the sole arbiters of legitimate claim to payment. Black laborers were required "to identify themselves in every possible manner needed to satisfy me they are the persons who did the work," Burroughs told Hood and Bostwick. "If I am not thus satisfied, I do not pay."[94] Wright also outlined his process for evaluating claims for unpaid wages. "I require all those colored persons who claim pay under the name appearing on the pay-rolls to bring a statement from their foreman who had charge of them during the time the work was done, that their names are the same represented on the pay-roll, and they are *bona fide* the persons they represent themselves to be," Wright reported. He did not elaborate on whether a statement from a foreman was in itself sufficient to prove identity, or if he had additional means

[93] Testimony of Peter Wright, n.d., in Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 15.
[94] Testimony of Lieutenant Burroughs, n.d., in Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 14.

of ascertaining whether claimants were who they claimed to be.[95] For many Black laborers themselves and for all relatives claiming back pay, the identification requirements of Burroughs and Wright blocked payment.

The process so effective in preventing Black men who had labored for military employers from receiving back pay was even more prohibitive for the families of those who died while constructing Nashville's fortifications. In Nashville, the formerly enslaved and U.S. military officials held different conceptions of the free labor economy that was replacing slavery. The officers who maintained the labor rolls believed that only individuals who could prove they were the men listed in the record books were entitled to compensation. Many formerly enslaved men and women, on the other hand, argued that compensation was a familial entitlement. Widows of laborers who died before they were paid brought their husbands' work certificates to the clerks of the army's Engineer Department and demanded compensation. Lieutenant Burroughs told Hood and Bostwick that he was unable to deliver the unpaid wages of deceased laborers to their living relatives. "If a wife comes with a certificate issued to her deceased husband for labor," Burroughs reported, "we have to refuse payment, for the reason there is no one authorized to sign his name to the receipt roll." This illustration was not hypothetical, and Burroughs's refusal did not stop Black Nashvillians from continuing to appeal for remuneration. "Persons claiming relationship with those deceased, as wife, child, father, mother, and almost every phase of relationship," Burroughs told Hood and Bostwick, "come and claim the pay due their deceased relative, for the work done by them." African Americans in Nashville believed that when wages

[95] Testimony of Peter Wright, n.d., in Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 14. "In the case of colored men enlisted at our quarters on the works," Wright testified, "I took the statement of their commanding officer as of sufficient identity." "I have not taken the statement of any citizen, not in government employ," he added, "as to the identity of any person who claimed pay for work." Testimony of Peter Wright, n.d., in Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 15.

had been promised to Black laborers who died in service to the nation, they should be delivered to their kin, the rightful benefactors of their labor. "I decline to pay the amounts due deceased (colored) persons to their family, or other person, who may claim the same," Burroughs stated emphatically.[96]

The Battle of Nashville

The events of December 1864 were a watershed for Black people in Middle Tennessee—those on the region's farms and plantations as well as those who had enlisted in the Union army. In November, Confederate forces under General John Bell Hood launched a campaign to drive through Tennessee into Kentucky, where he hoped to pick up 20,000 recruits and then smash Union forces in Tennessee.[97] Hood's failure, which owed in no small part to the fortifications constructed by formerly enslaved men and the combat service of Black soldiers, marked the death knell for slavery in Tennessee.[98] That failure also meant that Tennessee would remain a Union stronghold for the remaining months of the war. Slavery was abolished by a state constitutional convention in January 1865. The heroism of Black troops in the battle of Nashville, the culminating battle of the Confederate campaign, became a foundation for the political claims of Black Tennesseans.[99]

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[96] Testimony of Lieutenant Burroughs, n.d., in Hood and Bostwick, "Report of the Commissioners," 14. If a man came to Burroughs with certificate in hand, but could not be "satisfactorily identified," a criterion which Burroughs left vague, they were not paid. "I know of no way in which I can pay those claims, unless the person who did the work and to whom a certificate may have issued, presents said certificate, and is satisfactorily identified as the person who did the work, and to whom the certificate issued."

[97] James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 811.

[98] Ash, *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed*, 111. Ash writes that slavery, "already under stress in 1862, fractured in 1863 and disintegrated in 1864" because "rural chaos permitted it, the Union army encouraged it, and the slaves desired it and perpetrated it."

[99] On Black troops in the Battle of Nashville, see Ash, *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed*, 167-168; Cimprich, *Slavery's End*, 96-97; Maslowski, *Treason Must Be Made Odious*, 109-110; Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 64-67. For an account of the military role of Black troops in Middle

After the Confederate surrender of Atlanta in September 1864, Hood's Army of Tennessee, 40,000 strong, moved along the railroad to Chattanooga attacking targets in efforts to sever Union General William T. Sherman's supply line to the city. Sherman grew exasperated after weeks of skirmishes in territory he had already secured months earlier on the march to Atlanta. In November, he left General George H. Thomas and 60,000 troops to deal with Hood's army before cutting his supply line and setting off across Georgia to the Atlantic coast. As Sherman headed south, Hood readied his troops to move through northern Alabama and Tennessee and into Kentucky. Thomas, meanwhile, left Georgia for Tennessee, where he planned to intercept Hood.[100] Thomas ordered the Black regiments that were scattered across Middle Tennessee, mostly guarding railroad lines, to gather in Nashville and ready the city's defenses. On November 30, Hood attempted to strike Union troops near Franklin, Tennessee, while they were en route to Nashville. His attack backfired, and the Confederates sustained 7,000 casualties, three times what Union troops experienced. Among the casualties were half of Hood's regimental commanders and twelve generals, six of whom were killed. Undeterred, Hood immediately pressed the shattered Army of Tennessee toward Nashville.[101]

General Thomas organized the Black troops that had gathered in Nashville into two brigades. The 14th, 16th, 17th, 18th, and 44th U.S. Colored Infantries composed the First Colored Brigade, which was commanded by Colonel Thomas J. Morgan. The 12th, 13th, and 100th U.S. Colored Infantries, along with the 1st Kansas Battery, constituted the Second Colored

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Tennessee, see William A. Dobak, *Freedom by the Sword: The U.S. Colored Troops, 1862-1867* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army, Center of Military History, 2011), 259-297.

[100] McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 807-809.

[101] McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 812-813; Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 64. Historian Stanley Horn argues that Hood's defeat at Franklin set him up for the complete rout his army suffered at Nashville. "Franklin was a knockdown; Nashville was the knockout for Hood," writes Horn. Stanley F. Horn, *The Decisive Battle of Nashville* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1956), xiii.

Brigade, under the command of Colonel Charles R. Thompson.[102] As the Confederate army approached the city, squads of Black soldiers were assigned to reconnaissance duty, putting them near enemy lines and, on occasion, drawing fire and suffering casualties. Black soldiers also featured in the first engagements of the battle of Nashville in the early morning of December 15. The Black brigades advanced on Confederate troops approaching Trimble Bottom, a neighborhood near Fort Negley in south Nashville. Both Confederate and Union armies experienced losses that day. The Confederates suffered more than 1,200 casualties. Hood retreated south of the city where, on the following day, Black brigades were once again among the Union forces who engaged the enemy. The heaviest fighting occurred midday when Black regiments charged Confederates who had dug into Overton Hill. Both the 12th and 18th U.S. Colored infantries experienced heavy casualties before successfully taking the hill. The battle of Nashville was a resounding military victory for the Union army and for Black soldiers. Black regiments sustained the highest number of men killed during the battle.[103] Hood's army, which suffered 13,189 casualties, including dead, wounded, captured, and deserted, was utterly demoralized, its effectiveness ended. Thomas reported his official casualties for the two-day battle at 3,061, including 630 Black soldiers.[104]

Completely routed, thousands of Confederate soldiers surrendered to Black and white Union troops on December 16. Hood and what was left of his army fled south. Thomas's army pursued the bedraggled Confederates, half of whom marched without shoes, over the next two weeks. Along the way, hundreds more Confederate soldiers deserted or surrendered. When the

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[102] Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 64-65.
[103] Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 65; Gary W. Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 186, n. 27.
[104] *Official Records*, ser. 1, vol. 45, pt. 1, 50. Total Union casualties were 387 killed, 2,562 wounded, 112 captured or missing, 3,061 aggregate. Casualties among the U.S. Colored Troops were 98 killed, 508 wounded, 24 captured or missing, 630 aggregate. *Official Records*, ser. 1, vol. 45, pt. 1, 103, 105.

remnants of Hood's army reached Tupelo, Mississippi, only half of the original 40,000 remained in the ranks. The disgraced Hood resigned his command.[105]

The Union victory at Nashville was pivotal for the state and for the nation. Military historians mark the battle as a "knockout blow" and laud "the virtual destruction of Hood's Army of Tennessee."[106] The second-largest rebel army retreated in defeat, never to fight again. General Thomas received personal commendations from Secretary of War Stanton, General Grant, and President Lincoln, who offered "the Nation's thanks."[107] The U.S. Colored Troops were among those lauded by Thomas for the "unsurpassed gallantry and good conduct displayed by them in the battles."[108] Reuben Mussey, who had overseen Black recruitment in Middle Tennessee, bore witness to the Black soldiers' achievement. "[T]he Colored Troops have sustained the part assigned them with distinguished bravery and honor," Mussey reported. Throughout the battle's first day, "these men were under a heavy and effective fire of artillery and musketry: there was no flinching." Of the second day's engagements, he singled out for particular praise the color-bearers of the 13th U.S. Colored Infantry. The first color-bearer "advanced to the enemy's works and was shot down," only to be immediately replaced by another soldier who suffered the same fate, "and so till five color-bearers were shot." "The last color-bearer shook the flag over the rebel works" but it was snatched from his hand, and he was

[105] McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 811-816.
[106] Horn, *Battle of Nashville*, xiii ("knockout"); McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 811 ("virtual destruction").
[107] Edwin M. Stanton to Major-General Thomas, December 15, 1864, U. S. Grant to Major-General Thomas, December 15, 1864, and A. Lincoln to Major-General Thomas, enclosed in Major-General Thomas, Order 167, December 16, 1864, in *Official Records*, ser. 1, vol. 45, pt. 1, 50. "Please accept for yourself, officers, and men the Nation's thanks for your good work of yesterday," Lincoln wrote Thomas. In March, 1865, the War Department issued commended Thomas and the officers and soldiers under his command for "their skill and dauntless courage, by which the rebel army under General Hood was signally defeated and driven from the State of Tennessee." Secretary of War, Order 33, March 11, 1865, in *Official Records*, ser. 1, vol. 45, pt. 1, 51.
[108] Major-General Thomas, December 16, 1864, Order 167, *Official Records*, ser. 1, vol. 45, pt. 1, 50.

shot.[109] Nowhere did African American civilian labor combine with military service to play a more pivotal role in the outcome of the war than in the final offensive of the Confederate Army of Tennessee.

The battle of Nashville permanently secured Tennessee's place within the Union. During the early years of the war, most unionist slaveholders in Tennessee had been eager to see the Union preserved with slavery intact. The course of the war and the devolution of slavery in the state led them to change course and support the abolition of slavery, both "to provide a sound legal basis for a free-labor economy and to defeat the rebellion." Union victory at the battle of Nashville and the state's security in Union hands cleared the way for the organization of a unionist state government and for a constitutional amendment that abolished slavery.[110]

In January 1865, Tennessee unionists moved to abolish slavery in the state by constitutional amendment.[111] After Military Governor Andrew Johnson persuaded Lincoln to exempt Tennessee from the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, Tennessee had been left to abolish slavery in its own way and on its own time. By November 1863, Johnson was convinced that the question of emancipation in Tennessee was "already settled."[112] Under pressure from President Lincoln to speed up the abolition of slavery, Johnson called a constitutional convention in late 1864. On January 9, 1865, the convention approved an amendment to abolish slavery in the state, and unionist voters ratified it on February 22.[113]

African Americans in Nashville understood the significance of the Union victory at the

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[109] Colonel [Reuben D. Mussey] to Captain C. P. Brown, 21 Dec. 1864, in *The Black Military Experience*, ed. Berlin et al., 560-563, quotations on 560 and 562. Mussey noted in the same report that "[e]very one of the color-guard was either killed or wounded."
[110] Berlin et al., eds., *The Destruction of Slavery*, 267.
[111] Cimprich, *Slavery's End*, 118.
[112] Testimony of Governor Andrew Johnson before the American Freedman's Inquiry Commission, November 23, 1863, in *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor*, ed. Berlin et al., 411-415 (quotation on 414).
[113] Cimprich, *Slavery's End*, 118-124.

battle of Nashville and the essential role that Black military labor and armed service had played. The sacrifices of the Black soldiers defending Nashville became the foundation for claims for Black political belonging and the entitlements due to citizens and veterans of the war. Sixty-two African American men from Nashville published a lengthy petition to the constitutional convention asking its members to "abolish the last vestige of slavery by the express words of your organic law." "Many masters in Tennessee whose slaves have left them, will certainly make every effort to bring them back to bondage after the reorganization of the State government, unless slavery be expressly abolished by the Constitution," they warned. However, abolition alone was insufficient. They knew there would be no genuine freedom without the rights that made freedom meaningful and permanent. The petitioners therefore called for universal male suffrage and the right to testify in courts of law. "We know the burdens of citizenship," they wrote, "and are ready to bear them." The petitioners cited Black military service, and the battle of Nashville in particular, to justify their claims. "Can you forget how the colored man has fought at Fort Morgan, at Milliken's Bend, at Fort Pillow, before Petersburg, and your own city of Nashville?" they asked. They drew on military service in a direct appeal for suffrage. "If we are called on to do military duty against the rebel armies in the field," they argued, "why should we be denied the privilege of voting against rebel citizens at the ballot-box?" "The Government has asked the colored man to fight for its preservation and gladly has he done it. It can afford to trust him with a vote as safely as it trusted him with a bayonet."[114]

The contingencies of wartime emancipation, labor, and recruitment held consequences for the relationship between African Americans in Middle Tennessee and the federal government. Failure to pay Black laborers who fortified the city during the Civil War spurred

[114] Andrew Tait et al. to the Union Convention of Tennessee, January 9, 1865, in *The Black Military Experience*, ed. Berlin et al., 811-816.

claims for back pay. Soldiers and their families supposedly gained access to Civil War pensions as an entitlement of wartime service. However, the way emancipation unfolded in Middle Tennessee, particularly for Black men, created challenges for the record-keeping practices of the army. Military officials paid little heed to distinctions between enslaved and free African Americans when rushing to impress laborers in 1862. They took even less care distinguishing between men enslaved by loyal owners or disloyal owners. However, when it came time to pay laborers for their service, the distinctions mattered greatly. Military recruitment in the state often proceeded with similar disregard for record-keeping. Many recruiters took enlisting soldiers at their word when asking for the name of their enslaver. Such bureaucratic lapses, excused at the time because of the exigencies of war, would prove consequential to the efforts of African Americans seeking back pay, in the case of laborers, and pensions, in the case of Black soldiers and their families.

Conclusion

During the Civil War, Nashville was held by the Union largely because of the military labor and armed service of thousands of formerly enslaved African Americans. The experiences of military laborers and soldiers in wartime Nashville were similar. Both were likely to have been impressed into service or volunteered from refugee camps in Nashville or elsewhere in Middle Tennessee. Both civilian laborers and soldiers worked to construct the fortifications of Nashville. In later years, the efforts of Black Nashvillians to claim Civil War soldiers' and widows' pensions echoed the experiences of those who sought back pay for labor on the city's fortifications during the war. In both cases, the primary challenge facing Black claimants was producing evidence that complied with the government's requirements. Often, they were asked

to produce official documentation, which was created hastily, if at all, during the chaos of war. Black claimants therefore found themselves in an information deficit that was not of their own making. More often than not, Black claimants lacked the official documentation necessary to prove their eligibility and instead turned to local relationships to support their claims. As refugees from slavery laid the foundations for future Black neighborhoods, they were also creating places that would sustain claims for the entitlements due for wartime service.

Black pension applicants faced similar challenges to those experienced by Black laborers who claimed unpaid wages. In 1900, the commissioner of pensions reported to the secretary of the interior that there was great confusion among African Americans in Nashville as to who was entitled to a Civil War pension. The commissioner attributed the confusion to the large number of Black refugees in wartime Nashville who had been "employed . . . in various civilian capacities" without being enlisted as soldiers. "[S]o far as the claimants were concerned, the applications were filed in good faith," he acknowledged, but he railed against the "lack of knowledge possessed by these people as to the difference between an enlisted soldier and a civilian employee." Placing the blame squarely on "unprincipled agents" who were seeking "pecuniary profit out of the preparation" of applications, the commissioner failed to acknowledge the thousands of Black military laborers who remained unpaid.[115]

The commissioner did not acknowledge—and may not have known—that this confusion was in part the product of a military decision to assign Black soldiers chiefly to fatigue duty. Reluctant to recognize the martial abilities of Black soldiers, Military Governor Andrew Johnson had insisted that they were better suited to labor alongside the civilian workers who were fortifying Nashville. Black soldiers and some military officials complained at the time that the

[115] U.S. Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Department of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1900* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1900), 75-76.

policy failed to distinguish between the entitlements of soldiers and those of laborers and greatly hindered Black military recruitment. Thirty years later, amid a newly invigorated push among Black Nashvillians to claim long-denied Civil War pensions, the confusion between soldiers and laborers was attributed to the veterans and their dependents. The commissioner of pensions lamented the supposed ignorance of eager Black applicants and vilified the claims agents who attempted to help establish their claims as unscrupulous and even criminal.[116]

Wartime emancipation, labor compelled by federal authorities, and service as soldiers set the terms by which African Americans in Middle Tennessee engaged with the federal government during the Civil War. Refugees from slavery levied claims for protection from re-enslavement and access to housing, clothing, rations, and schools in return for the military enlistment of able-bodied Black men. Wartime service to the Union grounded Black people's claims throughout the war and laid the foundation for subsequent claims on the federal government in the idiom of service, citizenship, and entitlement.

[116] The quest of Black veterans and their families in Nashville to secure Civil War soldiers' and widows' pensions is examined below, in Chapter 4 and 5.

Part II

Claiming Place

Chapter 2

Black Bottom:
African American Life in a Working-Class Neighborhood, 1865-1900

No southern city was unchanged by the Civil War, but Nashville ranked among a select few that emerged relatively unscathed. Union forces occupied the city on February 25, 1862, and, for the duration of the war, developed it into a major supply hub by investing in railroad maintenance and construction.[1] The presence of Union troops and investment in local infrastructure lined the pockets of the city's merchants and set the stage for postwar economic growth. Nashville's population more than doubled between 1860 and 1880 and nearly doubled again in the decade that followed. The city also grew geographically, expanding from ten wards in 1860 to twenty by 1890 as annexations stretched the municipal boundaries.[2]

African Americans represented a significant proportion of those moving to Nashville and transforming it into an urban center. They claimed space in the city and formed some of its first Black enclaves.[3] By 1880, the city's Black population alone was larger than its total population

[1] The Union army preserved the city's three prewar railroads and constructed a fourth. The Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad had connected the city to Chattanooga in 1854; the Tennessee and Alabama Railroad had connected Nashville to Decatur, Alabama, in 1856; the Louisville and Nashville Railroad had made a connection to Louisville in 1859; and the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad joined the city to Hickman, Kentucky, in 1864. John M. Marshall, "Railroads and Urban Growth," in *Growing Metropolis: Aspects of Development in Nashville*, ed. James F. Blumstein and Benjamin Walter (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1975), 65-80.

[2] Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 15-16. According to Rabinowitz, "Nashville was one of several Southern cities favorably affected by the war."

[3] The African American population of Nashville, like that in other southern cities occupied early by the Union army, may have peaked during the Civil War and then slightly decreased by 1870. As it did in cities across the South, the Freedmen's Bureau sought to reduce the number of former slaves in Nashville by encouraging freedpeople to accept employment in the countryside. The rate at which African Americans left southern cities following the war may, however, be exaggerated by the under-enumeration of African Americans in both the 1870 and 1890 censuses. See Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 19-21.

had been at any point before 1860.[4] As discussed above, in Chapter 1, the first Black arrivals during the war were refugees from slavery fleeing the countryside in search of family and safety in the Union-occupied city. One refugee camp established by the Union army in 1864 was located near Fort Negley on the southern border of a working-class neighborhood known as Black Bottom. When the Freedmen's Bureau disbanded the camp in 1866, many of its residents moved into the wood-framed, single-room houses of Black Bottom. Their work of place-making—transforming an ad-hoc refuge into an enduring neighborhood—sustained a Black community in the heart of Nashville. Black Bottom's residents shared a history of self-emancipation and wartime service to the Union army. In the decades that followed, they drew on their shared genealogy to seek federal entitlements for wartime service.

Table 2.1. Population of Nashville, 1860-1900

Year	Total	White	Black	% Black
1860	16,988	13,043	3,945	23
1870	25,865	16,149	9,709	38
1880	43,350	27,005	16,337	38
1890	76,168	46,773	29,382	39
1900	80,856	50,787	35,044	37

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census: Population* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1864), 467; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census: Population*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1872), 262; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census: Population*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1883), 424; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eleventh Census: Population*, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1895), 481; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census: Population*, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1901), 681.

[4] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census: Population*, 1860 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1864), 467; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census: Population*, 1870, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1872), 262; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census: Population*, 1880, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1883), 424; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eleventh Census*: *Population*, 1890, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1895), 481. The number of African Americans living in Nashville in 1890 (29,395) was larger than the city's entire population in 1870 (25,856).

Black Bottom was one of the few parts of the city where jobs and rental housing were available to ex-slaves. The population of Ward Six, where the neighborhood was located, was 84 percent white in 1860, but its racial demography was transformed by the upheavals of war and emancipation. In fact, Black migration to Black Bottom far outpaced city-wide migration. While the Black population of Nashville as a whole increased by 146 percent between 1860 and 1870, the Black population of the Ward Six increased by 315 percent.[5] In 1872, the Nashville *Republican Banner* complained that closure of the refugee camps had "created the classic localities of 'Black Center' [Black Bottom] and 'Hell's Half Acre.'"[6] For the first time, Nashville's oldest working-class neighborhood was home to a significant number of African Americans.[7]

Subsequent decades saw younger generations of African Americans, born free, come of age alongside the New South city. Nashville's population more than tripled between 1860 and

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[5] Tabulated from U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census: Population*, 1860, p. 467; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census: Population*, 1870, vol. 1, p. 262. Tracking demographic change at the ward level is complicated by the frequent changes made to ward boundaries in the late nineteenth century. Depending on whom you asked, Black Bottom was either within or composed the whole of Ward Six until 1890, when it became Ward Twelve. There were negligible differences between the boundaries of Ward Six and the new Ward Twelve.

[6] *Republican Banner*, June 30, 1872. The story described the geography of Black Bottom—"south of Broad street"—when writing about "Black Center." Hell's Half Acre was in North Nashville, northwest of the state capitol.

[7] The wards with the largest African American populations in 1870 were Ward Four (2,181), Ward Six (1,648), and Ward Ten (1,509). U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census: Population*, 1870, vol. 1, p. 262. The first residents of Black Bottom were European immigrants who came to the neighborhood in the 1850s. They were mostly Irish, but some German and Jewish immigrants also found homes in the neighborhood. Most of the neighborhood's initial residents found jobs on the Cumberland River wharf to the east, at the railroad depot to the west, or in the growing number of manufactories and warehouses in between. See Benjamin Walter, "Ethnicity and Residential Succession: Nashville, 1850 to 1920," in *Growing Metropolis*, ed. Blumstein and Walter, 14. On the early development of Black Bottom as a part of Nashville's urban core, see Don H. Doyle, *Nashville in the New South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 63-86. While both German and Irish immigrants arrived in Nashville in large numbers in the 1850s, the two populations experienced different living conditions. More than 80 percent of the Irish worked as unskilled laborers and domestic servants, compared to only 10 percent of the Germans. The Irish concentrated on cheap land in the Sixth Ward, while the Germans lived on higher ground in the Fourth Ward. John M. Marshall, "Residential Expansion and Central-City Change," in *Growing Metropolis,* ed. Blumstein and Walter, 33-64.

Table 2.2. Population of Black Bottom, 1860-1900

Year	Total	White	Black	% Black
1860	2,519	2,122	397[a]	16
1870	3,497	1,849	1,648	47
1880[b]	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1890	2,943	1,046	1,897	65
1900	2,663	905	1,758	66

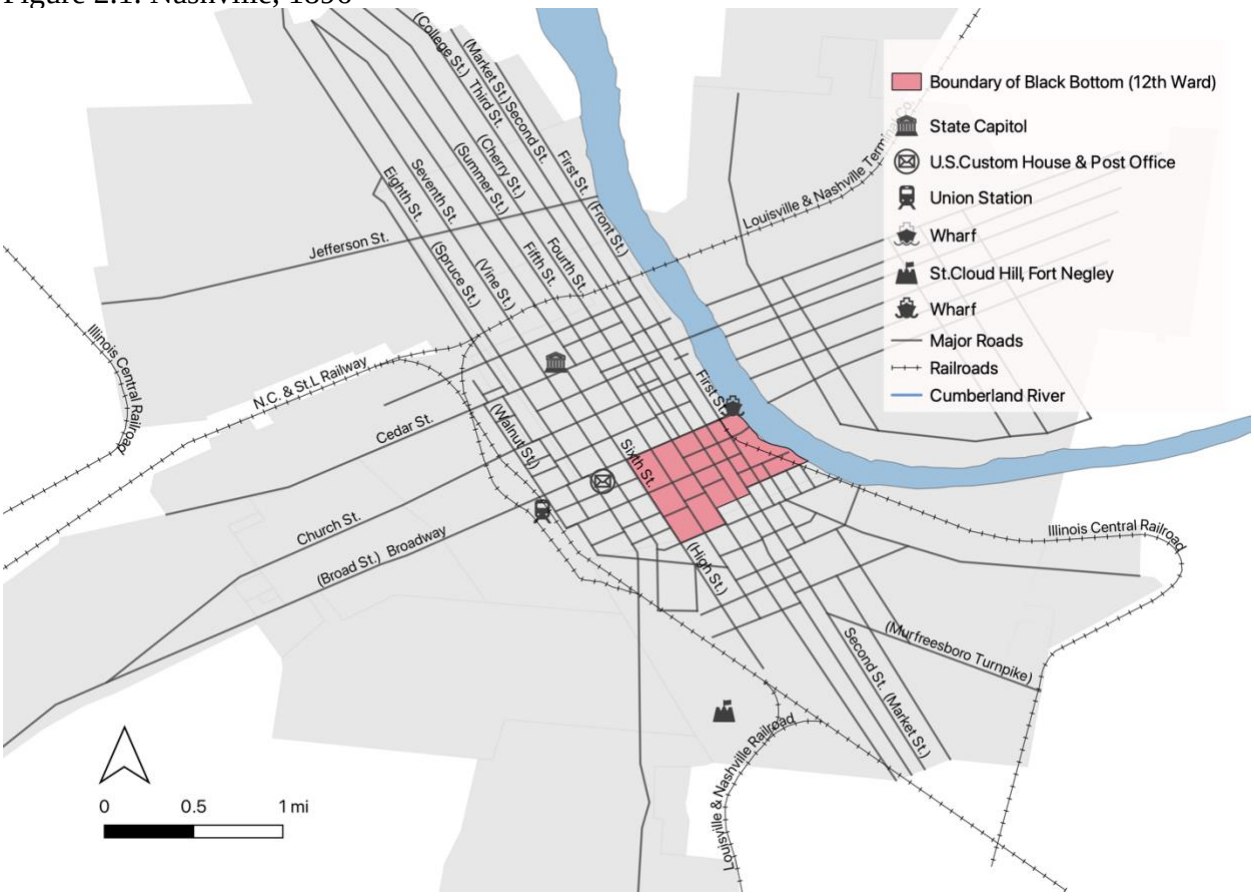
[a] Includes 85 free and 312 enslaved African Americans.
[b] Race-specific data was not reported at the ward level in the 1880 census.
Note: Data for 1860 and 1870 are for Ward Six. Data for 1890 and 1900 are for Ward Twelve. When ward boundaries were redrawn in 1890, Ward Six was renamed Ward Twelve with only slight modification of its boundaries.
Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census: Population* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1864), 467; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census: Population*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1872), 262; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eleventh Census: Population*, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1895), 481; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census: Population*, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1901), 681.

1890, and, after the initial wartime swell, African American in-migration increased in pace with overall population. African Americans lived in every ward of the city, but they were concentrated in North Nashville, along Cedar Street; in South Nashville, in Black Bottom and along Bass Street at the foot of St. Cloud Hill; in Trimble Bottom to the southwest; and in Edgefield, on the east bank of the Cumberland River.[8] While North Nashville began to attract larger numbers of African Americans by 1890 and 1900, Black Bottom (which had become Ward Twelve) retained one of the highest concentrations of African Americans in the city.[9]

[8] Bobby L. Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780-1930: Elites and Dilemmas* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 73. Prior to emancipation, more than half of Nashville's free Black community lived in the Fourth Ward, in North Nashville. In 1860 there were 719 free African Americans in Nashville; 390 lived in the Fourth Ward and 85 in the Sixth Ward. In contrast to the primarily poor and working-class population of Black Bottom, Nashville's most prosperous African Americans lived and worked north of Broad Street, in the Fourth Ward, nearer the state capitol. By the late nineteenth century, middle-class and elite African Americans had developed a significant enclave along Cedar Street between 4th Avenue North (Cherry Street) and 12th Avenue North. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census: Population*, 1860, p. 467; Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 77.
[9] In 1890, Ward Twelve had the highest concentration of African Americans (65 percent). Ten years later, Ward Twelve (66 percent) was surpassed only by Ward Four (68 percent) in North Nashville. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census: Population*, 1900, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1901), 681; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eleventh Census: Population*, 1890, vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 481; John R. Logan and Matthew Martinez, "The Spatial Scale and Spatial Configuration of Residential Settlement: Measuring Segregation in the Postbellum South," *American Journal of Sociology* 123, no. 4 (Spring 2018): 6.

Situated south of Broad Street along a bend in the Cumberland River, Black Bottom was poor land for poor people, but for freedom's first generation, it was a space of potential. A spring-fed creek ran diagonally through the neighborhood and into the river. Save for the more expensive houses on higher ground, homes and businesses flooded with the frequency of the seasons. The neighborhood derived its name from the dark alluvial soil that covered the lowland after heavy rains or when the Cumberland was high. Black Bottom was not an official municipal

Figure 2.1. Nashville, 1896



Map by Stanley D. Maxson. Adapted from "Map of Nashville, Tennessee," 1896, #36403, and "Map of Nashville, Tennessee," 1903, #44012, both in TSLA Map Collection, TVA.

jurisdiction, but most observers agreed that it comprised the majority of the city's Sixth Ward. When Nashville redrew ward boundaries in 1890, Ward Six was renamed Ward Twelve with only minor adjustments to the geographical area included.

Though small—less than a mile square—Black Bottom existed at a crucial nexus in Nashville. Geographically, it lay between the Cumberland River wharf and the Union Station train depot. The neighborhood was home to some of the city's busiest stables, warehouses, and lumberyards, as well as, by the 1890s, a public hay market for wholesale agricultural products. Black Bottom was also a center of urban leisure, offering activities from the respectable to the seamy. Members of the city's Black middle class, including its political and religious leaders, visited the neighborhood weekly for services at St. Paul's African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and Clark Chapel Methodist Episcopal (ME) Church. The saloons, dance halls, brothels, and gambling dens of Black Bottom attracted Black and white patrons from across the city and the countryside as well. Black Bottom was a cauldron of labor and leisure, uplift, and excess. As the Black neighborhood matured, it became a target for white supremacists, including New South boosters and urban reformers.

As early as the 1870s, many affluent white Nashvillians looked on the well-established Black community in Black Bottom with disgust. Recognizing that the physical space was claimed by African Americans, white Nashvillians sought to dominate the space Black Bottom occupied in the public imagination. They despised passing through Black Bottom on their daily streetcar commutes from the sylvan neighborhoods of South Nashville to the central business district. In the 1880s white Nashvillians employed the city's newspapers to subject Black Bottom to a continual barrage of bad press, including lurid accounts by white moral and sanitary reformers and violent reports by the all-white police department. This coverage, which is

explored below, in Chapter 3, obscured the social and political ecology of the neighborhood. Late nineteenth-century newspapers cast Black Bottom as a site of crime, vice, and disease. In contrast to the suburban neighborhoods that spread into the countryside, working-class Black Bottom was a "dark blot" in the city's heart that demanded to be wiped out lest it infect the entire city.[10] Attributing crime, vice, and disease to the character of its Black residents rather than to systemic failures to invest in infrastructure or to discriminatory housing and labor markets, Nashville's newspapers racialized the neighborhood in the public imagination.

White reformers were so successful at defining the rhetorical space of Black Bottom and erasing the lived experience of the Black community therein that the neighborhood's reputation of squalor has survived, largely unquestioned, today. Historical analysis of Black Bottom has done little to examine the neighborhood beyond shoring up its reputation as a slum. For historians of the New South, Black Bottom is an unremarkable example of an urban shanty-town—poor land filled with poor people living in tenement buildings, wooden shacks, and alleys, and the customers of saloons and brothels. Black Bottom's racially diverse population notwithstanding, an early scholarly analysis of residential patterns in Nashville described the neighborhood as "a Negro section where cheap rent and cheaper property made it an exceedingly profitable investment for real estate dealers."[11] When more recent historians of New South urban development examined Black Bottom, they emphasized its flood-prone land, high rates of crime, disease, and mortality, and concentration of African American residents, tenement buildings, saloons, and sporting houses. Drawing conclusions from census schedules and such records of municipal governance as police reports or the sanitary commission, these historians tell an

[10] *Daily American*, June 22, 1887.
[11] Blanche Henry Clark Weaver, "Shifting Residential Patterns of Nashville," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1959): 29.

evocative narrative of the circumstances of life in a New South neighborhood intentionally excluded from and left behind by the economic growth of the late nineteenth century.[12]

This chapter recovers the African American community of Black Bottom from such bleak descriptions and examines the neighborhood within the context of the developing New South city. It rests on a digital reconstruction of the Black Bottom's built environment, especially its housing stock, labor structure, and racial demography, analyzed within the context of urban development in the late nineteenth-century South. It also examines the neighborhood's shared public spaces, tenement-house life, and seasonal flooding that moralizing newspaper editors regarded as closely related phenomena. As formerly enslaved men and women settled in the Sixth Ward during and immediately following the Civil War, Black Bottom developed into one of Nashville's first Black enclaves.[13] Although its public reputation reflected the disdain of both reform-minded whites and elite Black Nashvillians, residents of Black Bottom shared a sophisticated social and political experience that warrants attention. As a neighborhood, Black Bottom comes into focus through the activities of its numerous institutions, including churches, schools, and businesses. Within the neighborhood and the city more broadly, these institutions shared and competed for space, resources, and members. Together, they wove the fabric of Black life in Black Bottom.

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[12] Doyle, *Nashville in the New South*, 80-86; James Summerville, "The City and the Slum: 'Black Bottom' in the Development of South Nashville," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (June 1981): 182-192; Walter, "Ethnicity and Residential Succession," 3-32; Weaver, "Shifting Residential Patterns of Nashville," 20-34.

[13] Bobby L. Lovett identifies "five Negro areas" that developed in Nashville during the Civil War: "Edgefield contraband camp, Black Bottom, Edgehill contraband camp, Trimble Bottom, and northwest contraband camp." Lovett, *African American History of Nashville*, 73-74. John R. Logan and Matthew Martinez identify three Black enclaves in 1880 Nashville, one of which was Black Bottom. Their conclusions are based on data from the 1880 federal census, transcribed and geocoded at the address level. "Spatial Scale and Spatial Configuration," 6, 29.

A Neighborhood in a New South City

African American life in Black Bottom must be understood against the backdrop of a rapidly changing city. The late nineteenth century was a period of transition for cities across the nation. Historians of urban development have documented a gradual shift from a "walking city," distinguished by "haphazard arrangement of stores, businesses, and residential areas" and significant intermixture of land use, toward larger geographical areas and specialized "commercial, industrial, and residential districts."[14] Geographical expansion was often driven in part by the introduction of horse-drawn and then electric streetcars.[15] Nashville more than doubled in both size and population in the decades following the Civil War. Even so, most of its residents continued to live within a mile of the commercial center through the 1870s. Up to the Civil War, Nashville developed along the Cumberland River, then expanded a little over a mile inland prior to 1880. The town of Edgefield, on the east bank of the river, was annexed in 1880, bringing both sides of the river under one municipal government for the first time. Still

[14] Kenneth L. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 35-36. Thomas W. Hanchett argues that, following the Civil War, Charlotte, North Carolina, developed from a "trading hamlet" to a "railroad town." At the same time, he cites the persistence of an "urban landscape of the preindustrial city" into the 1880s. See Hanchett, *Sorting out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 14, 19, 28-37. Sam Bass Warner popularized the terms "walking city" and "streetcar suburb" in his 1978 study of the development of Boston. Both have become standard descriptions of urban change in nineteenth-century U.S. cities. Warner defined a "walking city" as an urban area where "face-to-face communication and movement on foot were essential ingredients of city life." The radius of a walking city was no more than three miles, about the distance a pedestrian can walk in an hour. Beyond three miles, argues Warner, "the shops and offices of the metropolis would have fallen out of easy daily communication with each other." According to Warner, Boston was "entirely made over" from a walking city in 1850 to a city defined by the movement of electrified streetcars in 1900. Although horse-drawn streetcars arrived a decade earlier in Boston (1852) than in Nashville, the electrification of streetcars occurred only slightly earlier (1880s and 1890s, respectively). Electrified streetcars almost doubled the range of convenient mass transportation from 3-4 miles from the city core to a range of at least 5-6 miles. Sam Bass Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 15-16, 22.

[15] Howard N. Rabinowitz, "Continuity and Change: Southern Urban Development, 1860-1900," in *The City in Southern History: The Growth of Urban Civilization in the South* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1977), 98-99.

concentrated along the west bank of the river, Nashville did not significantly expand inland until the advent of electric streetcars in the 1890s.[16]

Figure 2.2. Expansion of Nashville, 1784-1903



Map by Stanley D. Maxson. Adapted from "Map of Nashville, Tennessee," 1903, #44012, TSLA Map Collection, TVA.

In the late nineteenth century, white Nashvillians increasingly began to flee the city's urban core. Horse- and mule-drawn streetcars appeared in Nashville immediately following the

[16] On the annexation of Edgefield, see Mark B. Riley, "Edgefield: A Study of an Early Nashville Suburb," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (Summer 1978): 133; Doyle, *Nashville in the New South*, 89.

Civil War, and the first suburban residential developments broke ground soon thereafter.[17] In 1865, the South Nashville Railway built lines for streetcars to transport affluent residents between the city center and such soon-to-be suburbs as Rutledge Hill. Because of the cost of a fare, African Americans had little access to the new streetcars, which carried passengers north and south along Cherry Street and College Street, parallel to the river.[18] Residents of the new "mule-car suburbs" of South Nashville could, for the first time, live significant distances from where they worked.[19] In 1883, following a tour of South Nashville, a journalist for the *Nashville Banner* reported that "a number of neat brick cottages and dwelling houses of larger dimensions" were being built at the end of the mule-car line on "South Summer street, near the City Cemetery." He hailed the development's financier as a "far seeing man" for speculating on the growth of Nashville and the desire of its aspiring middle class for "cottages and dwellings for rent."[20] Yet the cost of daily streetcar commutes prevented all but a small portion of Nashville's residents from living at a distance from their places of employment. Movement to new suburban developments remained out of reach for African Americans in Black Bottom, who relied on the low-paying jobs available near the central business district.

The advent of electric streetcars in the late 1880s and early 1890s spurred residential expansion on an even greater scale. For the first time, Nashville expanded inland from the low

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[17] Weaver, "Shifting Residential Patterns," 23.
[18] In Atlanta, African Americans' access to streetcars was also limited. According to Tera Hunter, "most blacks could only afford to ride occasionally on Sundays for recreation." Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 48.
[19] Horse-drawn and, later, electric streetcars also enabled affluent white residents to move farther from places of employment. Historian Don Doyle argues that Nashville's early neighborhoods—"mule car suburbs"—developed near the urban core with the advent of horse- and mule-drawn streetcars in the mid-nineteenth century. Animal-drawn streetcars eventually gave way to steam- or electric-powered streetcars. The greater distances covered by steam and electric streetcars accommodated new suburbs, built farther from the urban core in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Doyle calls these later suburbs "trolley-car suburbs." See Doyle, *Nashville in the New South*, 87, 89.
[20] *Nashville Banner*, June 25, 1883.

hills along the Cumberland River. To cover the cost of electric streetcars and the steam-generating plants that generated their power, the city's streetcar companies consolidated. The McGavock and Mount Vernon Company introduced the first electric streetcars to Nashville in 1888. Soon thereafter, the organization of the City Electric Railway drove significant residential and commercial development inland from the river. The integration of streetcar lines and new suburban development afforded members of the city's middle and upper classes rapid transportation to residential property far from the urban core.[21]

The new suburbs increasingly became the standard by which old-city neighborhoods were measured. South of Black Bottom and below St. Cloud Hill were houses of "some of the best Families of Nashville," wrote the *Nashville Banner* in 1883. In the eyes of the *Banner*, the new suburbs conferred respectability on their residents. "There is a look of neatness about these houses that is truly refreshing and indicates thriftiness and enterprise, coupled with taste and refined feeling," the paper opined. Black Bottom, situated between the central business district and the suburban homes of South Nashville, received no such glowing review. The same article that praised the new suburbs criticized the unkempt houses of Black Bottom that were "mostly occupied by negroes of the poorest class." While middle-class white residents of the city seized the opportunity to exchange the mix of industry, commerce, and residence in the old urban core for the exclusively residential neighborhoods of the suburbs, the *Banner* berated African American residents of Black Bottom for having "gradually crowded the decent white people out and compelled them to seek residences elsewhere."[22]

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[21] Doyle, *Nashville in the New South,* 88-89.

[22] *Nashville Banner*, June 25, 1883. In his study of the growth of Boston suburbs, Henry Binford found that early suburban commuters were members of the middle and upper classes, primarily wholesale merchants, bankers, physicians, and attorneys. Shopkeepers, artisans, and laborers remained city-bound. Henry C. Binford, *The First Suburbs: Residential Communities on the Boston Periphery, 1815-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 131-135.

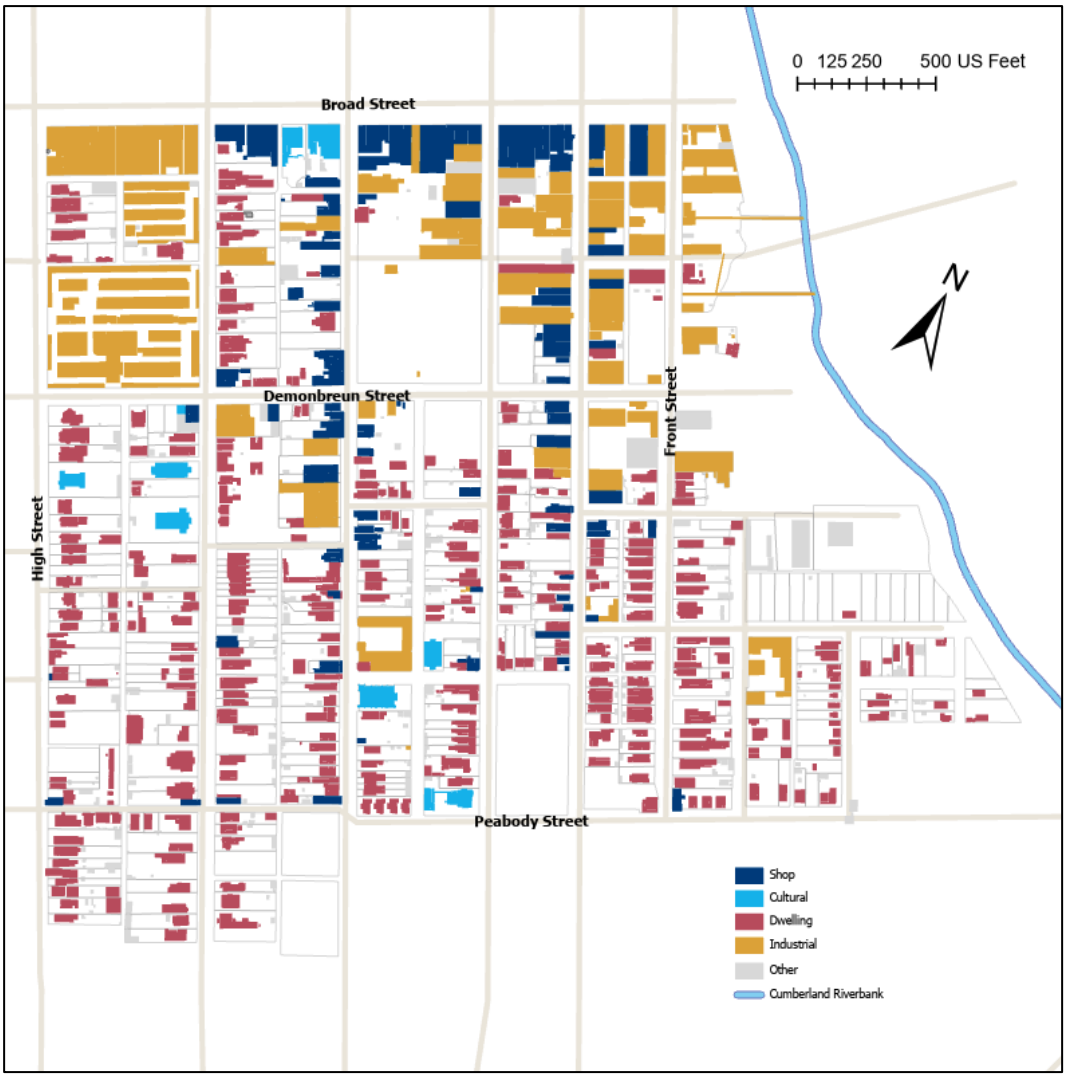
As specialized commercial and residential districts began to develop across the city, land use in Black Bottom remained mixed even as residential density fell.[23] Unlike those of the streetcar suburbs, the streets of Black Bottom teemed with the intermingled activities of the pre-industrial city. Streets running parallel to the river became major thoroughfares for moving both goods and people. The two roadways closest to the river, Front (First Street) and Market (Second Street), were crowded with wagons and buggies moving to, from, and between wharf, warehouse, and factory.[24] Streetcars cut through the center of the next two streets, Cherry (Third Street) and College (Fourth Street), moving people from the suburbs of South Nashville through Black Bottom to the central business district.[25] This imbrication of use in tight geographic space opened Black Bottom to critique as cluttered, unsanitary, and unsafe. Such conditions were certainly a far cry from those in the streetcar suburbs.

Industry and commerce moved into Black Bottom as white commuters settled in areas now only a streetcar away from the commercial district north of Broad Street.[26] Factory production added to the perception of Black Bottom as an undesirable slum. Retail shops and other businesses lined Broad Street, the northern border of Black Bottom, in imposing two- and three-story brick buildings. Factories and other industrial buildings occupied most real estate near the Cumberland River wharf. Broad Street and Demonbreun Street, one block to the south, were

[23] Based on careful measurement of population gain and loss and changes in land use, historian John Marshall finds that between 1890 and 1920 all wards in the old city (Wards Four, Five, Six, Twelve, and Thirteen) and the adjacent Ward Fifteen lost population. Every other ward gained population during the same period. Marshall, "Residential Expansion and Central-City Change," Table 2.1 and Figure 2.3.
[24] Historian Blanche Weaver identifies Market Street, particularly the section between Broad and Cherry, as the most important street in antebellum Nashville. Weaver, "Shifting Residential Patterns," 23. For a street-by-street description of economic activity in nineteenth-century Nashville, see Marshall, "Residential Expansion and Central-City Change," 48-49.
[25] The routes of the early mule-drawn streetcars circled Black Bottom along Cherry and College streets between Cedar and Trimble. See Wilbur F. Foster, *Map of the City of Nashville and Vicinity* (Nashville: Tavel, Eastman & Howell, 1877), Geography and Map Collection, Library of Congress.
[26] Walter, "Ethnicity and Residential Succession," 28.

thoroughfares for goods moving to and from the river, and more than two-thirds of the ward's industrial buildings were located between the two streets. Black Bottom was home to broom, carriage, furniture, and mattress factories, along with several wagon works and numerous warehouses. Horse- and mule-drawn carts were the primary means of transporting goods and

Figure 2.3. Black Bottom, 1897



Map by Bashar Al Tameemi and Stanley D. Maxson. Adapted from Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Nashville, Davidson County, Tennessee, vol. 2, Sanborn Map Company, 1897, Geography and Map Collection, Library of Congress.

materials from wharf or railway yard to the factories and warehouses. Stables, liveries, and feed stores abounded to house and feed draft animals. Near the center of the ward, just north of Demonbreun, a large lumber yard and hay market claimed nearly two city blocks. In the 1880s, when Black Bottom's population became increasingly Black, the urban space became defined by small factories, warehouses, and stables.[27]

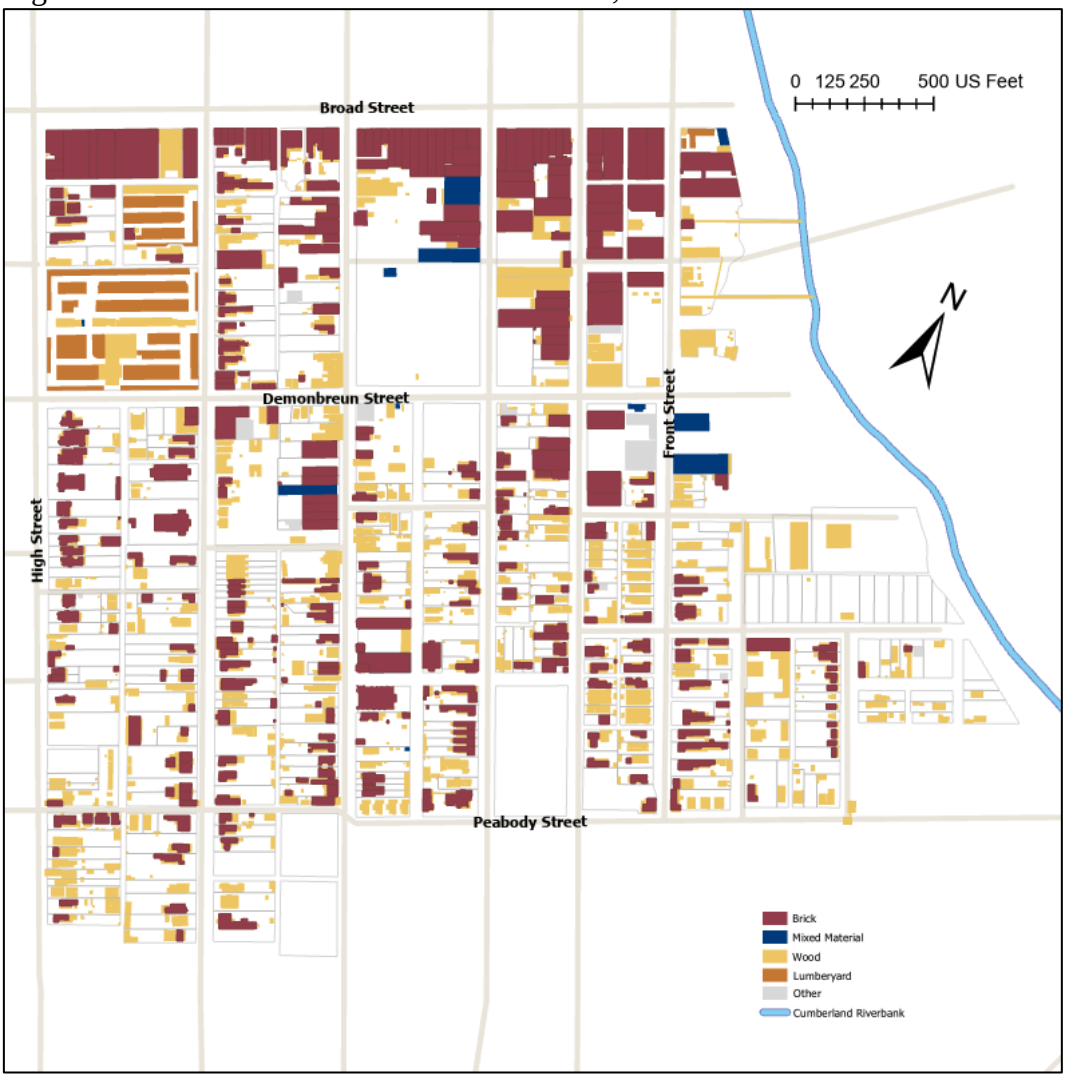
For the most part, Black Bottom's residential buildings were relegated to the lowest ground, south of Demonbreun. Characterization of the neighborhood as a slum stemmed from its geography and residential origins. Many of the wood-frame, single-room houses south of Broad Street were built by ex-slaves who came to Nashville during the Civil War. After the refugee camps were broken up in 1866, the Nashville *Republican Banner* complained that Black Bottom was populated by ex-slaves who erected "numberless shanties . . . in the most confused and helter skelter style upon a small piece of ground south of Broad street."[28] In 1883, the same story that praised suburban development in South Nashville decried the "miserable, tumble-down shanties" of Black Bottom.[29] In the heavily residential southern half of the neighborhood, construction materials were often of poor quality, and most were wood-frame structures. The housing stock further deteriorated as warehouses and small manufacturing shops moved in and white residents left for suburbs. Predatory real estate investors purchased rundown properties

[27] Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Nashville, Tennessee (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1897), vol. 2, Geography and Map Collection, Library of Congress. For a similar description of the neighborhood based on contemporary newspapers reports, see Doyle, *Nashville in the New South*, 80.
[28] *Republican Banner*, June 30, 1872. The paper also provided evidence of the unsanitary living conditions experienced by former slaves who settled in the area. "In these localities, at least one-half of the colored people, as many as eight and ten of whom were huddled together in one small scantily furnished room, died of contagious diseases," the report claimed.
[29] *Nashville Banner*, June 25, 1883.

south of Broad Street and profited by renting them to African American laborers while refusing to maintain them.[30]

Historian Benjamin Walter describes late nineteenth-century residential units in Black Bottom as exhibiting "a monotonous pattern of development that ingeniously squeezed the

Figure 2.4. Built Environment of Black Bottom, 1897



Map by Bashar Al Tameemi and Stanley D. Maxson. Adapted from Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Nashville, Davidson County, Tennessee, vol. 2, Sanborn Map Company, 1897, Geography and Map Collection, Library of Congress.

[30] Blanche Weaver argues that residential patterns in Nashville were stable up to the last quarter of the nineteenth century. As business expanded, she writes, "residential property became undesirable, declined in price, and was diverted to other uses." Weaver, "Shifting Residential Patterns," 23, 29.

maximum living space out of each block." According to Walter, most residential properties were "frame shanties" on tiny lots no more than twelve feet wide.[31] While an 1897 Sanborn Fire Insurance map confirms this observation, it also shows that most houses had front porches, suggesting a vernacular architecture designed to maximize fresh air and community interaction.[32] Men and women spent hot afternoons in the front doors and on the porches of their homes, escaping crowded rooms to fan themselves and socialize in the open air of the street.[33] Sidewalks, alleys, and streets were public spaces used for socializing, eating, and commerce. The *Daily American* documented such shared use of public space and complained of "egg-boxes and barrels, chicken-coops, old straw and rags" occupying the pavement, with pedestrians compelled to "'single-file' through the mud and straw."[34] The neighborhood's population density demanded that residents use every available space for both their personal belongings and the activities of daily life. But these communal spaces provided more than rest and relaxation. They provided the space for relationship building that would later support communal claims for economic security in the form of Civil War pensions for the neighborhood's Black founders.

Residential patterns in Black Bottom were shaped by the "casual and insecure employment" of low-skill, low-wage, and seasonal jobs.[35] Proximity to low-paying work hauling cargo from the wharf to warehouses and lumberyards, lumberyards to sawmills, and sawmills to rail yards drew a working-class population to the neighborhood. Its housing stock was diverse, with brick and wood single-family homes as well as multi-story apartment buildings. As a rule,

[31] Walter, "Ethnicity and Residential Succession," 23-24.
[32] Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Nashville, 1897.
[33] *Nashville Banner*, June 25, 1883.
[34] *Daily American*, March 22, 1879.
[35] Walter, "Ethnicity and Residential Succession," 23.

the poorest residents occupied the poorest housing. The 1897 Sanborn Fire Insurance map distinguished tenement buildings from boarding houses and other rental properties and identified tenement buildings by the race of their residents, designating some as "Negro Tenements" and others as simply "Tenements." Cross-referencing tenement addresses with information from the 1900 census confirms that both Black and white residents lived at Black Bottom addresses considered to be tenements by the fire insurance company, but most residents of tenements were Black.[36]

In Black Bottom, tenements were neither concentrated on a single street or block nor built from a common design. Surveyors for the Sanborn map identified twenty-three tenements in Ward Twelve, fifteen of which they labeled "Negro Tenements." Although geographically dispersed across the ward, the tenements were often adjacent to such sites of labor as stables, lumberyards, and warehouses.[37] Two types of tenements predominated: single-story buildings constructed of wood and two-story brick buildings, the largest of which were divided into twenty to thirty rooms.[38] Both types usually included basements that were universally damp and flooded regularly. According to the *Daily American*, "Many of these buildings have been rotting there for generations. The back-waters [floods] come and go, and leave the old shells worse off after every visitation."[39] Rooms were small, "not exceeding fifteen feet square," and, although furnishings were scant, a tenement room commonly included a double bed, a cooking stove, a small table,

[36] U.S. manuscript census, 1900, population, Nashville, Enumeration District 94-95 [hereafter E.D. 94-95], pp. 123-149; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Nashville, 1897. Renting rooms and boarding were common among unskilled laborers but by no means exclusive to the working class. Historian John Marshall found that listings in the 1890 Nashville city directory show a large number of people boarding in the homes of others, a sign that "the practice was convenient, economical, and socially acceptable." Marshall, "Residential Expansion and Central-City Change," 61.
[37] Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Nashville, 1897.
[38] *Daily American*, July 7, 1888; *Nashville American*, August 8, 1909.
[39] *Daily American*, June 15, 1890.

and a pot, skillet, or frying pan.[40] On the whole, tenement buildings were characterized in the city's newspapers as suffering from neglect and in a state of disrepair. Accounts cited crumbling buildings, floors with missing planks, narrow hallways, and windows that, if present at all, were small and yielded poor ventilation.[41]

It was common knowledge in Nashville that rents in Black Bottom were exploitative. Landlords catered to an African American clientele that was excluded from well-paying jobs that would enable residence elsewhere. In 1900, the working members of the Black families living in one tenement on South Summer Street were laundresses, day laborers, a porter, and a cook.[42] Families of four or five often occupied a single room.[43] Black Bottom's tenements offered easy profits for investors who had the capital to purchase property and no intention of improving it. Landlords rented every square foot of their tenement buildings, including attics and cellars, even when they offered only rudimentary shelter from the elements. Cellar and attic rooms were often cheaper, but they were still known to run $2 to $5 a month.[44] Historian Bobby Lovett describes the neighborhood as "a landlord's paradise."[45] Real estate company J. B. Hayne & Co. advertised the sale of two "negro tenements" in 1900. The first, a "two-story brick in 'Black Bottom,'"

[40] *Daily American*, July 23, 1883.
[41] *Daily American*, July 7, 1888; *Nashville American*, August 8, 1909.
[42] U.S. manuscript census, 1900, population, Nashville, E.D. 96, pp. 148-149.
[43] Descriptions of tenements published in Nashville's newspapers often commented on overcrowding and family structure: "ten to thirty rooms (a family to each room)" (*Nashville American*, August 8, 1909); "about twenty-seven rooms, all occupied. Four to a room would be too modest an average," and, writing about a second tenement house, "This house contained on a moderate estimate two persons to a room, or about forty people last night" (*Daily American*, July 7, 1888); "there could certainly not have been less than six or eight occupants" (*Daily American*, July 23, 1883); "In nearly every one of these miserable shanties of one and two rooms may be found a family of ten to eighteen, and in many instances two or three families" (*Nashville Banner*, June 25, 1883). It is difficult to separate such accounts from the voyeuristic context in which they were composed. Journalists "toured" Black Bottom on three occasions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Each report was written by a white journalist who visited the neighborhood with a police escort.
[44] *Daily American*, June 15, 1890.
[45] Lovett, *African American History of Nashville*, 73.

listed for $2,600 and boasted monthly rental revenue of $45. The company also advertised five "negro tenement houses" that could be purchased together for $2,500 or individually for $500 each. The advertisement promised $40 a month in rental income and claimed that the proprietors had been receiving rent "promptly" for five or six years.[46] One article that excoriated the exploitation of renters called tenements "money grinding machines."[47] Whether tenement or house, the city's newspapers judged the character of Black Bottom residents by the material condition of their homes. "Property owners have but very [l]ately deliberately built brick houses to rent at $5 and $6 a month for each room to the negroes who are so lost to self-respect that they are reduced to an equality with Black Bottom," the *Daily American* complained.[48]

Journalists who toured Black Bottom commented obsessively on the number of women and children in tenement buildings. As the journalists generally visited during daylight, it is likely that most men were at work and away from home. Many African American women living in the tenements were washerwoman who brought laundry home to wash, then hang to dry in the alley or courtyard.[49] An advantage of laundry work was the fact that it could be done off the premises of white employers, alongside other women, and amid other responsibilities. The independence granted by laundry work, historian Tera Hunter writes, made it "the optimal choice for a black woman who wanted to create a life of her own."[50] At home in the tenement, Black women could complete tasks with greater autonomy than they could in an employer's household. They conversed with other women while cooking over a shared stove, and children played or

[46] *Nashville Banner*, April 21, 1900.
[47] *Nashville American*, August 8, 1909.
[48] *Daily American*, June 15, 1890.
[49] *Daily American*, July 7, 1888. For a photograph of laundry hanging in the courtyard of a Black Bottom tenement, see *Nashville American*, August 8, 1909.
[50] Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 57.

napped within sight.[51] Hunter argues that Black washerwomen forged "informal networks of reciprocity," community, and a working-class politics through their communal labor. This politics was made most evident by the 1881 laundry women's strike in Atlanta, Georgia.[52] Hunter's analysis suggests that working-class neighborhoods like Black Bottom could be centers of collective power for Black women.

Life in Black Bottom's tenements was grim, and their residents often sought respite outside, on porches and in courtyards and alleys. A reporter for the *Nashville American* who toured Black Bottom in the company of a police officer described seeing women lounging in front of tenement buildings and sitting in groups in the alleyways. Many residents socialized outside to escape sweltering indoor temperatures. Front porches were filled with "old men and women smoking pipes, and young women talking in loud voices to each other," wrote the touring reporter. Inside a tenement, the reporter was surprised to find a "religious meeting in progress" and, in another room, "a dozen women chattering after the manner of their kind." On Saturday nights, Black men and women returned from "the river and railroads, the factories, and suburbs, and the rural districts" and gathered in large numbers for social events.[53]

Sights, Smells, and Hazards

[51] *Daily American*, July 7, 1888.
[52] Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 62 (quotation). For a description of the communal nature of laundry work, see 56-63. For the 1881 strike, see 88-97. Hunter also argues that laundry work gave Black women significant economic negotiating power. "Whites were not employers of laundresses as much as they were clients," she writes (58).
[53] *Daily American*, July 7, 1888. Tera Hunter notes the importance of the regular and momentary opportunities for leisure in the "alleys, side streets, front porches, churches, and fraternal halls in African-American neighborhoods." Nearby, she writes, African Americans "could frequent barber shops, billiard rooms, lunchrooms, restaurants, and beer saloons where they could play cards, gamble, smoke, eat, drink, and dance." *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 65-66.

The population density and built environment of Black Bottom required a shared use of space, which, in turn, supported strong social connections among neighborhood residents. The neighborhood's residences were sites of both labor and leisure. Their inhabitants lived alongside factories and stables. All of the city's foundries and machinists' shops and most of its blacksmith shops were located in Black Bottom, whose streets were used by both humans and draft animals.[54]

Population density and proximity to factories and animals created additional hardship during the heat of the summer. On July 7, 1883, the *Daily American* reported that the record high of the summer had been reached, ninety-three degrees in the shade. According to Sergeant L. N. Jesunofsky of the United States Signal Service, "the temperature in the sun and on the streets would not fall below 110 degrees."[55] Shade was hard to come by in Black Bottom, but the neighborhood's residents sought it wherever they could. High temperatures often meant choosing open-air settings for leisure and respite rather than the poorly ventilated rooms of tenements or wood-framed houses. People gathered under small trees, fanned themselves on front porches, and held sunshades for protection from the sun's rays.[56] The heat of the summer beat down on those who walked through Black Bottom as well, compounding the challenges of movement through congested streets. "Well, everybody is taking the shady side of the street to-day," remarked a reporter on the hottest day on record.[57]

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[54] For the foundries, machine shops, and blacksmith shops, see *Nashville Directory: Containing Full Alphabetical Record of Its Inhabitants, A Business Directory, A Complete List of Post-Offices in the United States, and Miscellaneous Information*, vol. 17 (Nashville: Marshall & Bruce, 1881), 25, 33.
[55] *Daily American*, July 7, 1888.
[56] *Nashville Banner*, June 25, 1883.
[57] *Daily American*, July 23, 1883. The article concluded with a table of the record high temperatures recorded in Nashville for July and August of every year from 1872 to 1883. They ranged from 88.7 degrees in August 1882 to 104 in August 1872.

Winter cold increased the risk of accidental fires as residents burned coal to heat factories, stables, and homes. Between October 1886 and February 1893, the city's newspapers reported at least seven fires in Black Bottom.[58] In 1891, a conflagration destroyed half a block. Discovered in the back of a stable, the fire spread to surrounding buildings and consumed them within thirty minutes. The seven buildings destroyed—a vacant house, a stable, a produce store, a shoe shop, a blacksmith shop, a junk shop, and a barbershop—were testaments to Black Bottom's mix of residential, commercial, and industrial space.[59] Fire presented an inordinate threat to the neighborhood's Black residents, who were more likely to live in housing that was overcrowded, poorly ventilated, and near factories and stables.[60] In 1899, sparks that fell from an unknown source ignited the roof of a frame tenement that was home to African American families.[61] Evidence suggests that Black businesses were either relegated to the most fire-prone buildings or targets of arson. A Black-owned feed store caught fire three times in five months. The third fire cost the proprietor his business because insurance companies were unwilling "to take the risk on a building so subject to conflagration." The structure was "almost totally destroyed" before firefighters arrived, though they did manage to keep the fire from spreading to nearby frame buildings. The cause of the fire was undetermined, which left the *Daily American* to speculate "spontaneous combustion or the work of an incendiary."[62]

[58] *Daily American*, October 26, 1886, November 22, 1886, December 21, 1886, December 17, 1887, October 17, 1891, February 24, 1892, January 19, 1893. Seven is undoubtedly an underestimate, as it is the result of a keyword search for "Black Bottom" and therefore does not include reports of fires at Black Bottom addresses in which the neighborhood was not named.
[59] *Daily American*, October 17, 1891.
[60] For examples of Black residents losing home and property to fires, see *Daily American*, August 13, 1883, October 26, 1886; *Nashville Banner*, April 22, 1899.
[61] *Nashville Banner*, April 22, 1899.
[62] *Daily American*, November 22, 1886.

The Cumberland River posed the most serious environmental threat to Black Bottom. From January through April, rainfall brought dangerous floods. The neighborhood was situated so low that streets and basements were inundated even when the river remained within its banks. Between 1870 and 1900, water rose high enough to flood property and endanger human and animal life seven times.[63] In 1877, the board of health reported that during times of high water Black Bottom was more like an inlet or a bay than a valley suitable for habitation. Water was known to spread half a mile from the banks of the river, submerging land to a depth of eighteen feet in the worst locations.[64] When Black Bottom flooded, so too did the sewer, spreading street and manufacturing refuse, human and animal waste, and acrid water through the neighborhood's streets and houses. Residents of basement quarters, often the poorest of the poor, were the hardest hit during high water and the first to evacuate, followed by residents of ground-level homes and apartments.[65] During the flood of 1886, the wharf at Broad Street was entirely submerged and nearly all residents of Black Bottom had to evacuate. Those who were able to build lives elsewhere did not return.[66]

By the 1880s, residents of Black Bottom, by then predominantly African American, saw their neighborhood increasingly encroached on by the facilities that enabled Nashville's urbanization and geographical growth. Animals were a fixture of the Black Bottom environment, sharing space, resources, and often work with the neighborhood's human residents. Few animals shaped the neighborhood as much as horses and mules, which were ubiquitous. In 1900, there

[63] For reports of dangerous flooding in Black Bottom, see *Daily American*, January 21, 1882, April 3, 1886, February 3, 1887, March 4, 1890, February 16, 1891; *Nashville Banner*, March 14, 1884, February 27, 1890, March 10, 1891.
[64] *Second Report of the Board of Health to the Honorable City Council of the City of Nashville, For the Year Ending July 4, 1877* (Nashville: Tavel, Eastman & Howell, 1877), 138.
[65] *Daily American*, April 7, 1886.
[66] *Daily American*, April 3, 1886, July 7, 1888.

were 471 horses per square mile in Nashville as a whole.[67] Black Bottom's proximity to the hay market, lumberyards, warehouses, and stables made for an especially dense concentration. The neighborhood's streets belonged to workhorses pulling wagons, carts, drays, and buggies. By virtue of their size and speed, horses dominated the macadamized and cobbled roads. Pedestrians seeking to cross a street were wise to cede ground to any oncoming cart. Sidewalks, where they existed, were also shared with horses and mules that were tied outside residences and shops while drivers unloaded their vehicles.[68]

Where there were draft animals, there was manure. The average horse produced between 20 and 50 pounds of manure every day, as well as a gallon of urine.[69] A city with Nashville's concentration of horses could expect between 9,500 and 23,500 pounds of manure per square mile each day. The first streetcars did little to decrease the number of horses. The grueling exertion of pulling streetcars meant that the average horse survived only four to five years, and streetcar companies therefore required a near-constant supply of new horses.[70] When horses died, their carcasses were often left in the street to rot, sometimes for days, until the municipal scavenging department could send a wagon. In Nashville, the scavengers dumped horse carcasses in the Cumberland River, where they could be seen floating away.[71] The excrement of horses and mules was scraped to the side of the street, where it was washed away in open ditches

[67] Ann Norton Greene, *Horses at Work: Harnessing Power in Industrial America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 284. According to Greene, only eight cities in the U.S. had a greater density of horses per square mile: Milwaukee (709), Boston, (680), Baltimore (645), Portland, Oregon (633), Richmond (615), Cincinnati (615), Denver (561), New York City (486).
[68] *Daily American*, July 6, 1888.
[69] Greene, *Horses at Work*, 175.
[70] Stephen B. Goddard, *Getting There: The Epic Struggle between Road and Rail in the American Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 66.
[71] Doyle, *Nashville in the New South*, 83-84. Clearing dead horses from the streets was a problem shared by all American cities in the late nineteenth century. The city of Chicago removed over ten thousand horse carcasses from city streets every year. See Donald L. Miller, *City of the Century: The Epic of Chicago and the Making of America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 267.

or heaped in scavenger carts to be sold as fertilizer. One Nashvillian complained that anyone with a horse took up scavenging regardless of whether he was a member of the city's scavenger department or not. Scavengers clogged the streets with their horses and carts, and clogged the nostrils with the stench of manure. The complainant recommended that the city enforce requirements for scavenging such as limiting it to overnight shifts and removing street scrapings in "air-tight" containers.[72]

The presence of draft animals influenced the built environment and occupational structure of Black Bottom as well as its streets. Half of the stables listed in the 1881 Nashville city directory were located in Black Bottom.[73] In her sweeping study of the importance of horses to the nineteenth-century economy, historian Ann Greene reports that horses were ever-present features of urban life. They "jammed the streets of Gilded Age cities, working in transit, industry, construction, shipping, commerce, and municipal government." The horses of Black Bottom were commercial workhorses and, like their counterparts in other urban centers of the period, were sheltered in "large, sometimes multistoried livery, freight, express, or streetcar stables or in small stables tucked between homes and businesses." Horses owned by poor and working-class families were more likely to be housed in such makeshift shelters as "shacks, sheds, and cheap livery stables with poor insulation."[74] The 1897 Sanborn map depicts seventeen commercial stables in Black Bottom, but that number underrepresented the presence of stables in

[72] *Daily American*, May 10, 1887. The complainant likely recommended air-tight containers because of the miasmic theory of disease, a belief that the gases released by sewers and waste spread diseases such as influenza, cholera, yellow fever, and pneumonia. See Martin V. Melosi, *The Sanitary City: Urban Infrastructure in America from Colonial Times to the Present* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 155.
[73] *Nashville Directory* (1881), 34.
[74] Greene, *Horses at Work*, 170, 173. Greene reminds her readers that railroads stimulated urban growth but were far too loud, dangerous, and expensive for most needs within a city. "There simply was no viable mechanical alternative to horses as urban prime movers," she writes. Greene, *Horses at Work*, 171.

the neighborhood because the map identified only the larger structures used to shelter commercial draft animals and not the smaller, privately-owned sheds where other horses were commonly housed.[75]

Caring for horse tack and the animals themselves was one of the most important occupations available to African American men in Black Bottom. In the 1900 census, residents of Black Bottom reported twenty-five different job titles that involved work with draft animals. As in other sectors of employment, labor in stables was structured along racial lines. White men held such better-paying positions as stable boss, horse dealer, and horseshoer, while Black men were limited to such less prestigious, menial jobs as teamster, cart driver, and livery hand. The division was stark in the neighborhood's livery and stable businesses. Every man with the title "manager" or "boss" was white, while all livery hands and all but four stable hands were Black.[76]

Horses were the powerhouses of urban development, but their presence in Black Bottom came at the expense of the health and safety of neighborhood residents. Liverymen, hackmen, and draymen did their best to manage the space humans shared with horses, but horses sometimes acted on their own initiative. On a summer day in 1888, a horse and cart tethered in front of a house on Vine Street became distressed from the heat and flies and attempted to free himself, only to become entangled in the rope with which he was tied and begin to choke. When a passerby cut the rope to relieve the animal, the horse "sprang to his feet and dashed madly towards and then down Church Street, running most of the distance on the sidewalk." The horse dragged the remains of the smashed cart behind him as he careered from Church Street to Cherry and then toward Broad, injuring several people.[77] Similar accounts of runaway horses in Black

[75] Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Nashville, 1897.
[76] U.S. manuscript census, 1900, population, Nashville, E.D. 94-95, pp. 123-149.
[77] *Daily American*, July 6, 1888.

Bottom were not uncommon in the pages of Nashville's newspapers. In 1894 a horse attached to a scavenger wagon made a dash down Demonbreun Street to High Street and then onto Broad, damaging buggies and injuring both humans and itself along the way.[78]

Horses were the most significant but by no means the only animals that shared space with people in the streets, alleys, and yards of Black Bottom. Dogs were perhaps the second most numerous, and their baying and barking were part of the neighborhood's daily soundscape. Dogs, which were kept for protection and for companionship, could be found in backyards, on porches and sidewalks, and in bars. They were so commonplace that the *Nashville Banner* once complained that there were two dogs for every person in the neighborhood.[79] Like horses, dogs sometimes escaped human control and pursued their own objectives. In a neighborhood as densely populated as Black Bottom, dogs that became aggressive due to fear, hunger, or disease posed a serious threat. Several accounts of "mad" dogs loose on the streets of Black Bottom appeared in Nashville newspapers in the 1880s and 1890s.[80] More prosaic examples of the coexistence of dogs and humans appeared as well. "If there is a house in South Nashville that does not possess one or both of these attractions [cats and dogs] we have been unable to discover it," lamented one contributor to the *Nashville Banner*. The "yelping and howling of dogs and the yawling of felines are familiar sounds" throughout the neighborhood, he complained.[81]

Pets and pests, from the mundane to the exotic, were also a significant component of life in Black Bottom. Wilson's Spring fed a small stream that often flooded with rain or a rise in the Cumberland River. Snakes that lived in holes near the stream were known to seek higher ground

[78] *Nashville Banner*, July 27, 1894. For similar stories involving runaway horses and mules hitched to carts, see *Nashville Banner*, August 25, 1881, February 3, 1882.
[79] *Nashville Banner*, March 8, 1884.
[80] *Daily American*, January 15, 1884, July 26, 1888; *Nashville Banner*, May 26, 1896, April 21, 1897.
[81] *Daily American*, July 26, 1888; *Nashville Banner*, June 24, 1881 (quotation), May 26, 1896; *Nashville American* April 21, 1897.

in garbage and houses as the water table rose.[82] A Black shopkeeper was arrested when police found a monkey on his premises that a white man claimed to have lost.[83] Meatpacking in the neighborhood meant that hogs were regularly driven through the streets.[84] Some Nashvillians complained of hogs that "wallow in alleys and wherever they can find a little water and create an unbearable stench."[85] On occasion, the porkers escaped *en masse* and "went grunting triumphantly through the streets . . . in seeming indifference to the terrors of pork-packing establishments."[86] Meanwhile, unclaimed hogs could be a valuable catch for those with the audacity to wrangle and butcher the animals themselves.

Meatpacking and its byproducts produced noisome smells. "[T]he odors that meet the pedestrian in this quarter is [*sic*] sickening in the extreme," remarked a journalist who visited Black Bottom. "It appears to be a mixture of sewer gas, onions, garlic, and slaughter-house refuse."[87] The smell of sewage, refuse, and open-air cooking, while repulsive to the journalist, were common odors of the nineteenth-century city and by no means unique to Black Bottom. It is likely that the journalist's revulsion stemmed from his preference for Nashville's new suburbs, which came with indoor plumbing and underground sewage systems and lacked the population density of the city center where streets were shared with draft animals, livestock, and open sewers. [88]

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[82] *Daily American*, August 20, 1888.
[83] *Nashville Banner*, January 21, 1896.
[84] *Nashville Directory* (1881), 48. While most small butcher shops were located in the city market in North Nashville, large meatpacking factories like Hart and Hensley's Pork Packing needed to be closer to the river and were thus located on South Market Street in Black Bottom. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Nashville, 1897.
[85] *Nashville Banner*, July 25, 1884.
[86] *Nashville Union and American*, November 11, 1874.
[87] *Nashville Union and American*, November 11, 1874.
[88] Municipal sewer systems were constructed in southern cities in the 1880s and 1890s. Charlotte, North Carolina, for example, installed underground sewers in the 1880s and expanded the system in 1896. In some cases, preexisting buildings were slow to connect to the new systems, leading cities to pass

Food preparation, whether in tenement buildings or open-air wagons, further distinguished Black Bottom from the middle-class neighborhoods of South Nashville. Open-air cooking was commonplace in Black Bottom, and food wagons were ubiquitous near the factories, stables, and lumberyards. Food wagons and public stalls served the large number of laborers who, because of the nature of their work, were regularly on the move. Cart drivers, day laborers, scavengers, and lumber workers gathered around food stalls where a hot midday meal could be purchased cheaply. The eating stalls paid little attention to property lines and were frequently constructed right up to the sidewalk.[89] One open-air food stall was significant enough to appear on the 1897 Sanborn map. Labeled "Lunch Wagon," it is identified as an iron-clad structure and was located in the hay market, where day laborers gathered to find work.[90] Contrary to emerging middle-class norms that demanded separate spaces for food preparation and dining, eateries such as the lunch wagon cooked meals where they were served, in the open air, filling the neighborhood with the aroma of frying fish and grilling meat.[91] Welcome or not, the smells greeted anyone on or near the street.

By century's end, Black Bottom was a relic of pre-industrial urban space. Commercial properties abutted small factories, and wood-framed residences were sprinkled throughout the neighborhood. While new transportation technology enabled those who could afford it a residence away from their places of work, Black Bottom remained home to men and women

ordinances requiring buildings in downtown areas to do so. Charlotte enacted such an ordinance in 1899. See Hanchett, *Sorting out the New South City*, 206-207.

[89] *Nashville American*, October 17, 1897.

[90] Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Nashville, 1897.

[91] *Nashville American*, October 17, 1897. In his study of middle-class residences in nineteenth-century Philadelphia, Stuart M. Blumin argues that separate kitchens and dining rooms were a hallmark of such homes. The homes of middling businessmen included "furnished parlors, fairly well-stocked dining rooms, and well-equipped kitchens." See Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 159.

employed in low-paying jobs in nearby factories, stables, warehouses, lumber yards, and wharf. The natural and built environments of Black Bottom posed perennial threats to the lives and livelihoods of its residents. Few escaped the summer heat or winter chill without discomfort, and wet spring weather brought rising water and floods. As Nashville expanded in size and population following the Civil War, Black Bottom remained one of the city's least salubrious neighborhoods and home to some of its poorest residents. As African American institutions matured in the neighborhood, they did so in a space increasingly shared with the warehouses, stables, and small manufactories that fueled Nashville's urban growth.

Urban Space and Residential Segregation

As warehouses and factories moved into Black Bottom and its housing stock decayed, white residents left in greater numbers than their African American neighbors. By 1890, fully 65 percent of the neighborhood's residents were Black.[92] In many respects, the story of racial segregation in Black Bottom is typical of that in working-class neighborhoods in other southern cities. African Americans were concentrated on poor land that was prone to flooding and close to sites of unskilled labor.[93] As elsewhere in the South, residential segregation in Nashville expressed itself through differences in both location (backyards, alleys, and side streets) and quality of housing.[94] Segregation at a larger scale (street, block, ward) was primarily a twentieth-

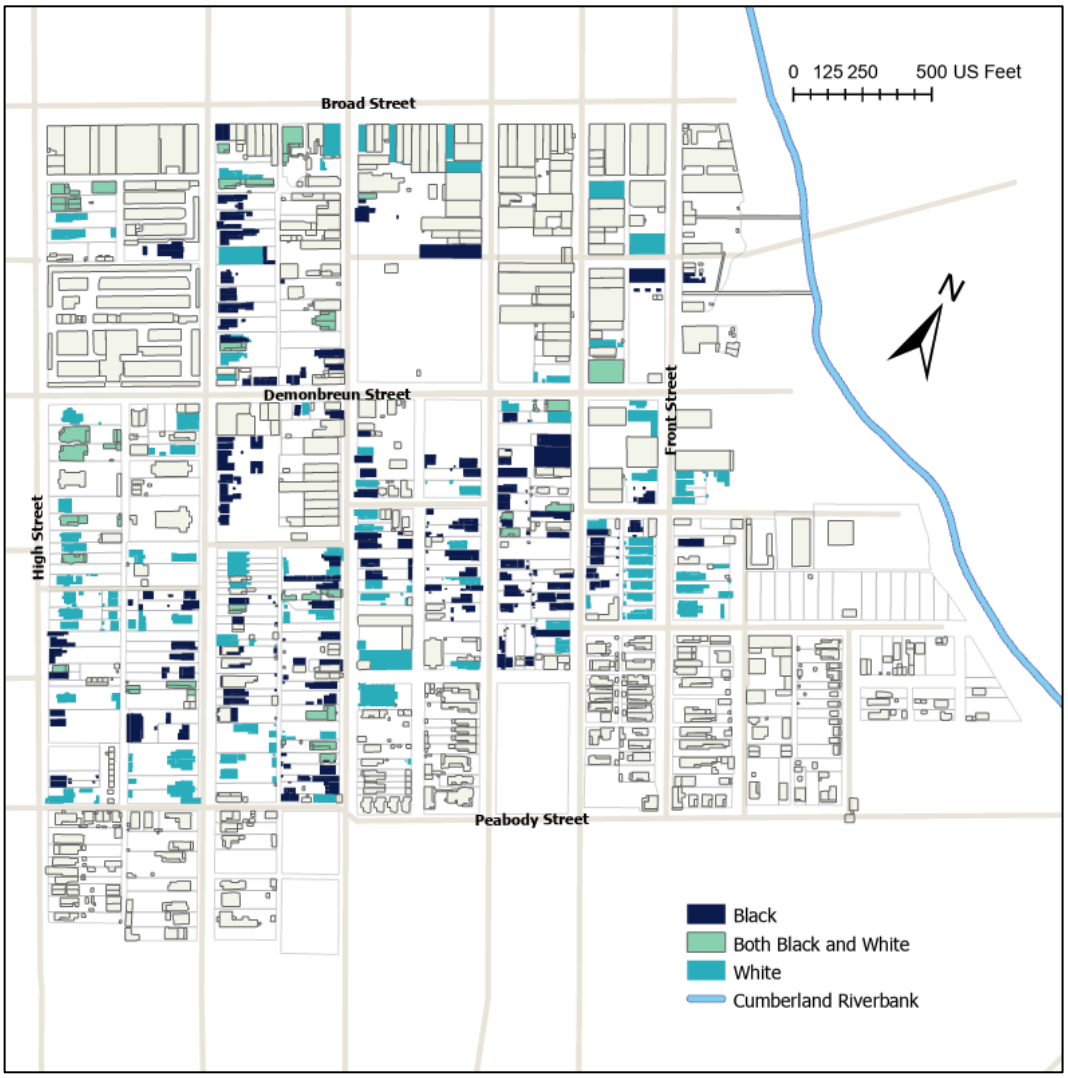
[92] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eleventh Census: Population*, 1890, p. 481.
[93] Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 114-115. "[T]he easiest way to locate Negro settlements in a Southern city at the end of the nineteenth century," Rabinowitz writes, "was to find the lowest spots. A housing map could be made from a topographical map, after allowances had been made for alleys and industrial sites." He argues that African Americans were forced to live "in the worst sections of the city: in unkempt alleyways, on low-lying ground near contaminated streams, or near slaughterhouses, flour mills, or other industrial sites." *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 98-99, 115.
[94] Logan and Martinez, "Spatial Scale and Spatial Configuration," 1161-1203.

century phenomenon.[95] Nashville resembled Atlanta, where African Americans lived in every ward but did not constitute a significant majority in any. As was also the case in Atlanta, residential patterns in Nashville assumed a different pattern than the "antebellum 'marble-caking' or 'backyard' patterns" of coastal cities such as Charleston and New Orleans, where African Americans "were scattered behind the homes of whites."[96] But, unlike in Richmond and Atlanta, where Black neighborhoods followed an antebellum pattern of settlement by occupying land on the fringes of the city, Nashville developed significant Black enclaves near the urban core.[97]

While the racial demography of Black Bottom included both Black and white, elements of residential segregation by race become apparent upon closer inspection. Black and white people lived as neighbors on every street in Black Bottom late into the nineteenth century. In a spatial analysis of ten southern cities in 1880, sociologists John R. Logan and Matthew Martinez found that while Black and white southerners lived in proximity to one another, elements of segregation by race were nevertheless significant. African Americans were more likely than white residents to live in backyards, alleys, and narrow streets. As in Black Bottom, the structural condition of Black housing in all ten cities was much poorer than that of neighboring whites. Mapping the demography of Black Bottom on a house-by-house level corroborates

[95] "By 1890," writes Howard Rabinowitz, "separate black and white neighborhoods dominated the urban landscape." Nevertheless, segregation was not as complete as it would become in the twentieth century; "a certain amount of racial intermixture within city blocks" remained. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 97-98. Kenneth Kusmer argues that southern cities developed "considerably lower levels of residential segregation" than their northern counterparts due to their "unique urban form (less centralized) and economic function (commercial or light industry rather than heavy industry)." Not until after World War II and the combined forces of "economic transformation, racism, and government policy" did neighborhood segregation characterize cities in all regions of the United States. Kenneth L Kusmer, "African Americans in the City since World War II: 'From the Industrial to the Post-Industrial Era,'" *Journal of Urban History* 21, no. 4 (Spring 1995): 462-463.
[96] Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 45.
[97] Rabinowitz, "Continuity and Change," 100.

Figure 2.5. Racial Demography of Ward 12, Nashville, 1900



Map by Bashar Al Tameemi and Stanley D. Maxson. Adapted from Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Nashville, Davidson County, Tennessee, vol. 2, Sanborn Map Company, 1897, Geography and Map Collection, Library of Congress. U.S. manuscript census, 1900, population, Nashville, E.D. 94-95, pp. 123-149.

the finding of Logan and Martinez that, when measured at the scale of a street segment, "the average black person in all of these cities lived on a street segment that was majority black."[98]

[98] Logan and Martinez, "Spatial Scale and Spatial Configuration," 23. According to Logan and Martinez, "when measured at the appropriate scale (the street segment), the absolute value of segregation was high in these cities by usual standards. The average black person in all of these cities lived on a street segment

Living in racially-mixed residential buildings was a pattern among working-class families in Black Bottom, though not exclusive to them. As Figure 2.5 shows, thirty-eight residential buildings had both white and Black occupants. Two adjoining brick buildings on South High Street were home to both white and Black families. Seven families rented rooms at 108 South High, four white and three Black. Two of the white heads of household worked as revenue collectors and the third was a banker. The Black families of 108 South High included a cart driver, a laundryman, and a cook.[99] Next door, the residents at 110 South High showed similar occupational diversity. The head of one white family was the proprietor of a saloon, possibly located in the building itself, another was a bartender, and two women worked as chambermaids. The African American renters included a servant, a day laborer, and a soap factory employee. Anecdotal evidence corroborates that white householders regularly rented rooms to Black boarders. In 1898, Joseph Kellogg, a white notary public and former police officer, rented a room to Richard Blanton, a Black minister. Shortly thereafter, the two entered into business together.[100]

A Neighborhood of Laborers

Most residents of Black Bottom lived in the neighborhood because it was one of the few places in the city where they could find employment. Former slaves who migrated to southern cities following the Civil War found that white prejudice and a lack of education or craft skills

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that was majority black (except New Orleans at 48.6%)." The cities included in Logan's and Martinez's study were Atlanta, Baltimore, Charleston, Louisville, Memphis, Mobile, Nashville, New Orleans, Richmond, and Washington, DC.

[99] U.S. manuscript census, 1900, population, Nashville, E.D. 96, p. 113.

[100] Direct Examination of R. H. Blanton, October 16, 1899, in *United States v. J. A. Kellogg*, no. 822, U.S. Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit, 1900, RG 276, NARA, Chicago, 277. The business partnership of Kellogg and Blanton is explored below, in Chapters 4 and 5.

shut them out of jobs with high earning potential and prestige. In attempts to maintain antebellum social and labor structures after emancipation, white southerners argued that African Americans were best suited for manual labor. As a result, most African Americans were confined to work as unskilled laborers or in personal or domestic service.[101] In Atlanta, for example, African Americans held 76 percent of the city's unskilled jobs within a few years after emancipation.[102] Black employment in Nashville followed similar patterns. As Table 2.3 shows, African Americans in Nashville dominated unskilled labor and personal and domestic service.

Table 2.3. "Colored" Percentage of Selected Occupations in Nashville, 1890

	Professional	Proprietary	Clerical	Skilled	Semiskilled	Unskilled	Personal & Domestic Service
Male	22.0	8.0	2.0	27.8	26.0	77.9	89.9
Female	21.5	17.9	2.7	1.5	22.4	75.7	92.4

Source: Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), Table 4.

Employment patterns in Black Bottom must be understood within the context of Nashville as a whole. In 1890, Nashville's labor force resembled that of other major southern cities. Unskilled labor claimed 52 percent of employed Black men, 15 percent were engaged in personal or domestic service, 5 percent in semiskilled labor, and 22 percent in skilled labor. Black women were employed almost exclusively in personal and domestic service, and they

[101] Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 63. After examining the southern labor market and opportunities for upward economic mobility for African Americans in the New South, economic historian Gavin Wright concludes that "discrimination was the rule, and blacks had little prospect for advancement above the unskilled level." Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy since the Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 13. See also Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 396-398.
[102] Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 63.

entered the labor market at a far higher rate than white women. In Nashville, fully 90 percent of employed Black women worked in personal or domestic service.[103]

Employment patterns in Black Bottom, shown in Table 2.4, followed those of workers in the city as a whole. Like African American workers across the city, those in Black Bottom were

Table 2.4. Occupational Structure in Black Bottom, 1900

	Professional	Proprietary	Clerical	Skilled	Semiskilled	Unskilled	Personal & Domestic Service	Total
White	94	46	47	120	73	39	55	474
Black	43	11	1	81	154	288	608	1,186
Total	137	57	48	201	227	327	663	1,660

Source: U.S. manuscript census, 1900, population, Nashville, E.D. 94-95, pp. 123-149. Data compiled from Ward Twelve.

overwhelmingly unskilled or employed in personal or domestic service. In 1900, the Twelfth Ward was primarily a working-class district. Only 15 percent of its employed residents were professionals, proprietors, or held clerical positions, and three-quarters of them were white. Meanwhile, in every category of manual labor, whether skilled, semiskilled, or unskilled, African Americans vastly outnumbered white residents; 80 percent of manual laborers residing in the Twelfth Ward were Black. Most African Americans in the ward were limited to unskilled occupations. Of the ward's residents who worked in personal service, 92 percent were African American, as were 88 percent of those employed as unskilled laborers. Most Black men in Black Bottom were employed at sites within the neighborhood, working as stable hands, poultry dressers, livery hands, servants, porters, cooks, and day laborers. The neighborhood's Black women were employed as domestic servants, maids, and washerwomen.[104]

[103] Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, Tables 2 and 3.
[104] U.S. manuscript census, 1900, population, Nashville, E.D. 94-95, pp. 123-149.

Black Bottom was also a significant enclave of Black skilled labor. In 1900, African Americans dominated the carpentry, metalworking, and masonry trades of the Twelfth Ward.[105] The 1881 city directory listed thirteen black-owned blacksmith shops in the neighborhood.[106] Of the nineteen barbers in Ward Twelve in 1900, all but one was African American.[107] Several Black-owned commercial enterprises were also located in Black Bottom, including a fruit and confection shop, a feed store, several retail stores, and shoemaker shops. The city's only Black-owned livery stable, owned by E. W. Napier, was on Broad Street, the neighborhood's northern boundary.[108] The neighborhood offered inexpensive housing near the bulk of unskilled jobs in the city's factories, stables, warehouses, and wharf. By 1890, Black Bottom had become a working-class neighborhood for African Americans, just as it had been for Irish immigrants forty years earlier.

Black Institutions

For its Black residents, Black Bottom was more than a place for labor and housing. They invested time and energy in creating an associational life that made the neighborhood a setting for social and political gatherings, institution building, and shared leisure. Black Bottom was home to some of Nashville's oldest Black religious and educational institutions. Its Black residents built what historian Bobby Lovett calls a "special kind of life," filled with social, educational, and religious activities.[109] The strength of relationships sustained by Black Bottom's

[105] U.S. manuscript census, 1900, population, Nashville, E.D. 94-95, pp. 123-149.
[106] *Nashville Directory* (1881), 25.
[107] U.S. manuscript census, 1900, population, Nashville, E.D. 94-95, pp. 123-149. Fifteen of twenty-two carpenters were also Black, as were eight of ten blacksmiths, and six of seven stonemasons.
[108] *Nashville Directory* (1881), 34 (fruit and confectioner), 33 (feed), 35-38 (retail grocer), 57 (shoemaker), 34 (livery stable).
[109] Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 74.

African American community would later become an invaluable resource for men and women struggling to claim the entitlement of Civil War pensions.

Following the Civil War, northern religious denominations, both white and Black, saw emancipation and the defeat of the Confederacy as opportunities to expand their influence into the South.[110] While several denominations operated in Nashville, Methodist and Baptist churches became the most important for African Americans in Black Bottom.[111] The neighborhood's African Americans seized on northern patronage to establish St. Paul's African American Episcopal (AME) Church and Clark Chapel Methodist Episcopal (ME) Church. The two denominations shared much in theology, organization, and practice. Both saw education and religion as closely related and emphasized an educated ministry. They did, however, have significant differences when it came to their episcopacies. The AME Church had been founded in Philadelphia in 1816 on the premise of an entirely Black clergy and episcopal hierarchy. The

[110] Northern churches invested heavily in home missionary work in the South. Historian Sally McMillen documents the immediate influx of northern missionaries following the Civil War. In 1866, according to McMillen, the American Baptist Home Missionary Society (ABHMS) had 68 missionaries working among freedpeople in twelve southern states. By 1868, northern Presbyterians had 179 missionaries working in the South, and by 1872 white northern Methodists had more than 75. The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AME Zion) Church, both Black denominations, also sent missionaries to the South. See Sally G. McMillen, *To Raise up the South: Sunday Schools in Black and White Churches, 1865-1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 31 (ABHMS and northern Presbyterians), 32 (AME and AME Zion), 45-46 (white northern Methodists). On the activities of the AME church and its missionaries in the South, see William E. Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African-American Church in the South, 1865-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994); Clarence E. Walker, *A Rock in a Weary Land: The African Methodist Episcopal Church during the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

[111] Nashville was home to Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Disciples of Christ, and Catholics. This chapter focuses on the operations of the two Black churches located in Black Bottom: Clark Chapel, Methodist Episcopal Church, and St. Paul's African Methodist Episcopal Church. For an overview of Black churches and their activities in postwar Nashville, see Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 173-197. For the activities of Black Baptists in Nashville, see also Bobby L. Lovett, *A Black Man's Dream: Richard Henry Boyd and the National Baptist Publishing Board, The First 100 Years* (Jacksonville, FL: Mega Corp., 1993). For a historical review of Black churches in nineteenth-century Nashville, see Lois C. McDougald, *A Collection of Histories of Metro/Nashville's Afro-American Churches, 1832-1907* (Nashville: Published in Cooperation with the National Endowment for the Humanities, 1986).

AME prided itself in independent Black control and ownership of its churches. The ME church, by contrast, opposed full autonomy for Black churches, particularly those consisting primarily of former slaves. It chose instead to keep Black congregations within the organization and oversight of the white Methodist episcopacy.[112]

Like many other Black churches in Nashville, the origin of Clark Chapel was a credit to the work and aspirations of formerly enslaved men and women, who built it into a pillar of the African American community during the early years of Reconstruction. The occupation of Nashville by the Union army brought both benefits and disadvantages to the operations of northern Methodists in the city. The army appropriated McKendree Chapel to house a cavalry unit and left the interior of the building stripped and defaced when vacating the building.[113] At the same time, cooperation between military officials and leaders of the ME Church meant that some property confiscated by the Union army was transferred to the church. Originally the "Negro mission" of Andrew Chapel ME Church, Black members of the church separated from the parent congregation in 1865, assumed the name Clark Chapel, and in 1866 moved into a building on South College Street that had housed a Confederate gun factory.[114] Wherever located, Clark Chapel operated as both a school and a church.[115]

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[112] James E. Kirby, Russell E. Richey, and Kenneth E. Rowe, *The Methodists* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 90. For more on the AME Church, see Gilbert Anthony Williams, *The Christian Recorder, Newspaper of the African Methodist Episcopal Church: History of a Forum for Ideas, 1854-1902* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1996). For an overview of how the various northern Methodist denominations—AME, AME Zion, Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, Methodist Episcopal (ME) Church, and Methodist Episcopal Church, South (ME South)—approached issues of race and emancipation, see Reginald Francis Hildebrand, *The Times Were Strange and Stirring: Methodist Preachers and the Crisis of Emancipation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).
[113] Ralph E. Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1956), 35.
[114] Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 154; Faye Wellborn Robbins, "Black Churches: The Building Blocks of Community," *Tennessean*, December 21, 1980.
[115] Alrutheus Ambush Taylor, *The Negro in Tennessee, 1865-1880* (Washington, DC: Associated Publishers, 1941), 191.

In 1868, the congregants of Clark Chapel purchased a more permanent location from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, for $15,000, and the deed was transferred to the Clark Chapel trustees, all of whom were African American men.[116] Shortly thereafter, the congregation moved into the new building, which was located on the corner of Almond Street and Franklin, in the heart of Black Bottom. Clark Chapel ME Church enjoyed the autonomy of owning its own building while remaining within the northern Methodist episcopacy. By 1870, Clark Chapel had a membership of 400 and a building that could seat up to 600, and it operated a Sunday School for 150 pupils taught by twenty teachers.[117] The congregation sent its minister, the Reverend J. Braden, as its representative to the annual Tennessee Methodist Episcopal Conference in 1867, where nineteen Black men were ordained as deacons.[118] The work conducted by the founding congregation of Clark Chapel set a pattern for community involvement that would characterize the church throughout the late nineteenth century.

In 1867, the congregation of St. Paul's AME Church, Nashville's second oldest AME church, met in the same Union-confiscated building as Clark Chapel.[119] The Reverend Jordan Early, pastor of St. Paul's, estimated that over 400 students, young and old, attended his Sunday school each week in 1867. Many of the attendees traveled to Nashville from surrounding towns.[120] In 1868, the ME Church, "having more gold," purchased the building from the army, leaving the congregants of St. Paul's to find a new home.[121] St. Paul's grew under the leadership

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[116] *Republican Banner*, October 9, 1868. The trustees listed in the *Republican Banner* were Randal Brown, Elias Polk, Ephraim Pickett, Henry Taylor, Squire Fain, Alfred Menefee, Samuel Emory, Madison Trimble, and Wiley Ramsey. Before the war, many of them had been enslaved by Nashville's wealthiest white families.
[117] Taylor, *Negro in Tennessee*, 212.
[118] *Memphis Daily Post*, October 11, 1867.
[119] Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 74.
[120] Sara J. W. Early, *Life and Labors of Rev. Jordan W. Early: One of the Pioneers of African Methodism in the West and South* (Nashville: Publishing House AME Church Sunday School Union, 1894), 62.
[121] *Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia), October 8, 1870.

of the Rev. Early and by the mid-1870s boasted a congregation of over 160 members.[122] The congregation broke ground on a purpose-built sanctuary across from Clark Chapel on the corner of Franklin and Cherry streets in 1874.[123] Construction of the new building cost $20,000, much of which was raised by the congregation itself.[124] The *Christian Recorder*, the official newspaper of the AME Church, heaped praise on the finished church, which boasted a 140-foot tower, as "the grandest sight in Nashville" and "the cathedral of African Methodism in Tennessee."[125] After a powerful storm destroyed the sanctuary in 1886, the congregation rebuilt the church, adding a larger belfry and a fully remodeled interior.[126]

Clark Chapel and St. Paul's both hosted lively community events that brought African Americans from across the city to Black Bottom.[127] In 1881, the *Nashville Banner* reported that "a series of meetings has been in progress at the colored church on Cherry Street [St. Paul's], and every night until after midnight they continue."[128] St. Paul's hosted annual Emancipation Day celebrations as well as entertainment nights to honor the Grand Army of the Republic.[129]

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[122] *Christian Recorder,* October 12, 1876. Early was an African American minister and prominent evangelist of the AME Church. In addition to St. Paul's, Early was instrumental in founding AME churches in Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Louisiana, and elsewhere in Tennessee. Early, *Life and Labors*, 10, 48.
[123] Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 178.
[124] *Republican Banner*, April 22, 1874.
[125] *Christian Recorder*, October 12, 1876.
[126] *Christian Recorder*, July 8, 1886.
[127] For newspaper reports of some of the events hosted by Clark Chapel and St. Paul's, see *Republican Banner*, May 24, 1872 (picnic and parade); *Daily American*, October 7, 1879 (monthly session of Sunday School Union); *Daily American*, June 19, 1880 (picnic); *Nashville Banner*, October 4, 1881 (monthly session of Sunday School Union); *Daily American*, January 10, 1882 (monthly session of Sunday School Union); *Daily American*, April 3, 1882 (monthly session of Sunday School Union); *Daily American*, May 20, 1883 (concert, "Jubilee service"); *Nashville Banner*, November 24, 1888 (conference); *Nashville Banner*, May 9, 1889 (picnic and fundraiser).
[128] *Nashville Banner*, August 25, 1881.
[129] For an example of an Emancipation Day celebration, see *Nashville Banner*, January 2, 1894; *Daily American*, January 2, 1894. For an evening honoring the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), see *Nashville Banner*, May 24, 1889. The GAR was a fraternal organization composed of Union veterans of the Civil War. It fulfilled both social and political needs of veterans as members formed posts across the country. Some GAR posts included both Black and white veterans. Tennessee was home to twelve

Congregants of St. Paul's were among the founding members of the Colored Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) No. 2 and the Ladies Auxiliary YMCA.[130] Both the Black men's and women's YMCAs held regular outdoor meetings in Black Bottom with receptions that followed at St. Paul's or Clark Chapel.[131]

In addition to hosting commemorative events and sponsoring associational meetings, both St. Paul's and Clark Chapel sponsored Sunday schools that brought African Americans from throughout the city to Black Bottom on a weekly basis. Partnering with Black churches across the city, St. Paul's and Clark Chapel were early members of the Nashville Sunday School Union, originally the Colored Sabbath School Union, a cooperative that shared resources, space, and responsibility for educational programs throughout the late nineteenth century.[132] In Black Bottom, as across the South, Sunday schools created a platform for Black social and political action. Along with regularly scheduled meetings, Sunday schools hosted social events such as

racially-integrated GAR posts in East Tennessee, but Nashville had separate posts for Black and white veterans. See Barbara A. Gannon, *The Won Cause: Black and White Comradeship in the Grand Army of the Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 207, 220.

[130] *Nashville Banner*, June 19, 1886 (Formation of the Ladies Auxiliary YMCA); *Nashville Banner*, January 2, 1894 (gatherings of the YMCA No. 2 and Ladies Auxiliary).

[131] *Nashville Banner*, September 16, 1899; *Daily American*, September 16, 1899.

[132] *Republican Banner*, May 24, 1872. Following the Civil War, Black and white congregations across the South organized Sunday schools. Historian Sally McMillen argues that the postwar zeal for Sunday school was fueled in part by the influx of northern missionaries operating in the South, who "saw Sunday school as the most effective evangelical agency." Northern and southern denominations and congregations, both Black and white, saw Sunday school as an institution that "promised to uplift individual lives, improve behavior, and strengthen churches, denominations and communities." Nowhere was denominational competition more intense than in the quest to bring newly emancipated slaves into church membership, and Sunday schools were essential to that effort. McMillen shows that northern missionary societies were crucial to the creation of Black Sunday schools "by donating money, Bibles, books, lesson plans, and periodicals, and assisting officers and teachers as they set about their work." Wary of white intentions, Black congregations welcomed financial support while almost universally seeking autonomy in the management of Sunday school activities. Sunday schools became a particularly important institution for Black communities following the federal retreat from Reconstruction and the subsequent rise in white supremacist violence and political disfranchisement. McMillen, *To Raise up the South*, 18-19 (importance of Sunday schools after Reconstruction), 32 ("evangelical agency"), x ("uplift"), 47 ("donating money").

parades, picnics, concerts, and barbecues.[133] They organized local and regional conventions at which speakers delivered messages challenging racial injustice, loss of Black political rights, and lynching. Black Sunday schools also taught "the virtues of benevolence," temperance, and self-improvement through education and honest labor.[134]

Perhaps no feature of the Sunday schools was more valuable to the residents of Black Bottom than the literacy training they provided. Sunday schools offered literacy instruction for both children and adults, including those who could not attend school.[135] As historian Sally McMillen argues, Sunday school "often became the best means—and perhaps the only one—for blacks to acquire basic literacy." [136] Almost all Sunday schools included "literary exercises."[137] On Christmas Eve, 1876, attendees of one Sunday school in Black Bottom participated in a day of "music, brief addresses, and black board exercises."[138] It was not uncommon for Sunday schools to teach literacy through lessons on such subjects as the lives of Frederick Douglass and Toussaint L'Overture.[139]

Assemblies of the Sunday School Union drew African Americans from across Nashville to Black Bottom and gave Black Bottom residents a reason to travel outside of the neighborhood

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[133] For newspaper reports of events hosted by the Sunday School Union in which Clark Chapel and St. Paul's participated, see *Republican Banner*, May 24, 1872 (picnic and parade); *Daily American*, October 7, 1879 (monthly session); *Daily American*, June 19, 1880 (picnic); *Nashville Banner*, October 4, 1881 (monthly session); *Daily American*, January 10, 1882 (monthly session); *Daily American*, April 3, 1882 (monthly session); *Daily American*, May 20, 1883 (concert, "Jubilee service"); *Nashville Banner*, November 24, 1888 (conference); *Nashville Banner*, May 9, 1889 (picnic and fundraiser).
[134] McMillen, *To Raise up the South*, 174-175 (Sunday school conventions), 170 ("virtues of benevolence"), 171 (temperance), 193 (self-improvement).
[135] McMillen notes that "[a]fter the Civil War, freedmen of all ages came to Sunday school in order to learn to read." McMillen, *To Raise up the South*, 202-203. For an examination of adult Sunday schools, see Charles W. Brewbaker, *The Adult Program in the Church School* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1925).
[136] McMillen, *To Raise up the South*, 21.
[137] *Daily American*, October 7, 1879, January 10, 1882, April 3, 1882; *Nashville Banner*, October 4, 1881.
[138] *Daily American*, December 24, 1876.
[139] McMillen, *To Raise up the South*, 164 (education), 172 (Black history).

for social, religious, and educational activities. A typical monthly meeting of the Sunday School Union in 1882 included eight Sunday schools from various denominations.[140] It is possible that many learned of Sunday school meetings from notices published in newspapers. In 1882, Irvin C. Brown, extended an invitation to church members from across the city, "all Sunday-school workers and friends of the union," to join an upcoming Sunday school hosted by Clark Chapel.[141]

Participation in Nashville's Sunday School Union demonstrated remarkable cooperation among Black denominations, especially given their fierce competition for members. In 1872, the Sunday School Union organized a parade and picnic to celebrate and advertise its programs. Sixteen Sunday schools participated, representing such denominations as the African Methodist Episcopal, Methodist Episcopal, Baptist, and Disciples of Christ.[142] Ephraim Pickett of Clark Chapel led the parade as honorary chief marshal.[143] Monthly meetings of the Sunday School Union were held at churches across the city and occasionally at the chapels of Fisk University and Central Tennessee College, both of which were Black institutions.[144] Representatives of

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[140] The following Sunday schools participated in the monthly meeting of the Sunday School Union: "Spruce-street Baptist Sunday-school, St. Paul Chapel, St. John Chapel, Clark Chapel, Gay-street Christian, Howard Chapel, Thompson Chapel and Caper's Chapel." *Daily American*, January 10, 1882. Tera Hunter has also pointed to the importance of Sunday schools in connecting African Americans to social networks that extended beyond congregation, neighborhood, city, and state. See *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 69.

[141] *Daily American*, April 3, 1882. Brown was a Black grocery store clerk who lived in Black Bottom and served as secretary of the Sunday School Union. See U.S. manuscript census, 1880, population, Nashville, E.D. 38, p. 68.

[142] *Republican Banner*, May 24, 1872. The following congregations were said to have participated in the picnic: "First Baptist Sabbath, St. John's Chapel, Thompson's Chapel, St. Paul's Chapel, Clark's Chapel, Second Christian Church, Second Baptist, McKee's, Fisk's, Baptist College, Mount Zion's, Caprel's Chapel, Salom's, Rev. Mr. Vanable's, Edgefield, St. Mary's."

[143] Black parades, even those for Sunday schools, could be met with violent white defiance. In 1873, a mob of over 150 white men assaulted a procession of the colored Sunday School of Asbury Methodist Church in Baltimore, Maryland. *Nashville Union and American*, July 10, 1873.

[144] *Republican Banner*, May 24, 1872. One of the nation's preeminent African American universities, Fisk originated in a partnership between local African Americans, the American Missionary Association, and the Freedmen's Bureau. Founded in 1865, Fisk grew into "an academy and normal school with three

participating churches met monthly to plan curricula that included religious instruction and literacy training. A typical meeting consisted of "addresses, select readings, essays, discussion, and singing."[145]

In addition to literacy training, Clark Chapel and St. Paul's sponsored adult education through involvement with the late nineteenth-century lyceum movement.[146] Intended for those privileged enough to have completed primary education or even some college, Clark Chapel's semi-monthly lyceum was an evening of musical performances, recitations of literature, original oratory, and readings of essays on political and moral subjects. On December 19, 1882, a meeting of the Clark Chapel Lyceum included vocal performances, the presentation of three essays ("The Religious Outlook of the Church," "True Manhood," and "Woman's Rights"), an instrumental solo, and prayer.[147] In the 1880s, lyceum events merged into the popular

terms and tuition at three dollars per term." Its curriculum included both liberal arts and professional courses, and a majority of the school's student body came from families of the aspiring Black middle class and elite. Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 158-159, 161. Known today as Walden University, Central Tennessee College was established in 1865 by northern Methodists. Between 1869 and 1899, it was Black Nashville's comprehensive university, offering courses in algebra, geometry, Latin, Greek, English grammar, science, and religion. With the financial backing of northern Methodists, Central Tennessee College opened Meharry Medical Department (later Meharry Medical College) in 1876. On the founding of Central Tennessee College, see Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 154-155. For an analysis of Black institutions of higher education in Nashville in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, chap. 7. For a study of the development of Nashville's institutions of higher education, white and Black, see Mary Ellen Pethel, *Athens of the New South: College Life and the Making of Modern Nashville* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2017).

[145] *Daily American*, January 10, 1882.

[146] The first lyceum was organized in 1826 by Josiah Holbrook, an educator who believed that self-improvement came through intellectual curiosity and the continual acquisition of knowledge. Early lyceums were local community organizations that hosted lectures, discussions, and debates on a variety of topics. By 1845, the Lyceum had developed a lecture circuit in the northeastern and midwestern United States. Following the Civil War, lyceum programming expanded to include popular entertainment and musical performances as local organizations invited participation from local citizens as well as professionals. Angela G. Ray, *The Lyceum and Public Culture in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2005), 1-12.

[147] *Daily American*, December 20, 1882.

Chautauqua movement, meetings of which were also hosted by Clark Chapel.[148] The AME *Christian Recorder* heaped praise on the "literary and historical societies" that met weekly at St. Paul's, writing that "the literate of Nashville crowded into its meetings."[149]

Clark Chapel functioned as a site of activism and advocacy for African Americans of both Black Bottom and the wider city. When Nashville's discriminatory public school system fell short, members of Clark Chapel organized events in support of Black schools. As early as 1870, Clark Chapel held fundraising events for Black public schools. In 1883, Clark Chapel hosted a public meeting as part of a campaign led by James C. Napier, a prominent Black businessman and city council member, to pressure the board of education to hire Black public school teachers. There had been no Black teachers in the city's public schools since Reconstruction. Attendees of the meeting at Clark Chapel passed a resolution notifying the board of education "that if colored teachers were not employed, they would withdraw their children from the schools."[150] The campaign for Black educators succeeded in 1884 when the board of education hired Minnie Lou Scott Crosthwaite, the first Black public school teacher hired since 1868.[151] Similar collective action was taken in Black Bottom two years later when a meeting was

[148] An interracial branch of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle occasionally met at Clark Chapel. For examples of meeting invitations published in the city's newspapers, see *Daily American*, June 20, 1883; *Nashville Banner*, July 7, 1884. The Chautauqua movement was a social and educational movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Founded at Chautauqua Lake, New York, in 1873 as a summer training program for Methodist Sunday School teachers, the model grew into a wildly popular movement of independent summer institutes, itinerant tent assemblies, and local clubs. Chautauqua assemblies shared common ideals of self-improvement through the study of science, literature, and the arts; moral development through the practice and teaching of Christianity; and fostering the public good. Chautaquas were particularly popular among the white middle class in the Northeast and Midwest United States. Andrew Chamberlin Rieser, *The Chautauqua Moment: Protestants, Progressives, and the Culture of Modern Liberalism, 1874-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 1-14, 129.

[149] *Christian Recorder*, July 8, 1886.

[150] *Nashville Banner*, June 12, 1883.

[151] Mary Ellen Pethel, "Lift Every Female Voice: Education and Activism in Nashville's African American Community, 1870-1940," in *Tennessee Women: Their Lives and Times*, ed. Beverly G. Bond and Sarah Wilkerson Freeman, vol. 2 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 243. The first Black

called to pressure the board of education, "by petition or otherwise," to provide ninth and tenth grades in the city's Black public schools as it did in the white schools.[152]

While Clark Chapel and St. Paul's provided crucial literacy training for Black Bottom residents, their educational offerings were only a stopgap compared to the promise of public education. Black Bottom was the home of Pearl Public School, the only public school for African Americans in the city's center. In Nashville, as across the South, the advocacy, activism, and organizing of African Americans ensured that education was a central component of Reconstruction and that Black schools survived into the twentieth century. Historians have shown that public schools like Pearl were the product of the tireless work of Black professional, political, and religious communities.[153] Pearl Public School was a two-story brick building

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teachers in Nashville's public schools, Elizabeth Lawrence and Channie Patterson, taught for only two years (1868-1870), after which the Nashville board of education resumed its practice of hiring only white teachers. In 1878, James C. Napier won election to the Nashville city council and used the position to encourage the board of education to hire Black teachers. See Pethel, "Lift Every Female Voice," 242-244; Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 137.

[152] *Daily American*, September 13, 1886. For other accounts of the meeting to press for ninth and tenth grades, see *Daily American*, September 15, 1886, September 16, 1886. By 1890, there were four public schools that served African Americans in Nashville: Belleview (grades 1-8), McKee (grades 1-3), Meigs (grades 1-11), and Pearl (grades 1-7). Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 138.

[153] Literacy and education were central to formerly enslaved men and women's definitions of freedom. Heather Andrea Williams documents the crucial role of Black military service in teaching literacy and the role of Black teachers in sustaining education for the formerly enslaved. See Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005). Ronald Butchart reevaluates the role of white northerners and southerners in fostering education for African Americans during Reconstruction. Butchart shows that more white men than white women traveled south to teach in Black schools. He also adds nuance to the white southern response to Black education, which varied from genuine interest to paternalistic support to violent opposition. And he shows that local Black communities made schools possible by donating money and materials for school buildings and providing provisions and lodging for teachers. See Ronald E. Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861-1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2010). Hillary Green credits the unrelenting political mobilization of African Americans for transforming Black education from instruction in disparate local schoolhouses to publicly funded institutions. Comparing Black educational advocacy in Richmond, Virginia, and Mobile, Alabama, Green shows that African Americans applied persistent pressure on local officials, struck deals with racist white leaders, and endured the underfunding of Black schools and the underemployment of Black teachers to ensure that public education was accessible to Black southerners. See Hilary Green, *Educational Reconstruction: African American Schools in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016). For a foundational study of both private and public schools

constructed in 1883 to serve Black students from first through seventh grade. A white principal oversaw the school for the first three years of its existence. Highlighting the inequality meted out along racial lines in Nashville, he was paid 40 percent more than the Black principal of a larger public school elsewhere in the city. In 1887, in response to pressure from Black education advocates, the Nashville school board turned the school over to an all-black staff.[154] African Americans rightly noted that the school was too small to serve the Black population of Black Bottom and the surrounding neighborhoods. In 1897, Pearl was authorized to serve students through the eleventh grade, a welcome change, but one that further increased the problem of overcrowding. Some members of the city's Black elite expressed concern about the school's location in a poverty-stricken neighborhood, and such sentiments would continue well into the twentieth century.[155] Nevertheless, Pearl was a significant public resource for the African American families of Black Bottom and adjoining parts of the city.

The presence of Pearl Public School in Black Bottom was of symbolic as well as practical significance. Black students could claim ownership of public space in and around Pearl in ways denied by white discrimination elsewhere in the city. According to the 1900 manuscript census, all the residences directly across the street from the school were occupied by Black families.[156] The school's location in the heart of Black Bottom meant that gestures of deference demanded by white citizens across the Jim Crow South, such as conceding the right of way on a

for African Americans in the South from Reconstruction to the Great Depression, see James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

[154] Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 138.

[155] Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 139. Black education activists argued that Pearl was woefully inadequate for the number of students it served. While they recognized its value as the only Black school near the city's urban core, many were also concerned about its location in Black Bottom.

[156] U.S. manuscript census, 1900, population, Nashville, E.D. 94-95, pp. 123-149; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Nashville, 1897.

sidewalk, could be subverted.[157] On May 9, 1887, two white students from Montgomery Bell, a white high school, walked down the sidewalk of Summer Street, near the center of Black Bottom. One them jostled an African American student from Pearl who was standing on the sidewalk and speaking to friends. Just two blocks farther north, nearer the central business district, the white students could have expected the Black students to cede the narrow walkway, but on the sidewalk outside Pearl, the Black students "resented the insult." One of them "struck the white boy with a stone," accompanied by shouts of what the *Nashville Banner* considered "vulgar and profane language."[158] The deferential choreography of Jim Crow did not govern the sidewalk in front of Pearl Public School.

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[157] Historians of African American history, particularly African American women's history, have shown that dismantling slavery required more than abolition by law; it required a reworking of "the politics of everyday life." Demanding that African Americans grant white pedestrians right of way on a sidewalk was one of many "rituals of race" intended to publicly reaffirm white superiority "in a world where slavery no longer established the limits of black people's actions." See Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 123 (rituals of race), 206. Thavolia Glymph argues that, immediately following emancipation, Black women made freedom meaningful by making, owning, and wearing fine clothes, and by not ceding the sidewalk to white women. Struggles over self-direction and self-determination remained central to Black women's politics through Jim Crow, she writes. See Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 208 (fine clothes), 210-211 (sidewalk), 218.

[158] *Nashville Banner*, January 30, 1884. Complaints about Pearl students crowding the sidewalks arose again in 1912. The principal of the school at the time responded in Nashville's Black newspaper, the *Nashville Globe*, to claims that students were "walking three and four abreast" and "taking up the whole pavement on the way to school." He advised the students to "be circumspect in their conduct" and reminded them that, as the only Black school in the center of the city, it "was the cynosure of all eyes." *Nashville Globe*, October 4, 1912. The sidewalks of Black Bottom were contentious ground for the choreography of Jim Crow. Tera Hunter points out that "strangers encountered one another more casually and intimately" in urban settings such as sidewalks, saloons, and dance halls. See Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 146. Historian Glenda Gilmore argues that accounts of sidewalk encounters between Black and white can be read as examples of Black women "standing up for their rights and abandoning deference." See Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 103-104. In Black Bottom, white Nashvillians complained of Black residents refusing to step aside and let them pass. In 1881, the *Nashville Banner* complained that "negro roughs" in Black Bottom persistently make it "impracticable for ladies to attempt to pass on." The newspaper demanded that the police "give the matter proper attention, and abate the nuisance, by dispersing the crowd of loafers that daily congregate in that locality." *Nashville Banner*, August 25, 1881. Police in Nashville were known to fine African Americans who would not cede the sidewalk when told to do so. A Black man visiting Nashville from Franklin,

Public Space, Leisure, and Belonging

African Americans in Black Bottom, like their counterparts across the South, claimed belonging and entitlement to public space through gatherings that celebrated Black life and Black achievement.[159] Churches and schools were often the sponsors of such events. African Americans gathered in and around Black Bottom for parades, memorials, concerts, and picnics. On July 4, 1868, the congregation of Clark Chapel, mainly formerly enslaved men and women, held an Independence Day parade. Ephraim Pickett, a founding trustee of Clark Chapel, was at its head as "President of the day." The procession included a brass band and African American voluntary associations, including the Barbers' Association, Sons of Relief, Benevolent Society, and Peoples Aid Society. Following the associations were men, women, and children on foot, in carriages, and on horseback. The parade marched from the corner of Market and Broad streets, at the northwestern edge of Black Bottom, north through the heart of Nashville to the Davidson County courthouse and city hall, before ending on the grounds of the state capitol.[160]

Parades and public gatherings continued throughout Reconstruction and into the late nineteenth century. Clark Chapel hosted an annual festival and parade from 1870 to 1874 to celebrate the founding of Benevolent Association No. 1, a society established by the church.[161]

Tennessee, was fined $10 for not obeying a white police officer when told to "move on" from the sidewalk. *Daily American*, May 10, 1887.

[159] Beginning during the Civil War and continued into the twentieth century, African Americans articulated conceptions of freedom and citizenship through public commemorations. Kathleen Clark argues that African Americans' commemorations were as much about opening a world of future opportunity as about memorializing the past. Event organizers "literally *made* progress in the post-Reconstruction South." Public commemorations, sometimes multi-day events attended by hundreds to thousands of people became "critical forums for enacting and projecting black-authored visions of progress." See Kathleen Ann Clark, *Defining Moments: African American Commemoration and Political Culture in the South, 1863-1913* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), quotations on 11.

[160] *Republican Banner*, July 3, 1868.

[161] *Republican Banner*, April 13, 1870, April 13, 1871; *Nashville Union and American*, April 14, 1874.

In 1873, the congregation of Clark Chapel joined fellow Black churches in a parade that marked the founding of Fisk University.[162] In the summer of 1887, the *Daily American* reported that "a colored church festival" was held in the neighborhood, and "several hundred people had assembled."[163] In Black Bottom, as elsewhere in the South, parades and other assemblies were significant ways for Black communities to assert a claim to public space that otherwise was rarely acknowledged.[164]

The Black churches of Black Bottom drew visitors from across the state and occasionally from across the nation for social, political, and religious events. In January 1889, St. Paul's hosted the dedicatory services for a newly purchased four-story building that would house the Publishing House of the AME Church Sunday School Union.[165] The pews of St. Paul's were filled with members and guests in their best attire. "All the colors of the rainbow were there presented in the association of the beautiful, grand and noble women that gave animation to the scene," remarked one speaker. Pride in the gathering prompted him to elaborate. "[T]here could not be found in all this land a more beautiful scene . . . ," he declared. "I do not mean with regard to the texture of *mousseline de laine* and the empress cloth and the furbelows and the sealskins and all the paraphernalia, but in intelligent beauty and grace that were combined in that scene."[166] Esteemed leaders of the AME Church were in attendance, bishops and clergy, as well

[162] *Republican Banner*, October 22, 1873.
[163] *Daily American*, June 22, 1887.
[164] In their study of late nineteenth-century Richmond, Virginia, Elsa Barkley Brown and Gregg Kimball argue that, through parades, "black Richmonders claimed the city as a whole, pronounced their rights to civic space, and also seized the power to define public memory." Elsa Barkley Brown and Gregg D. Kimball, "Mapping the Terrain of Black Richmond," *Journal of Urban History* 21, no. 3 (March, 1995): 304-312 (quotation on 309).
[165] *Christian Recorder*, February 7, 1889.
[166] "Rev. J. A. Handy's Speech at the Banquet," in *Dedicatory Services at the Publishing House of the A.M.E. Church Sunday School Union*, ed. C. S. Smith (Nashville: Publishing House of the AME Church Sunday School Union, 1894), 90. Handy further complimented the beauty of St. Paul's congregation by remarking, "No flower garden or rose amid the everglades of Florida could present a more handsome sight than was seen in St. Paul church yesterday."

as local Sunday school children, their officers, and their teachers. Frederick Douglass was invited and, although unable to attend, sent his regrets and hailed the occasion as a "luminous point in the moral and intellectual progress of the colored people of the South."[167]

After a morning of prayer and speeches, the congregation traveled in carriages and streetcars through Black Bottom to the publishing-house building for a formal dedication ceremony. The building's site was steeped in political and historical significance. It faced city hall and the Davidson County courthouse on what Nashvillians called the "public square," one of the city's most prominent locations. The public square also held historical meaning as the site where, prior to the Civil War, enslaved African Americans had been auctioned and sold. Lest anyone miss the significance of the ground on which they stood, Bishop T. M. D. Ward declared during the dedication that "in the sight of the spot which once fettered our limbs, this grand Sunday-school building is erected." Reports of the dedicatory service noted that a "great crowd" was present, but "had the weather been favorable . . . at least five thousand people would have been in and around the building." The mayor of Nashville and several white politicians joined the throng. The services included speeches and prayer, following which the St. Paul's choir led the attendees in singing "Coronation."[168]

African Americans in Black Bottom also seized opportunities to memorialize those who had died to end slavery. On May 31, 1872, the day that northerners observed as Decoration Day, Black Nashvillians marched "with banners and music" to the Louisville and Nashville Depot, where they boarded railroad cars to the Nashville National Cemetery. There, ceremonies to honor "the federal dead" were attended by "a great crowd, principally of colored people," dressed in "holiday costume and with flowers in abundance." They opened with music by the

[167] "Letters from Distinguished Persons," in Smith, ed., *Dedicatory Services*, 101.
[168] Smith, ed., *Dedicatory Services*, 22-26.

Benevolent Society band and the Clark Chapel choir, both from Black Bottom. According to the *Republican Banner*, between five and six thousand African Americans participated in the observances, while "only about three or four hundred white people" were present.[169] Decoration Day remained a significant opportunity for Black Nashvillians to claim belonging in public space and to pointedly differentiate their observances from Confederate decoration days. In 1884, thousands also gathered to decorate the federal graves at the National Cemetery, including "two divisions of the Grand Army." As in 1872, music was provided by the Clark Chapel choir.[170]

When it came to claiming public space for the race, the Clark Chapel choir was as effective as any commemorative parade, benevolent society, or school. Lauded in the press as "one of the best of its class in the city," the choir performed multiple concerts each year between 1870 and 1890, frequently to benefit Black charities, international missionary work, and the church itself. Through its performances, the choir cemented relationships between African Americans in Black Bottom and those in other parts of the city.[171] In 1878, it performed in a benefit for yellow fever victims.[172] In 1883, its talents were called on to raise funds for the Order of Immaculates, a local Black benevolent society.[173] The choir was a staple of Black festivities in Nashville throughout the late nineteenth century and a mainstay of benevolent fundraisers, Memorial Day observances, commencement ceremonies at Fisk University and Central Tennessee College, and church picnics.[174] As the event calendar of the Clark Chapel choir makes evident, Black Bottom was home to a vibrant civic culture.

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[169] *Republican Banner*, May 31, 1872.
[170] *Nashville Banner*, May 31, 1884.
[171] *Daily American*, July 30, 1878.
[172] *Daily American*, September 24, 1878.
[173] *Daily American*, March 26, 1883. The Order of Immaculates was founded by Clark Chapel in 1869. See *Christian Recorder*, February 17, 1881.
[174] *Nashville Banner*, May 12, 1881, and *Daily American*, May 13, 1881(fundraiser for St. John's AME Church); *Nashville Banner*, August 1, 1881 (visited Tennessee State Penitentiary); *Daily American*,

The churches of Black Bottom were also sites of Black political organizing. The Tennessee State Colored Convention met in Clark Chapel in 1870. Representatives from across the state came to Black Bottom to unite the sentiments of Black Tennesseans "in relation to subjects directly relating to their material interests—education, industrial pursuits, wages, etc." One hundred delegates representing forty counties attended, as did "a large crowd of interested spectators."[175] When Black Nashvillians gathered to elect delegates to the 1872 National Convention of Colored Men, they did so in Black Bottom, at Clark Chapel.[176] St. Paul's also hosted statewide and national meetings. In 1873 and again in 1896, the Annual Tennessee Conference of the AME Church met at St. Paul's.[177] On December 6, 1883, the church hosted the annual meeting of the General Missionary Board, the national body of the AME Church tasked with directing missionary work.[178]

As part of the working-class community of the surrounding neighborhood, Clark Chapel similarly lent its space and resources to improve laborers' lives and working conditions. In 1870, the church hosted meetings of the National Labor Union Society, whose object was to "draw white and colored labor more closely together, make more of a unity between all classes of labor,

September 25, 1878 (concert at Wilson County fair); *Daily American*, May 23, 1882 (Central Tennessee College commencement); *Daily American*, March 26, 1883 (Easter services for the Order of Immaculates); *Nashville Banner*, June 5, 1885 (picnic at Greenbrier "colored fair").

[175] *Nashville Union and American*, February 20, 1870. Nashville was the host city for several state and national colored conventions. The Tennessee State Colored Convention met in Nashville in 1865, 1866, 1870, 1871, 1874, and 1884. So did the National Convention of Colored People in 1876 and 1879, and the National Colored Press Association in 1888. Colored Conventions Project, accessed August 30, 2022, https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/.

[176] *Republican Banner*, March 31, 1872.

[177] *Christian Recorder*, November 13, 1873, January 2, 1896.

[178] *Christian Recorder*, December 6, 1883. For examples of other events hosted by St. Paul's AME Church, see *Christian Recorder*, September 14, 1867 (Thirteenth Annual Conference of the Missouri District of the AME Church); *Christian Recorder*, July 9, 1874 (Tennessee Sabbath School Convention); *Christian Recorder*, May 6, 1875 (Nashville District Conference of the AME Church); *Christian Recorder*, May 2, 1895 (Colored Women of America Annual Meeting).

and have less politics and more work."[179] The following year, African American roustabouts from Black Bottom, who worked at the Cumberland River wharf loading and unloading steamboats, organized a strike to demand wages of at least 20¢ per hour. Buoyed by support from the laboring people of Black Bottom, the strike lasted more than a month. A month after it began, Nashville's first Colored Labor Association was organized in Clark Chapel.[180] It is not known whether the association had organized the strike, but the *Republican Banner* reported that "the colored people who labor on the landing have a sort of trade union."[181] Steamboat owners and local government officials collaborated to undermine the strike. Convicts from the Tennessee State Penitentiary were brought in to work at the pre-strike wage of 15¢ per hour, a pittance when compared to the value of the commerce brought into Nashville by the river. During the previous year, the city government had received $4,886 in wharfage, the tax for loading and unloading goods at the wharf. The city official charged with managing river commerce, the Wharf Master, was paid an $800 salary that year.[182]

Black Bottom was also a center of working-class leisure. Like Decatur Street in Atlanta, Canal Street in New Orleans, or the Bowery in New York City, Black Bottom was renowned for its saloons, dance halls, gambling dens, and brothels.[183] Historian Tera Hunter argues that, in such places, African Americans "vigorously created and defended a separate and unequal, but

[179] *Nashville Union and American*, September 10, 1870.
[180] *Republican Banner*, April 30, 1871.
[181] *Republican Banner*, March 12, 1871.
[182] *Republican Banner*, February 22, 1871; Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 73. Newspaper reports suggest that Black Bottom was also a site of labor organizing for railroad workers, mostly Black but some white, who worked on the North Carolina and St. Louis railroad switches on the western edge of the neighborhood. Ten years after the wharf strike, railroad workers organized for higher wages. Although the railroad strike was also ultimately unsuccessful, solidarity was strong among the laborers, who "announced publicly that they would steal rather than work for a dollar a day." Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 73.
[183] For a description of Atlanta's Decatur Street as a center of urban leisure, including comparisons to New Orleans and New York City, see Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 152-154.

vibrant and distinctive, world of entertainment that was at once removed from and subjected to the limitations imposed by Jim Crow." While Black Bottom's religious and educational institutions hosted events that adhered to notions of middle-class respectability and racial uplift, the neighborhood offered access to secular, commercial, and communal pleasures in saloons and dance halls. As in other centers of working-class Black leisure, Black Bottom's saloons would eventually take center stage in public discourse over decency and indecency in public amusements.[184]

Although Black Bottom was less than one mile square, it was home to one-quarter of the city's saloons.[185] The *Nashville Banner* considered the neighborhood a musical center within the city, reporting that "within a radius of two squares, are to be found a most varied assortment of musical instruments, such as a piano, organ, accordeon [*sic*], violin, harp, guitar, flute, and banjo." Live music could be heard throughout the neighborhood nightly as musicians "freely used" these instruments as "a source of unbounded pleasure to each individual performer."[186] In the early 1880s, not coincidentally, two-thirds of the city's music teachers worked in Black Bottom.[187] The neighborhood's saloons and dance halls made Black Bottom a destination for men and women seeking company, refreshment, dancing, and music.[188] Dance halls, which were often located behind saloons, generally consisted of large rooms with "a piano, a few tables and

[184] For a discussion of the role of Atlanta's Decatur Street in the public discourse on respectability and public leisure, see Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 151-167.
[185] *Nashville Directory* (1881), 50-55. The directory lists only three Black saloon proprietors, one of whom was in Black Bottom. This enumeration may underrepresent the number of Black-owned saloons as it did not count unlicensed saloons or those operating surreptitiously out of the neighborhood's numerous rented commercial properties. See Lovett, *African-American History of Nashville*, 73.
[186] *Nashville Banner*, August 9, 1881.
[187] *Nashville Directory* (1881), 45.
[188] For newspaper reports of dancing in Black Bottom, see *Nashville Banner*, August 9, 1881, November 17, 1887, August 15, 1888, February 12, 1892, May 18, 1895, August 1, 1900; *Daily American*, February 14, 1886, July 9, 1889, November 9, 1889, November 6, 1891, January 18, 1893, July 2, 1893, July 13, 1893; *Nashville American*, May 12, 1895, August 20, 1895, September 3, 1895, January 24, 1896, March 4, 1898, April 4, 1899, March 8, 1900, August 1, 1900.

chairs," and an open floor for dancing. The *Daily American* reported that "two low saloons and dance houses" were located behind one of Black Bottom's largest tenement buildings. Both were "kept by white men and patronized almost entirely by negro men and women."[189] Men could gain entry for a nickel, and women were often admitted free of charge.[190] Some saloon owners offered free wagon rides to patrons as a means of enticing customers to visit their saloons.[191] The *Daily American* reported that one "negro saloon" hosted a weekly dance on Monday nights, "and sometimes more often." Black men and women flocked to the saloons to drink and dance; their revelry could be heard into the early hours of the morning.[192]

Men and women dressed in their finest to spend nights dancing in Black Bottom. In an examination of working-class Black nightlife in the dance halls of Atlanta's Decatur Street, Tera Hunter writes that women "wore flat-top or wide brimmed hats, full-length skirts that hugged the hips and flared out at the bottom, blouses with pouter pigeon bodices." Men "donned hats, vests, jackets, and trousers held up by suspenders."[193] Patrons of Black Bottom's dance halls showed similar devotion to fashion. The *Daily American* described an African American woman named

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[189] *Daily American*, June 15, 1890. The close connection between saloons and dance halls was standard in vice districts in practically every American city in the late nineteenth century. See Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 22. According to Tera Hunter, the famous dance halls of Atlanta's Decatur Street were commonly found in "makeshift rooms devoted primarily to music and dance" that adjoined saloons or in the basements of storefronts. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 171.

[190] *Nashville American,* August 1, 1900.

[191] *Nashville American*, January 24, 1896.

[192] *Daily American*, July 13, 1893. Tera Hunter argues that working-class Black women "recapture[d] their bodies from exploitation" by dancing in turn-of-the-century juke joints. See Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 168-186. Amy Dru Stanley argues that "slave emancipation transformed the human rights tradition inherited from the Age of Revolution" by "vindicating amusement seeking" as a natural right. See Stanley, "Slave Emancipation and the Revolutionizing of Human Rights," in *The World the Civil War Made*, ed. Gregory P. Downs and Kate Masur (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 270.

[193] Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 183. By choosing to wear clothing "typically associated with the middle class" to dance halls, Hunter suggests, working-class Black men and women constructed "their own notions of masculinity and femininity."

Liz Casey who "decked herself out in her best bib and tucker" and traveled across the Cumberland River from East Nashville to a Black Bottom dance hall. There she enjoyed an evening dancing "the waltz, the polka, the Scottish, the can-can, the Highland fling, and the nigger jig."[194] Descriptions of the music played in the dance halls are scarce, but, according to one newspaper account, "the dancing was of the startling variety and the songs varied from 'The Wabash' to 'Hot Times.'"[195]

Police frequently raided the saloons and dance halls in Black Bottom, particularly those that catered to an African American clientele. If they could not break up a gathering by arresting the proprietor for hosting a dance or selling liquor without a license, they harassed the patrons by arresting them for vagrancy, drunkenness, or disturbing the peace.[196] Police arrested one woman at a Black Bottom dance because she "handled her skirt in a manner which shocked the modesty of the assembled guests."[197] On other occasions, women were fined $5 for "high kicking."[198] During one raid, police quietly surrounded "a large dance hall" that the *American* reported was "filled nightly by negro men and women." The police blocked each exit before notifying the patrons that they were all under arrest. Thirty-three women and thirty-six men, all of them African American, were dancing, "trying to have a good time," as one patron later told the *Nashville American*. The police arrested every one of them under the charge of vagrancy, packed

[194] *Daily American*, July 9, 1889.
[195] *Nashville American*, August 1, 1900.
[196] For examples of Black Bottom saloon keepers arrested for selling liquor without a license, see *Daily American*, October 27, 1886, April 19, 1887, April 6, 1889; *Nashville Banner*, April 5, 1889, April 15, 1889. For examples of Black Bottom saloon keepers arrested for selling liquor on a Sunday, see *Daily American*, February 2, 1884, March 28, 1886, September 20, 1886, October 26, 1891; *Nashville Banner,* January 16, 1893, June 20, 1893, September 28, 1896, September 12, 1898, October 17, 1898, June 18, 1900, June 25, 1900; *Nashville American*, April 20, 1896, September 7, 1896. For hosting a dance without license, see *Nashville Banner*, November 17, 1887, August 15, 1888; *Daily American*, July 9, 1889, November 6, 1891, July 2, 1893; *Nashville American*, August 1, 1900.
[197] *Daily Banner*, November 17, 1887.
[198] *Daily American*, May 10, 1887; *Nashville Banner*, November 17, 1887.

them into patrol wagons (up to eighteen men and women per wagon), and carted them to the police station. White residents of South Nashville who had complained of Black revelers "blockading the street" hailed the raid as "one of the most successful in the history of the department."[199] Knowing that they had the support of white Nashvillians, police targeted Black nightlife through the selective enforcement of ostensibly race-neutral laws against vagrancy, creating a public disturbance, and selling liquor on a Sunday.[200]

Few Black saloon proprietors were as successful or drew as much police scrutiny as Joe Watson, who was a grocer, a saloon owner, and a merchant of both legal and illicit goods and services. The "Watson house" was a mainstay of African American nightlife in Black Bottom.[201] The saloon was raided at least seventeen times between 1881 and 1898 for such non-violent charges as gambling, creating a public disturbance, and selling liquor on a Sunday.[202] In the face of such surveillance, Watson organized his establishment for selective access. A cigar shop, the most respectable of his businesses, opened to the street. Patrons visiting his saloon had to first walk through the cigar shop. Once in the saloon, they rubbed shoulders at the bar, talked around tables, sang, and danced, all the while drinking beer, whiskey, and other liquor that Watson sold for as little as 5¢ a drink. The saloon was as raucous as it was joyous. On swinging nights, laughter and exclamations carried through the cigar shop and could be heard by passersby on

[199] *Nashville American* August 1, 1900.
[200] For examples of dance hall patrons arrested for vagrancy, public intoxication, and disturbing the peace, see *Nashville American*, August 20, 1895, September 3, 1895, August 1, 1900; *Daily American*, July 9, 1889. Police activity in Black Bottom is discussed in greater detail below, in Chapter 3.
[201] Newspapers document the eclectic nature of Watson's businesses. For examples of his career as a grocer, see *Daily American*, February 2, 1884; as a saloon proprietor, see *Daily American*, August 31, 1886; as a bookkeeper, see *Daily American*, December 8, 1885; as an organizer of various illicit activities, see *Nashville Banner*, December 8, 1885.
[202] For newspaper articles publicizing Watson's arrest and fines, see *Daily American*, January 5, 1881, March 22, 1881, February 2, 1884, December 8, 1885, March 28, 1886, October 27, 1886, March 16, 1891, June 11, 1891; *Nashville Banner*, September 24, 1887, February 11, 1889, March 2, 1891, May 17, 1893, June 20, 1893, October 25, 1898; *Nashville American*, August 20, 1895, September 7, 1896, October 17, 1898.

Cherry Street.[203] Music was a staple of evenings at Watson's saloon. Watson kept a house guitar behind the bar for visiting musicians to use. One guitar player was "so much infatuated with the instrument" that he took it home with him. He was found the next day playing it outside his house on Front Street.[204] More than music and laughter spilled into the streets of Black Bottom. Fights were inevitable when hot liquor met hot blood on sweltering nights. The city's newspapers rarely missed an opportunity to publish accounts of disorderly conduct attributed to Watson's establishment. The *Nashville Banner* called his saloon "one of the worse [*sic*] dens in the city and a harbor for all the lewd women of Black Bottom, gamblers, toughs, and thieves."[205]

Newspaper accounts suggest that Watson catered primarily to working-class African Americans.[206] Roustabouts who worked the Cumberland wharf, hack drivers, domestic servants, and laundresses ready to leave the day's work behind came to Watson for a cheap drink and convivial company. Patrons who enjoyed the good graces of Joe Watson were allowed to pass into the rooms behind the saloon to visit parlors of illicit entertainment. The main vice on offer was gambling: cards and dice.[207] The gambling hall was large; at least forty people could be seated comfortably around tables "playing cards, with drinks in front of them, loading the air with profanity and vulgarity."[208] On particularly momentous nights, crowds gathered both inside and outside the saloon, with people flooding out onto the street. Once, when Watson was arrested

[203] *Daily American*, February 6, 1887. For a similar description of the raucous sounds of dance halls being heard from the street, see Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 171.
[204] *Nashville American*, June 17, 1899.
[205] *Nashville Banner,* December 8, 1885. Watson himself was arrested multiple times for drunk and disorderly conduct. See *Nashville Banner*, August 20, 1886, September 22, 1887, September 22, 1887, April 16, 1889; *Daily American*, August 31, 1886.
[206] This characterization of the racial composition of Watson's patrons is based on fifty-two accounts of Watson or events at his saloon published in the *Nashville Banner* and the *Daily American* between 1881 and 1900.
[207] The *Daily American* alleged that Watson also organized cockfights, but no other newspaper accounts made the same claim. *Daily American,* February 6, 1887.
[208] *Nashville Banner*, November 20, 1886.

and arraigned for keeping a disorderly house, a white witness testified that "frequently passing the house at night with his wife, a crowd of noisy negroes would be standing around there on the sidewalk blocking it up to such an extent that he and his wife would be compelled to walk in the center of the street." [209] As they did with respect to Pearl school students who refused to yield the sidewalk, white Nashvillians took their complaints about African Americans gathered outside Watson's saloon to the press.

Conclusion

Nashville came of age in the second half of the nineteenth century. More than doubling in size and tripling in population, the city was transformed from a trading hub along a regional waterway to a commercial gem of the New South.[210] Although Black Bottom was physically near the city center, undesirable geography and racial discrimination excluded it from the benefits of economic development. An influx of emancipation's refugees during the Civil War made the neighborhood a significant Black enclave for the first time. Over subsequent decades, Black Bottom became increasingly African American as Black in-migration held steady while white residents left for better housing in the newly developed suburbs. At the same time, the neighborhood also became Nashville's urban center for the warehouses, stables, and small manufactories that enabled the cities rapid development.

[209] *Nashville Banner*, December 8, 1885.
[210] Nashville's nineteenth-century urban development was consistent with that of other southern cities, nearly all of which began as way stations for transporting raw materials, "ports perched on riverways or the gulf coast (Memphis and New Orleans) and rail lines (Nashville, Charlotte, and Atlanta)." Richard Lloyd, "Urbanization and the Southern United States," *Annual Review of Sociology* 38 (Spring 2012): 486. For southern cities' reliance on commercial trade in this era, see James C. Cobb, *Industrialization and Southern Society, 1877-1984* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 22-26.

Community building in Black Bottom took the form of place-making. Despite the challenges presented by the built and natural environments of the neighborhood, Black residents invested in the brick and mortar of community by creating local institutions of social and cultural importance. Black Bottom was Nashville's oldest working-class neighborhood, and formerly enslaved men and women transformed it into a center for Black life and culture. Following the Civil War, its Black residents were locked out of steady, well-paying employment and limited to renting only the worst housing units, while many of their white neighbors found opportunities for upward mobility out of the neighborhood. By the end of the nineteenth century, 90 percent of the unskilled laborers and domestic servants in Black Bottom were Black. In the face of racial discrimination, they created a neighborhood identity through shared institutions of religion, education, labor, and leisure. Together, they built a rich associational life in Black Bottom that sustained strong relationships among community residents and enabled the possibility of communal claims-making.

A distinct politics of place emerged in Black Bottom as working-class African Americans claimed belonging in the heart of Nashville. Black Bottom was renowned across the city for its associational life. The neighborhood was important to African American parents of school-age children who associated it with Pearl Public School, the only public school serving Black children in the urban core. The saloonkeepers and clergymen of Black Bottom were each evangelists in their own way. Churches such as Clark Chapel and St. Paul's provided space for religious and social gatherings, literacy training, and political organizing. They took the name "Black Bottom" across the city and into the surrounding countryside when sponsoring events such as Sunday school meetings, concerts, and picnics. Working-class African Americans traveled to Black Bottom nightly for entertainment and companionship. The saloons, gambling

dens, and dance halls of the neighborhood achieved legendary status across middle Tennessee as sites of working-class leisure. Returning to their tenement homes after each day's work, the laborers and laundrywomen of Black Bottom spent evenings socializing on porches, in courtyards, and in alleyways. Beyond offering respite from the labors of the day, these sites of communal leisure were the bedrock of community relationships. Black Nashvillians, both residents of the neighborhood and non-residents, sustained Black Bottom as a place of religious, educational, and social life. Together they wove the community fabric that made Black Bottom a home for its residents and a destination for Black Nashvillians across the city.

Chapter 3

Racializing Space:
The Denigration of Black Bottom, 1880-1900

As an African American community came of age in Black Bottom, white Nashvillians used the city's newspapers to cast aspersions on the neighborhood. Unable to control the physical space of Black Bottom, white Nashvillians settled for controlling the rhetorical space the neighborhood occupied in the city's press and in its politics. Race overlaid physical geography such that the presence of African Americans became the defining characteristic of Black Bottom. In a backlash against the neighborhood's burgeoning institutions of education, religion, and leisure, local newspapers depicted Black Bottom as a district of crime, vice, and disease.

Throughout the late nineteenth century, the racial demography of Black Bottom remained mixed, and African Americans never comprised more than 66 percent of the population. Nevertheless, in newspaper coverage of the neighborhood and in the decisions of public officials, crime, vice, and disease were attributed almost exclusively to its Black residents. Newspapers characterized Black Bottom, so close to the heart of Nashville's central business district, as home to a population of incurable criminals. The board of health and the police department saw African Americans as responsible for the crime and disease that plagued the neighborhood rather than as victims of environmental circumstances. One wealthy white resident of South Nashville remembered Black Bottom—"Ebony Flats" she called it—as "a negro settlement" best avoided by respectable people.[1] Race, not cleanliness or safety, was the salient context for her memory.

[1] Recollection of Mrs. George H. Price, quoted in William Waller, ed., *Nashville in the 1890s* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1970), 178. Mrs. Price, a lifelong resident of South Nashville, was the daughter of John N. Sperry, the president of Nashville's Merchants Bank. Black Bottom has been known by many names. For example, an 1885 newspaper referred to "Smoky Row, alias The Jungles, alias Black Bottom." *Daily American*, July 29, 1885. Like "Ebony Flats," these names had racial connotations.

Over the late nineteenth century, Black Bottom was racialized through the words and actions of local newspapers, public officials, and middle-class white reformers.

The work of claiming space had high stakes. The struggles of African Americans to transform Black Bottom into a neighborhood cannot be fully understood without the context of white opposition to their efforts. Claiming space in the heart of Nashville did not end with the abolition of slavery. Each generation of neighborhood's Black residents renewed efforts to claim belonging in the city's urban core. More often than not, their place-making was threatened by a white public that both disparaged the Black neighborhood's use of space and coveted the district for the purposes of redevelopment. Attention to the white backlash against Black claims to urban space illustrates that the challenges Black Bottom faced were not inevitable or a product of the natural environment; rather, they were a product of political will and planning. Further examining the rhetoric and tactics of the white backlash also illuminates the extent to which later depictions of the neighborhood, both popular and academic, rest on tropes of criminality and public health that were first deployed in the nineteenth century.

From Reconstruction to the end of the century, white newspapers in Nashville maligned Black Bottom and attempted to erase the efforts of Black Nashvillians to build community in the neighborhood. White reformers understood how to employ the politics of place. By denigrating the neighborhood in the strongest possible terms, opponents of Black Bottom characterized it as in need of reclamation. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, white citizens' organizations attempted to wipe out the neighborhood African Americans had built and redevelop the space on terms set by white Nashvillians.

White newspapers used negative depictions of African American residents to defame the neighborhood and generate support for plans that would see it destroyed and remade. They

turned Black Bottom into an epithet, using the language of race to explain and condemn its crime, vice, and disease.[2] Establishing a connection between race and space was a powerful means by which white Nashvillians imagined their city to be among the enlightened, modern cities of the New South. Racializing Black Bottom— representing the neighborhood as home exclusively to the "vile negroes of Black Bottom and police court fame," New South boosters and reform-minded white Nashvillians blamed the neighborhood and its African American residents as the source of the city's crime, vice, and disease.[3] Arguing that Black Bottom was a threat to public safety, morals, and health, white proponents of urban reform called for its regulation (through police surveillance), exclusion (through quarantining), or elimination (through private and/or public acquisition and redevelopment). Imagining the crimes committed there as perpetrated primarily by African Americans led to a white reform movement—the Law and Order League of South Nashville—that demanded greater police surveillance of the neighborhood. Surging reports of crimes by African Americans in Black Bottom corresponded with the movement of white citizens to influence the criminal justice system. The narrative of Black criminality fed popular support for plans to destroy Black Bottom.

This chapter draws from 1,882 articles about Black Bottom that were published by Tennessee newspapers between 1860 and 1901.[4] The Nashville *Daily American* and the

[2] For examples of articles condemning the Black Bottom and its residents, see *Daily American*, December 12, 1879, January 5, 1881, August 9, 1887, May 22, 1890; *Nashville Banner*, September 14, 1886.
[3] *Nashville American*, March 2, 1900.
[4] The articles were identified through a keyword search of Tennessee newspapers in Newspapers.com. The database allows the searcher to structure queries by keyword, state, and date range, in this case "Tennessee" + "1860-1901" + "Black Bottom," which resulted in 1,882 stories from thirteen newspapers that were published between 1860 and 1901. Stories retrieved by the search were analyzed and organized into four thematic categories: "crime," "vice," "health," and "other." The "crime" category includes reports of crimes or arrests that occurred in Black Bottom. The "vice" category consists of reports, editorials, and opinion pieces that remarked on activity in Black Bottom that the authors considered immoral or indecent. Reports of criminal vice (e.g., gambling, selling liquor on Sunday) were included only in "crime." Stories in the "health" category include reports, editorials, and opinions that made a connection between the neighborhood and the health and safety of Nashvillians at large. Criminal threats

Nashville Banner returned the lion's share of stories, 903 and 541 articles, respectively. Newspapers referenced Black Bottom most frequently in the arrest and court summaries they published from the previous day's records of the police department and the criminal court. These crime stories comprised a significant subset of the overall reportage on Black Bottom: 1,059 stories from sixteen Tennessee newspapers. They provide a counterpoint to police records that are organized and reported only at the city level.[5] In combination with the official records of the city's board of health and its police department, the newspaper stories show that Black Bottom received disproportionate attention in discussions of crime, vice, and public health.

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to safety (e.g., assault and battery, rape) were included in "crime," while environmental threats to safety (e.g., fire, flood) are included in "health." Stories that did not belong in either "crime," "vice," or "health" were designated "other." Keyword searching has limitations. Newspaper stories about events in Black Bottom that did not use the term "Black Bottom" (an arrest made "at the corner of Demonbreun and Cherry Streets," for example), were not captured. Moreover, keyword searches may return multiple newspaper stories recounting the same event. Further analysis would therefore be necessary to distinguish between, for example, the number of newspaper reports of arrests for larceny in Black Bottom and the number of arrests for larceny in Black Bottom.

[5] In its annual reports, the Nashville Police Department reported only the total number of arrests made citywide. This chapter draws from the annual reports between 1880 and 1900 (hereafter cited as Annual Police Reports, 1880-1900). See *Daily American*, October 6, 1880 (1880 report); *Daily American,* October 3, 1881 (1881 report); *Daily American*, October 6, 1883 (1883 report); "Report of the Chief of Police," *Nashville, the Workings of the City under Its New Form of Government: A Statement in Detail Showing Financial Operations from October 1, 1883, to September 30, 1884, Reports of the Various Officers Connected with the Different Departments*, ed. James T. Bell (Nashville: Albert B. Tavel Stationer and Printer, 1885), 69-80 (1884 report); *Nashville Banner*, October 20, 1885 (1885 report); *Nashville Banner*, October 20, 1887 (1886, 1887 reports) *Nashville Banner*, October 13, 1888 (1888 report); *Nashville Banner*, October 17, 1889 (1889 report); *Nashville Banner*, November 15, 1890 (1890 report); "Report of the Police Department," in *Reports of Departments of the City of Nashville for the Fiscal Year Ending December 31, 1897*, ed. James T. Bell (Nashville: Brandon Printing Co., 1897), 23-45 (1891, 1894, 1896, 1897 reports); "Report of the Police Department," in *Reports of Departments of the City of Nashville for the Fiscal Year Ending January 1, 1893*, ed. James T. Bell (Nashville: Brandon Printing Co., 1893), 29-41 (1892 report); *Nashville Banner*, January 8, 1894 (1893 report); *Nashville Banner*, March 3, 1896 (1895 report); "Report of the Police Department," in *Reports of Departments of the City of Nashville for the Fiscal Year Ending December 31, 1899*, ed. J. P. Byrne (Nashville: Foster & Webb, Stationers and Printers, 1899), 37-52 (1898, 1899 reports); "Report of the Police Department," in *Reports of Departments of the City of Nashville for the Fiscal Year Ending December 31, 1900*, ed. J. P. Byrne (Nashville: Jas. J. Ambrose Co., 1900), 115-131 (1900 report). No annual report for 1882 was located.

By the 1880s, press coverage of Black Bottom was as overwhelmingly negative as it was pervasive. The most usual place to encounter the term "Black Bottom" was in the daily crime reports. Stories involving crime accounted for more than half of news coverage of Black Bottom between 1880 and 1901. Furthermore, the neighborhood's cognomen was most often used in stories involving African Americans accused of engaging in vice or other criminal activity. The regularity of these stories cemented connections between race and social ills in the neighborhood. In 1887, for example, Tennessee newspapers published stories involving Black Bottom more than twice a week. Three-quarters of the articles involved an alleged crime, unsanitary living conditions, or the practice of vice. It would not be difficult for frequent consumers of the Nashville news to imagine Black Bottom as not only "a Negro settlement" but a "den of iniquity."[6] Nashville's most prominent newspapers, the *Daily American* and the *Nashville Banner*, referred to Black Bottom most frequently when reporting on crimes committed by African Americans. In so doing, they encouraged readers to construct a false syllogism: Black Bottom was a neighborhood of crime, vice, and disease. Black Bottom was home to African Americans. Therefore, African Americans in Black Bottom threatened the safety, morals, and health of Nashville.

Vice in the Heart of the City

Black Bottom was a center of working-class nightlife.[7] One-quarter of the city's licensed saloons were in Black Bottom, and those in the know could also take their drinks in unlicensed

[6] Recollection of Mrs. George H. Price, in Waller, ed., *Nashville in the 1890s*, 178 (Negro settlement); *Daily American*, July 22, 1890 (den of iniquity).
[7] Black Bottom's role as a destination for working-class leisure is discussed above, in Chapter 2.

tippling houses. Men in search of racier entertainment patronized the brothels and backroom gambling dens that also dotted the neighborhood.

The concentration and diversity of leisure activities for sale in Black Bottom, legal and extra-legal, made the neighborhood a focal point for Nashville's late nineteenth-century urban and moral reformers. Black Bottom's libertine economy was at odds with what historian Lewis Erenberg describes as "the moral fastidiousness and cultural refinement" of middle-class culture. Erenberg argues that the urban bourgeoisie began to distinguish itself from "the lower orders" by creating "public and private amusements that fit their hierarchical conception of culture."[8] In urban settings across the United States, the middle class saw concert halls, theaters, and private social functions as respectable venues of entertainment, unlike taverns, dance halls, and brothels.[9] In the 1880s, wealthy white Nashvillians founded elite men's and women's social clubs such as the Hermitage Club (1882) and the Ladies Hermitage Association (1889), which hosted lavish events in the city's finest hotels and mansions.[10] Middle-class values—temperance, thrift, diligent work, piety, and learning—were as much about self-control as they were about the

[8] Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 5.

[9] For an analysis of the division of culture into the serious and the popular, the high and the low, which began in the late nineteenth century and escalated in the twentieth century, see Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow, Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988). On developing distinctions between bourgeois and working-class forms of entertainment, see Erenberg, *Steppin' Out*, 5-29; Patricia Catherine Click, *The Spirit of the Times: Amusements in Nineteenth-Century Baltimore, Norfolk, and Richmond* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989). For a criticism of this dichotomy, see Steve Goodson, *Highbrows, Hillbillies, and Hellfire: Public Entertainment in Atlanta, 1880-1930* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002). Goodson argues that, in Atlanta, contrary to the efforts of the elite, it was the musical culture of the Black and white working class that was eventually responsible for turning the city into a cultural center through blues and country music.

[10] Don H. Doyle, *Nashville in the New South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 68-69.

potential for social reform through intellectual and moral refinement.[11] Labeled a "nuisance" and a source of "moral contamination," Black Bottom drew more ire from middle-class reformers than any other working-class neighborhood in Nashville. Working-class leisure could be found in many colorfully named neighborhoods and alleys in the city—"Hell's Half Acre," "Crappy Chute," "Martin's Alley," and "Varmint Town." But "greatest of them all," according to the *Daily American,* was "the wonderful and infamous 'Black Bottom.'"[12]

Whether reporting crimes committed, arrests made, or suggested reforms, newspaper accounts about Black Bottom portrayed the neighborhood as a danger to the safety, health, and morals of the white public. The newspapers frequently suggested that the scourge of Black Bottom would eventually threaten the respectability, safety, and health of rest of Nashville. An article published under the headline "Black Bottom" argued that "the city cannot protect the people from Black Bottom."[13] Even when race was not explicitly mentioned, such statements often carried racial connotations. Newspapers commonly reported a need to "clean out" or "cleanse" the city of the disreputable characters living in Black Bottom.[14] On December 27, 1886, an editorial in the *Daily American* declared that "[i]f there was no Black Bottom, there would be no Black Bottom ruffians such as these, making darkness a terror to all good citizens who are forced to come within their reach." Three days later, the *Daily American* published a

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[11] On middle-class belief in culture as a "hopeful social and political force," see Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 140-181 (quotation on 142).

[12] *Daily American,* June 15, 1890. Some historians have also singled out Black Bottom as a center of crime, poverty, and vice in Nashville. See Doyle, *Nashville in the New South,* 80; James Summerville, "The City and the Slum: 'Black Bottom' in the Development of South Nashville," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 182-192.

[13] *Nashville Banner,* September 8, 1886.

[14] An 1886 editorial in the *Nashville Banner* argued that "the criminal classes [of Black Bottom] ought to be cleaned out." *Nashville Banner,* September 15, 1886. That same year the *Daily American* suggested that Nashville should "extirpate this pest at once and forever," and then, in 1887, declared that the city had a responsibility to "stamp out forever these blots upon her fair fame." *Daily American,* December 27, 1886, February 24, 1887.

second editorial invoking racialized "darkness" to disparage the neighborhood and call for the clearance of both Black Bottom and Hell's Half Acre. According to the paper, the "Egyptian darkness" of those neighborhoods dimmed the cultural aspirations of the entire city.[15]

Dominating the space Black Bottom occupied in public rhetoric did not translate to control of space on the ground. White men who frequented Black Bottom expecting to enjoy the violent privileges of white supremacy were shocked when they were rebuffed. J. L. Frank, a young white man, was ridiculed in the press for making "a fearful mistake" when he and a friend came to Black Bottom in search of a brothel. Frank knocked on the door of a residence and demanded to enter. When the occupant told Frank that his home was not a brothel, Frank became enraged. Incensed at the denial of his entitlement, he was convinced that the man had lied to him. Frank "kicked a panel of the door out" and, when seized by police, refused to pay damages. Frank's fantasy of Black Bottom was dispelled only when the police arrested him for disturbing the peace and hauled him from the scene. Frank was fined $3 in court, but neither the police nor the district attorney suggested that his assumption that he could find a brothel in Black Bottom was misplaced. Frank had simply kicked down the wrong door.[16]

For one white visitor to Nashville, the reputation of Black Bottom served as an alibi for disorderly behavior. After a brief visit to his sister in South Nashville, W. J. Renfrow stopped in Black Bottom for a drink and soon "fell in with a young man named Fahey, from East Nashville." Over the course of drinks, Renfrow noticed that he was missing $55 in cash and accused Fahey of having picked his pocket. Fahey took offense, Renfrow pulled a gun, and Fahey struck him. When the police arrived to break up the row, they arrested Renfrow, who claimed to remember nothing of the incident and suggested that the beer he was drinking must

[15] *Daily American*, December 27, 1886, December 30, 1886.
[16] *Daily American*, December 31, 1885.

have been drugged. Brought before the city's criminal court, Renfrow fell back on his "good character" and the judge released him without imposing a fine.[17]

Coverage of vice and violence in Black Bottom conflated crime with the presence of African Americans by adopting a rhetoric of sanitation and epidemiology. Crime stories involving Black Bottom residents occurred so frequently the *Daily American* derided Black Bottom as suffering from "an epidemic of casualties." Headlines throughout the 1880s emphasized a connection between crime, vice, and disease in Black Bottom. Newspapers drew on the language of cleansing with such headlines as "Clean them Out" and "Let there be Light" and referred to the "Unseemly Sights" that occurred in the "Dark Blot" of the neighborhood.[18] Other headlines derided Black Bottom as a source of disease, warning that the neighborhood was "Food for Epidemics" and asking the city council to take "Sanitary Precaution" against the area.[19]

Beyond its danger to public health, newspaper reports suggested that Black Bottom was a menace to public morals and "The Abode of Vice."[20] An article in 1879 appeared under the headline "The Horrors of Black Bottom."[21] Certain particularly violent crimes were connected to the neighborhood through eponymous headlines. When the *American* wrote about the robbery of

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[17] *Nashville Banner*, May 21, 1889.
[18] *Daily American*, December 27, 1885 (epidemic); *Nashville Banner*, September 14, 1886 (clean them out); *Daily American*, June 4, 1887 (let there be light); *Daily American*, August 9, 1887 (unseemly sights); *Daily American*, June 22, 1887 (dark blot). See also "An Intolerable Nuisance: The Attention of the Authorities again Called to Black Bottom," *Daily American*, December 12, 1879; "Black Bottom Unpleasantness," *Daily American*, January 5, 1881.
[19] *Daily American*, June 14, 1888, July 7, 1888. Two years earlier, the *Daily American* published a similar article under the headline "The Work of Cleaning Out of Black Bottom to Be Prosecuted with Vigor." *Daily American*, June 13, 1886.
[20] *Daily American*, June 15, 1890 (abode of vice). For another article alleging "rampant vice in Black Bottom," see *Daily American*, September 5, 1887.
[21] *Daily American*, September 5, 1887. Scandalous headlines involving Black Bottom were nothing new. In 1881, the *Nashville Banner* published a story headed "The Terror of Black Bottom." *Nashville Banner*, August 9, 1881.

T. M. Harrison, it did not say that he was robbed. Instead, he was the recipient of "a Black Bottom Slugging."[22] When a dispute over money escalated into a two-person knife fight, the victim was not stabbed; he received a "Black Bottom Cutting."[23] In 1882, the *Daily American*, feigning exasperation, fumed, "Black Bottom Again: Another Bloody Deed of Murder in this Portion of the City."[24]

Newspaper stories often described sanitation and morality as related concepts and cast Black Bottom as a location lacking both. On July 7, 1888, the *Daily American* reported that "[t]his is now notoriously the worst section in point both of bad sanitary government and abject immoralities that exists in Nashville." Remarking on both the sanitary and moral condition of residents, the story continued: "Rows of frame shanties held in their frail crookedness with frailer supports, standing over the unwholesome moist soil of that low land, and lining the big sewer as far up as Wilson Spring, live negroes who are controlled only by force, whose sole terror upon earth is a determined policeman."[25] Black Bottom, the newspapers of Nashville concluded, was such a danger to public safety, health, and morals that it must be eliminated.[26] Unable to influence life on the streets of Black Bottom, white Nashvillians claimed the neighborhood was a place of both moral and physical filth that threatened to infect the rest of the city.

Public Health

[22] *Nashville Banner*, August 9, 1881.
[23] The phrase "Black Bottom cutting" was used by both the *Nashville Banner* and the *Daily American*. See *Nashville Banner*, August 9, 1881, June 18, 1883; *Daily American*, June 18, 1883.
[24] *Daily American*, October 4, 1882. Two years later, the *Daily American* emphasized bloodshed within the neighborhood yet again. See "Bloodshed in Black Bottom," *Daily American*, January 4, 1884.
[25] *Daily American*, July 7, 1888.
[26] *Daily American*, September 9, 1886.

Backlash to Black urban space often relied on evidence regarding purportedly race-neutral subjects such as public health. Discourse about Black Bottom did more than conflate vice and disease. Warnings about deleterious sanitary conditions in Black Bottom and their effect on residents of other parts of the city were common themes. Indeed, they became a central pillar of Nashville's urban reform movements. Concerns about sanitation in Black Bottom fell into three categories: the need for proper sewerage and drainage, unsafe tenement buildings and shanty houses, and the spread of infectious disease. As the *Nashville Banner* reported, even if crime decreased in Black Bottom, the neighborhood would still have a "surplus of filth."[27] Rather than understood as victims of poor sanitary infrastructure, the residents of Black Bottom were, more often than not, blamed for the deleterious consequences of inadequate sanitary systems.

So notorious were the sewage problems of Black Bottom that they featured prominently in a parody announcement that the *Nashville Banner* published for an evening of entertainment at the intersection of South College and Demonbreun streets. The program consisted of music lampooning the municipal government for allowing the degraded state of Black Bottom. The overture, played by the "Law and Order Band from Black Bottom," was "Contaminated air, in D minor, op. 27, cat's wail." The performances that followed included a vocal solo, "'We Know That Our Destroyers Liveth,' by Black Bottom prima donna, Miss Sweet Smells," and a chorus of "Inhale the Sweet Malaria" by the "Sweet Singers of Black Bottom." Banquet guests would "be entertained by African worm diggers."[28] Although exaggerated for comedic effect, the parody did not fall far from the language with which the city's newspapers regularly described Black Bottom. In 1881, the *Daily American* reported "great piles of filth" from "Cherry to College, in the Black Bottom, composed chiefly of manure and street scrapings," and called for

[27] *Daily American*, July 7, 1888.
[28] *Nashville Banner*, May 30, 1888.

"great improvements."[29] Sanitary improvements did not come quickly. The *Nashville Banner* reported a similar issue in 1887: "In several places in the bottom—notably about the corner of Cherry and Demonbreun streets—filth has accumulated and the stench is loud."[30] Descriptions of reeking wastewater and the funk of refuse added to a belief that Black Bottom and its residents were set apart from respectable Nashville.

Black Bottom did in fact function as a cesspool for Nashville's urban core. The city's early sewer system relied on the region's hilly topography and seasonal rainfall. While advantageous for residents on high ground, the design was calamitous for those below. Street runoff and sewage drained from the hills through Black Bottom and along Wilson Creek. In 1877 the city's board of health reported that in low areas like Black Bottom "the sewerage is either absorbed by the soil or flows by sluggish and winding channel, exhaling its odors as it goes, until it reaches the [Cumberland] river."[31] Stagnant water frequently pooled near the creek bed, inviting disease and stench.[32] During periods of heavy rainfall, the board of health also reported, "the alleys become marshes" and the main streets "become a synonyme [*sic*] for all that is stinking and unsightly."[33] The large pond at the corner of College and Demonbreun was a perennial nuisance, once referred to, perhaps hyperbolically, as a "two-acre cess pool."[34] Drainage at the intersection was so bad that water pooled beneath buildings and houses at depths of two to six feet.[35] Several dwellings and stables on Demonbreun were built on stilts to avoid

[29] *Daily American*, June 22, 1881.
[30] *Nashville Banner*, July 4, 1887.
[31] *Second Report of the Board of Health to the Honorable City Council of the City of Nashville, for the Year ending July 4, 1877* (Nashville: Tavel, Eastman & Howell, 1877), 139. Between the newly elevated streets, the report continued, sat "a square basin that . . . defied all sanitary efforts."
[32] For accounts of pooling water, see *Nashville Banner*, June 24, 1881; *Daily American*, July 18, 1883, June 14, 1888, June 30, 1888.
[33] *Second Report of the Board of Health*, 49.
[34] *Nashville Banner*, May 30, 1888.
[35] *Nashville Banner*, July 4, 1887.

the rising water.[36] To ensure safe passage through the neighborhood during high water, the board of public works elevated the major thoroughfares as high as twenty to thirty feet in some places.[37] While this practice allowed dry transit, it did nothing to solve the problem of poor drainage and noxious cesspools.

In 1886, the board of health considered rectifying the stagnant water in Black Bottom. City health officer Charles Mitchell, a physician, recommended that the board compel property owners to fill vacant lots where water lingered. When landholders refused to comply, Dr. Mitchell suggested that the city purchase the lots and dump "the dust and mud from street cleanings into these places."[38] His recommendations went unheeded until the summer of 1888, when the board finally ordered landowners to drain the cesspools on their properties.[39] The order coincided with the city's first significant investment in an integrated water and sewer system—one that would provide both water supply and wastewater disposal. Most American cities adopted large-scale waterworks between 1830 and 1870, but the adoption of integrated sewer systems lagged. Such was the case in Nashville, where most buildings, including those in Black Bottom, were piped for fresh water decades before connecting to a city-wide system for wastewater disposal.[40]

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[36] *Daily American*, April 16, 1888.
[37] *Daily American*, July 9, 1886.
[38] *Daily American*, July 9, 1886. Dr. Mitchell made a nearly identical recommendation to the Board of Public Works two years later. *Daily American*, May 18, 1888.
[39] *Nashville Banner*, June 13, 1888; *Daily American*, June 30, 1888.
[40] Historian Martin Melosi argues that limited interest and limited budgets led cities to prioritize waterworks long before they adopted public wastewater solutions. Only a handful of cities in the U.S. had underground sewer systems integrated with waterworks by 1870 and all of them were in the North. The following U.S. cities adopted integrated sewer systems by 1870: Brooklyn (1857), Chicago (1859), Providence (1869), New Haven (1872), Boston (1876), Cincinnati (1870), Indianapolis (1870). Elsewhere, as in Nashville, residents of urban centers were content with the pre-sewer system of cesspools and privy vaults. It was difficult, Melosi writes, "to persuade a city to switch from the private system (cesspools and privy vaults) to an expensive public system (underground sewers)."[40] Waterworks that brought fresh water to houses and buildings were profitable for private companies and municipalities. Wastewater systems did not become a staple in American cities until after 1880, when approximately one-

Nashville buried five to six miles of sewers every year in the late 1880s, creating an integrated underground water and sewer system in the city for the first time.[41] Cesspools and "old square rock sewers" were replaced with new underground sewer pipes that drained into the Cumberland River. Reporting on the progress of the work, a city engineer proudly announced in 1888 that "there was no standing water either in Black Bottom or in the Lick Branch depression" of North Nashville.[42] In 1890, Wilson's Spring, a longtime nuisance to the neighborhood's residents, was finally dug out and converted into an underground sewer six feet in diameter.[43]

Nashville's sewage system, or lack thereof, was a leading contributor to an 1873 cholera epidemic. A map illustrating the spatial distribution of cholera cases in the city shows that the disease hit African American neighborhoods and low-lying areas near creek beds hardest.[44] While new sewer systems were an improvement for Black Bottom, the neighborhood continued to have one of the highest mortality rates in the city. In 1890, the rate for residents of Black

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third of all urban households had water closets. Rapidly increasing water usage and overwhelmed systems of privy vaults and cesspools, combined with increased public understanding of waterborne diseases and nationally organized sanitary movements, tipped the scales and drove the large-scale adoption of citywide wastewater solutions. Martin V. Melosi, *The Sanitary City: Urban Infrastructure in America from Colonial Times to the Present* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 91-93. Historian Joanne Goldman argues that comprehensive sewer reform was possible in cities such as New York City only after local governance was itself transformed. Planned and integrated infrastructure, such as a sewer system, Goldman argues, may have been a consequence of the changing nature of U.S. cities (population and geographical growth) and developments in public health and cultural expectations (germ theory and a preference for water closets over backyard privies). Still, it was made possible only as the scope of municipal government increased and the "influence of the average [citizen] waned." Joanne Abel Goldman, *Building New York's Sewers: Developing Mechanisms of Urban Management* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1997), 3-4.

[41] *Daily American*, July 11, 1888.

[42] *Daily American*, July 11, 1888.

[43] *Daily American*, January 31, 1890.

[44] Ely McClellan, *Map of Nashville, Tennessee, Cholera Epidemic of 1873* (1873), Digital Collections, National Library of Medicine. If Nashville was on the leading edge of southern cities implementing integrated water and sewer systems, it was likely due to the lessons learned from Memphis, where devastating yellow fever epidemics in 1873 and 1878 killed more than 7,000 people combined, a number equal to one-sixth of the city's population. In the 1870s, the Memphis sewer system consisted of only a few miles of private sewers in the central business district. By 1886, Memphis had "roughly forty-three miles of sewers and thirty-five miles of subsoil drains." Melosi, *The Sanitary City*, 153, 154, 156.

Bottom was twenty-four per thousand. Illustrating that African Americans were disproportionately victims of disease, the rate for African American residents of the neighborhood was forty-one per thousand, nearly twice the neighborhood average and more than three times the citywide average. [45]

Nashville was not unique in its susceptibility to cholera or lack of an underground sewage system. While American understanding of the disease had shifted from a "moral dilemma" in the early nineteenth century to a "social problem" by the end of the Civil War, germ theory remained rudimentary, if not widely discredited.[46] The urban poor were the primary victims of cholera epidemics. And because African Americans were likelier to live in cholera-prone neighborhoods, cholera was often seen as a racial disease.[47] Howard Rabinowitz points out that every southern city had its poor neighborhoods, "filthy narrow places, often open sewers, and the breeding grounds of disease and crime," that were "almost entirely the province of the blacks."[48] The disproportionate mortality of Black Nashvillians was no secret. As early as 1877, the city's board of health wrote in a section of its annual report titled "African Mortality" that the death rate for

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[45] Doyle, *Nashville in the New South*, 84. The mortality rate in Nashville at large was also high: thirteen per thousand.

[46] Charles E. Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 228. Germ, or bacteriological, theory became well-established by 1880. Melosi, *The Sanitary City*, 110.

[47] On the conflation of race and disease in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Samuel Roberts, *Infectious Fear: Politics, Disease, and the Health Effects of Segregation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Todd Lee Savitt and James Harvey Young, eds., *Disease and Distinctiveness in the American South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988); Keith Wailoo, *Dying in the City of the Blues: Sickle Cell Anemia and the Politics of Race and Health* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

[48] Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 114. Lester C. Lamon and Bobby L. Lovett, historians of Black Tennessee, also point out that, in the late nineteenth century, African American neighborhoods were often in low-lying areas, where streets were poor or unpaved, and sewer and water access was lacking or insufficient. Lamon, *Blacks in Tennessee, 1791-1970* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 63-64; Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780-1930: Elites and Dilemmas* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 73-74. For further analysis of the connection between Nashville's poor water and sewer systems and the spread of disease in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Doyle, *Nashville in the New South*, 83-86.

African Americans was nearly twice that of white citizens. While the report correctly cited the poor living conditions of African Americans as a potential cause, it closed the subject with a plea to the city's Black residents to change their social behavior. The report implored Black Nashvillians to end the practice "of holding meetings at the Churches nearly through the night," behavior the board of health considered "highly deleterious to both the health and morals."[49]

For public health officials, dismay about the concentration of tenements and other inadequate housing in Black Bottom was second only to concern about sewage and drainage. In 1877, the board of health singled out impoverished neighborhoods and the morality of Black residents as the city's second most significant threat to public health. Overcrowding was attributed to the nearly 10,000 formerly enslaved people who had taken up residence in Nashville during and immediately following the Civil War. According to the board, most of these new Nashvillians lived "in old stables, situated upon alleys in the midst of privy vaults, or in wooden shanties a remnant of war times, or in huts closely crowded together in the outskirts." The deleterious effects of such conditions were "intensified tenfold by the smallness of the rooms, want of ventilation, and by the vice, ignorance, and squalor of the occupants." The board urged greater surveillance and regulatory power over poor Black neighborhoods lest their vice and disease infect other parts of the city. The proliferation of tenement houses required "rigid regulation," the board warned, and neglecting to act "will finally compel our wealthy citizens to desert their handsome residences around the Capitol and other central points, and remove to the suburbs or country."[50] Despite such warnings, the city council failed to invest in neighborhood improvements, and citizens with means did increasingly leave for the suburbs.

[49] *Second Report of the Board of Health,* 23-26.
[50] *Second Report of the Board of Health,* 23, 55.

In his efforts to convince the city that Black Bottom was not only a blight but a danger to public health, Dr. Mitchell called overcrowded housing to the attention of the board of public works. The neighborhood's tenements came to the notice of Dr. Mitchell and the board of public works through night raids conducted by the police department. Officers "time and again . . . in search of a criminal, visited these dwellings at night and found negroes living there like rats in a den being six or eight in a small room and all sleeping upon merely piles of rags reeking with filth, alive with vermin and permeated with germs and dreaded disease," Mitchell told the *Daily American*.[51] Stories of disease, crime, and inadequate sanitation used the colorblind language of "citizens" and "people of Nashville" when discussing reforms, but focused on Black residents when assigning blame. Under the headline "One Cause of Mortality among the Negroes," the *Daily American* maintained that poor living conditions in tenements contributed to the spread of contagious disease. But the author, who claimed to have toured a Black Bottom tenement, ultimately placed blame for death and disease on the perceived moral deficiencies of Black tenement residents themselves, starting with their very presence in the city. An African American man, he wrote, "would rather loaf in town, dependent upon what he can pick up by hook and by crook, than do yeoman service in the healthful and congenial atmosphere of the country."[52]

Dr. Mitchell claimed that the Black residents of Black Bottom were the source of the city's recent spells of infectious disease. In an article in the *Daily American*, he singled out the residents of three Black Bottom tenements. "The Martin Brick, the McTigue Brick and the Hanmer Brick," he wrote, "are houses well known to the police as among those often found densely crowded with negro renters, and where diseases not only spread rapidly, but are, in fact,

[51] *Daily American*, May 18, 1888.
[52] *Daily American*, July 20, 1876. According to the article, the author "took a stroll down South Cherry Street one night not long since, and in the course of it looked into a tenement house which contained nine rooms, all of them of moderate size."

engendered."[53] To follow Mitchell's logic, disease in Nashville came from Black Bottom and, within Black Bottom, from its poor Black residents.

Because Mitchell was the city's health officer, his racialized epidemiology influenced public policy. In 1888, Mitchell oversaw the municipal response to a smallpox outbreak. After announcing plans for free vaccinations, the *Banner* reported that a newly arrived Black steamship hand named William Norman was being held in quarantine under police guard after a marine hospital surgeon identified "a suspicious eruption" on his skin. The surgeon requested that Norman be examined by the city health officer, but when Mitchell visited the wharf and examined Norman, he was unable to confirm smallpox as the source of the lesion. Nevertheless, he ordered Norman to be removed from the wharf and quarantined in Black Bottom, where he was held under police guard in the "foundation of a building in course of construction."[54]

Dr. Mitchell's assumption that African Americans were carriers of disease followed a precedent set by earlier city health officers and continued after his tenure. In 1882, Mayor Morton B. Kercheval had hired a physician to vaccinate "the denizens of 'Black Bottom'" after smallpox was discovered in Nashville.[55] In 1888, the health department gathered epidemiological data from police raids on African American residents of Black Bottom, and by 1900, it had folded police raids into its public health practice. After a case of smallpox was "discovered" at 139 Cherry Street, in "the heart of Black Bottom," Dr. Larkin Smith, the city health officer, devised strategies for mass vaccination. Acting under the assumption that "the class of people who inhabit that region [Black Bottom] spread the disease more readily than any other class," Dr.

[53] *Daily American,* November 29, 1888.
[54] *Nashville Banner,* July 7, 1888.
[55] *Nashville Banner,* May 18, 1882. Kercheval served as mayor of Nashville from 1874 to 1882 and again from 1885 to 1887, after which he resigned to take a position on the city's board of public works. Doyle, *Nashville in the New South,* 237.

Smith, five health inspectors, and two policemen visited Black Bottom at night. The police and health inspectors approached Ramsey's saloon, where a dance was underway, intending to vaccinate all in attendance. Newspaper reports indicated that more than 200 people were in the saloon at the time, most of them African American. "In all 207 persons of both sexes were vaccinated," the *Banner* reported, but when Dr. Smith and the police officers sought to vaccinate other residents of the neighborhood, they found that "the population of Black Bottom had thinned."[56] News had spread of the police-medical raid. Surprise raids and forced vaccinations were repeated in Black Bottom during the summer of 1901, when doctors and their assistants "surrounded half a dozen houses at once, and vaccinated the occupants straight through."[57]

Discourse on crime, vice, and disease influenced municipal policy. Black Bottom and its residents were denigrated in the press and singled out as vectors of disease and crime in the offices of city officials. In 1889, an editorial in the *Daily American* declared that Black Bottom "is a foul pool which spreads its baleful influence far and near."[58] As public health and sanitary officials targeted Black Bottom, white citizens of South Nashville implored police, prosecutors, and judges to do the same.

Crime

The white backlash against Black Bottom relied on racialized narratives of crime to marginalize the neighborhood and render it susceptible to destruction and redevelopment. Between 1880 and 1900, racialized reports of crime, vice, and disease in Black Bottom circulated among public health officials, the police department, and the city's white newspapers

[56] *Nashville American*, January 28, 1901.
[57] *Daily Leaf-Chronicle*, July 3, 1901.
[58] *Daily American*, August 12, 1889.

in ways that reinforced the belief that African Americans were a threat to public health, morals, and safety. Historian and public policy scholar Khalil Muhammad refers to this interaction as "the condemnation of blackness," in which aspects of Black society and culture that white observers see as peculiar are taken as evidence of moral deficiency and innate criminality.[59] Voyeuristic reporting on Black Bottom by white newspapers does much to explain what historian Anthony Gregory calls a "feedback loop" in which "racist enforcement propelled racist criminology propelled racist enforcement."[60]

Nashville's newspapers wrote about Black Bottom as a neighborhood utterly foreign, yet situated at the very heart of the city. Although the neighborhood was set apart by its concentration of Black residents and an alleged preponderance of crime, its physical location placed it in immediate proximity to the city's central business district. According to historian Michael Casiano, race and geography played a similar role in Baltimore at the turn of the twentieth century. Casiano argues that a working-class neighborhood known as "The Pot" was widely denigrated in Baltimore's white press, which considered it "an example par excellence of black unfitness for city life."[61] The same was true of Black Bottom. The version of Black Bottom that existed in Nashville newspapers was so compelling that the neighborhood's name became a synonym for all things vile and violent.

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[59] Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).
[60] Anthony Gregory, "Policing Jim Crow America: Enforcers' Agency and Structural Transformations," *Law and History Review* 40, no. 1 (Spring 2022): 91-122 (quotation on 115).
[61] Michael Casiano, "'The Pot': Criminalizing Black Neighborhoods in Jim Crow Baltimore," in *Baltimore Revisited: Stories of Inequality and Resistance in a U.S. City*, ed. P. Nicole King, Kate Drabinski, and Joshua Clark Davis (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2019), 37-51 (quotation on 39). Casiano's analysis focuses on how racialized newspaper reporting influenced police surveillance, regulation, and criminalization of the possession and sale of cocaine. For more on the racialization of sexual and social deviance in late nineteenth-century urban geographies, see Chad C. Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

Newspapers painted their portrait of Black Bottom with a broad and disapproving brush. Their coverage of crime in Nashville employed "Black Bottom" as a shorthand for the alleged criminality of African Americans. Stories in the *Nashville Banner* and the *Daily American* under such unassuming headlines as "Jottings," "Round about the City," and "Here a Little, There a Little" regularly included summaries of arrests made in the city on the previous day. Occasionally, these bulletins resembled the more in-depth notices published in the regular crime reports.[62] Arrest notices, however brief, usually included the name and race of the person arrested and a description of the alleged crime. Whether a general-interest story or a crime report, newspapers used the term "Black Bottom" more often for crimes said to have been perpetrated by African Americans than in stories of crimes committed by white Americans. Of 954 articles reporting crime in Black Bottom that were published between 1880 and 1900, 75 percent (719) involved African American perpetrators, while only 25 percent (235) involved white perpetrators. Meanwhile, African Americans never comprised more than 66 percent of the neighborhood population. Newspapers made an editorial choice whether to use the general term "Black Bottom" or to specify a more precise location such as "on the corner of Cherry and Demonbreun streets."[63] Disproportionate use of "Black Bottom" when reporting crimes by Black perpetrators shaped the way consumers of Nashville news conceived of the neighborhood.

[62] See, for example, *Nashville Banner*, December 19, 1884, December 20, 1884, December 8, 1885, December 31, 1885, December 2, 1886, February 4, 1887, July 22, 1888, September 22, 1888, April 15, 1889. Crime reports in the *Nashville Banner* ran under such stock headlines as "Police Pickups," "Police Blotter," "At the Police Station," "City Court," "City Court Mélange," and "Criminal Court." Most arrest reports were between two and six lines of newspaper text.

[63] For example, *Nashville American*, September 5, 1896. In this newspaper report, a white man who was arrested for "for being drunk and disorderly" at a saloon in the heart of Black Bottom—at the intersection of Cherry and Demonbreun streets, but the article does not use the term "Black Bottom" to describe the location of the incident.

According to the city's newspapers, Black Bottom was a *location* for crimes committed by Black and white Nashvillians, but it was a *place* of Black criminality.[64]

Table 3.1. Crimes Reported as Occurring in Black Bottom, 1880-1900

Alleged Perpetrator(s)	No. of Crimes Reported
White Female	44
White Male	191
Black Female	207
Black Male	512

Source: Black Bottom Crime Reports.

Daily newspaper reports of Black arrests suggested a link between race and crime. Readers of the *Daily American* and *Nashville Banner* would have found it difficult to escape the persistent suggestion that both African Americans and Black Bottom posed threats to public

[64] The 1,882 newspaper stories identified through the keyword search described above, in n. 4, were sorted into thematic categories, one of which was "crime." It comprised 954 stories. Those stories (hereafter cited as Black Bottom Crime Reports) received additional analysis to illuminate patterns in how newspapers reported crimes that occurred in Black Bottom. Each story was tagged for location (Black Bottom), race (Black or white), and gender (male or female). The results reveal trends in the number of crimes reported in Black Bottom and in the race and gender of reported perpetrators of crime in Black Bottom over time. The Black Bottom Crime Reports collection is not a count of the number of perpetrators reported or the number of crimes committed in Black Bottom. Such information does not exist at the neighborhood level. Conclusions about the total number of crimes and arrests in Black Bottom are avoided due to limitations of the keyword search. For example, the Black Bottom Crime Reports underrepresent the number of arrests in the neighborhood because they do not include stories of arrests that did not use the term "Black Bottom." An arrest represented as having been made at a location in Black Bottom, e.g., "the corner of Demonbreun and Cherry Streets," was not captured by the keyword search. Another problem is that accounts of the same crime were occasionally published in multiple newspapers. Because Black Bottom Crime Reports consists of crime *stories*, not actual crimes, the story of a single crime or arrest published in two newspapers appears as two records in the collection. My analysis accounted for the race and gender of perpetrators involved in crime stories, but no attempt was made to calculate the *number* of perpetrators by race or gender. For example, in a story involving one white male, one white female, and two Black males, only the race and gender were coded (white: Yes, Black: Yes; male: Yes; female: Yes). The result of this method shows that the story reports both white and Black, as well as both male and female, perpetrators. The method does not capture that two white and two Black perpetrators were allegedly involved in the same crime. In the absence of data on arrests made at the ward or neighborhood level, a keyword search provides the best approximation of police activity that sources allow for a geographical area as small as Black Bottom.

safety. Indeed, readers became so inured to the idea that Black Bottom was synonymous with crime that the name "Black Bottom" could be used as a shorthand for crime perpetrated by African Americans. Even for white Tennesseans elsewhere in the state, "Black Bottom" became a stand-in for race and vice. When a resident of Clarksville looked for words to describe "a certain disreputable locality" in his hometown, he wrote that it "corresponded with the famous Black Bottom in Nashville."[65] A correspondent from Ashland City used similar rhetoric when describing Lula Chambers, a woman arrested for assault with a knife. Chambers, he wrote, "is a light, copper-colored specimen of the mixed African race, and looks as though she might have been a denizen of 'Black Bottom' or 'Hell's Half Acre.'"[66] An article in the *Nashville Banner* touting newly developed suburbs in West Nashville and South Nashville did so by imagining a "heated discussion" between men from each of the two neighborhoods "as to the desirability of their respective parts of town for residence." When the man from South Nashville boasted that his suburb "received much more attention from the city bosses; had better streets, sidewalks and other conveniences that only time and a liberal spending of cash could bring," he was met with the pithy retort, "we have no Black Bottom in West Nashville."[67] The *Daily American* offered a fable about a man whose regular walk through Black Bottom and frequent visitation of saloons on Cherry Street transformed him into a keg of beer.[68]

Nashville newspapers also published salacious stories documenting moral disorder in Black Bottom. The most common themes were crimes of violence and vice: assault, murder, drunkenness, gambling, and prostitution. When the *Daily American* reported a fight between two

[65] *Daily American,* October 7, 1887. For a another comparison between a Clarksville locale and Black Bottom, see *Daily American,* April 2, 1887.
[66] *Daily American,* May 4, 1888.
[67] *Nashville Banner,* October 24, 1888.
[68] *Daily American,* June 12, 1887.

men, the headline was "Black Bottom Cutting." The narrative lingered on gory details of the victim's lacerated face, ruptured eye, and broken teeth.[69] When a saloon gunfight resulted in the death of an African American resident of Black Bottom, the *Daily American* suggested that the entire neighborhood was witness to the grotesque crime: "[I]t appeared as if all the inhabitants of 'Black Bottom' were concentrated around one object of attraction—the corpse. . . . The forehead looked as if the point of a miner's pick had been driven into it, and the brains oozed out of a hole somewhat smaller than a silver quarter."[70] Most often, however, accounts of violence in Black Bottom were considered so mundane that they were relegated to single lines in general-interest stories. On August 31, 1886, for example, the *Daily American* sandwiched a line about a Black woman severely beaten by a Black Bottom saloonkeeper between an announcement for the next meeting of Knights of Labor Local 3713 and a notice about renovations being made in the rooms of the criminal court.[71]

The backlash intended to malign Black Bottom occasionally tarnished the reputation of white Nashvillians. When this occurred, newspapers published stories defending the reputation of white Nashvillians accused of crime, a courtesy that was not extended to African Americans. The *Nashville Banner* reported that Charles Altmeyer, "a well-known stallkeeper in the market-house," had been cut severely in the hand in "a difficulty upon the Public Square," taken to the stationhouse, and later released on parole. The following day, the *Daily American* published a statement from Altmeyer explaining the incident: "Altmeyer desires *The American* to state that the cut in his hand . . . was done by the breaking of a jug while playing with a friend."[72] Sarah

[69] *Daily American,* June 12, 1887.
[70] *Daily American,* January 4, 1884.
[71] *Daily American,* August 31, 1886.
[72] *Nashville Banner,* August 30, 1886. The story also reported that Altmeyer had been charged with "using profane language" and fined $3. *Daily American,* August 31, 1886.

Harrison wrote to the *Nashville Banner* under the headline "A Correction" to defend the morality of her battered husband. She refuted a story that had described her husband as having been found in Black Bottom by police officers "in a jolly condition." The story had implied that he was so drunk that he severely injured himself. Sara Harrison wanted the record to be set straight. Her husband had passed through Black Bottom, she explained, but did not stoop to the level of that locality. Instead, "his injuries were received from another person, and he was not drunk."[73] A rabbi who was the proprietor of a shop in Black Bottom received similar treatment from the newspapers, which, after running stories alleging his guilt for several days, were quick to report that he had been found not guilty of receiving stolen goods.[74]

Nashville's all-white police department attempted to extend the highly racialized and gendered norms of white middle-class respectability to the streets of Black Bottom. In these instances, gender, race, and geography intersected in Black Bottom, where police refused to extend the same privileges to African American women that they did to white women. In the wake of emancipation, white southerners sought to regain status through a gendered politics of purity and respectability that rendered only white women entitled to the status of "lady."[75] Historian Thavolia Glymph argues that "[t]he term 'lady' carried distinct connotations and white southerners had clearly marked and policed its boundaries."[76] In Nashville, newspapers and the

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[73] *Nashville Banner*, January 11, 1887.
[74] *Nashville Banner*, February 25, 1888; *Daily American*, February 26, 1888.
[75] Glenda Gilmore argues that policing gender roles was central to white southerners' efforts to reassert supremacy during and after Reconstruction. "White men," she writes, "had always excluded black women from definitions of purity and spoke in rapturous terms of southern white women, generally ignoring 'unruly' poor white women." Once the distinction between slavery and freedom was extinguished, a gendered politics of purity reenforced solidarity among white southerners. Assuming the purity of all white women, regardless of class, and the impurity of Black women, regardless of class, encouraged poor white southerners to value race over class. Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), chap. 4 (quotation on 72).
[76] Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 214. White southerners' characterization of Black

police reinforced such racial and gendered distinctions. An 1886 contributor to the *Nashville Banner* considered it "amusing to note with what persistency the inmates of Black Bottom, Hell's Half Acre, and low dives insist on calling each other and being called "lady."[77] The following year, the *Daily American* devoted an entire column, complete with illustration, to a story of a Black woman who allegedly assaulted a white woman during a dispute over a gold ring.[78] Such depictions in word and illustration did not, however, prevent Black women from claiming the title "lady" and demanding respect. When Malindajane Brooks, an African American woman, appeared before a judge who took the liberty of calling her "Malinda," she demanded that he address her as "Miss Brooks."[79]

The policing of who deserved the honorific "lady" spilled out of newspapers and courtrooms and onto the streets of Black Bottom. Middle-class and elite white women claimed to be afraid to traverse the neighborhood because of the presence of African Americans.[80] They relied on the police to ensure that the privileges of white womanhood extended to Black Bottom. When Martha Sherlock complained to Officer A. H. McConnell that "Jennie Cole, colored, had

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women's assertions of independence as "playing the lady," Glymph writes, was an intentional effort "to undermine black women's personal sense of self-worth and dignity, and their political ambitions." Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 222.

[77] *Nashville Banner*, September 14, 1886.

[78] *Nashville Banner*, March 22, 1887.

[79] *Daily American*, April 20, 1891. Miss Brooks's demand for respect in the courtroom is an example of what historian Elsa Barkley Brown argues were Black women's efforts to "retain space" in the public sphere that "they traditionally had held in the immediate post-emancipation period." Black women were "increasingly disfranchised by the connections between manhood and citizenship" in the political discourse of the late nineteenth century, she writes. By demanding respect in a public courtroom, Brooks drew on gendered notions of respectability to assert her right to equal treatment in a court system where the rights of African Americans had been eroding since Reconstruction. Elsa Barkley Brown, "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom," in *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights*, ed. Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, and Bryant Simon (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 28-66 (quotations on 29, 50).

[80] *Nashville Banner*, September 23, 1886.

been guilty of using unchaste and unbecoming language in her presence," Cole was summarily "escorted to the work-house."[81]

Reports alleging Black criminality were ubiquitous in white newspapers across the South, not just in Nashville. In his hallmark survey of the late nineteenth-century South, Edward Ayers observes that "[v]irtually every issue of every Southern newspaper contained an account of black wrongdoing; if no episode from nearby could be found, episodes were imported from as far away as necessary."[82] Such coverage fed widespread fear among white southerners. Newspapers peddled narratives that African Americans were responsible for "a rising tide of crime" in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Ayers identifies several factors that contributed to higher rates of Black arrests and imprisonment, a disposition toward violence not among them.[83]

Perhaps nowhere in the criminal justice system did racial exclusion have more serious consequences for Black Nashvillians than in policing. The Nashville police department attempted to bring the rhetorical backlash against Black Bottom to the streets. The actions of local law enforcement, including the decisions of individual police officers, were crucial in creating and maintaining privilege and oppression along the lines of race. "In implementing segregation, unequally enforcing and expanding criminal law, and acting ambivalently toward lynching and racial terror," writes historian Anthony Gregory, "Southern law enforcers helped

[81] *Daily American*, July 11, 1885.
[82] Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 153.
[83] Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 153-154 (quotation on 153). Ayers points to the economic depression of the 1870s, racial discrimination in the labor market, the professionalization of police forces, and newly enacted legislation that limited Black mobility and mandated prison sentences for property crimes as circumstances that contributed to higher rates of Black arrests and prison sentences in the late nineteenth-century South.

define the meaning of Jim Crow law in all its unstable reliance on formal and informal authority."[84]

There were no Black police officers in Nashville in the nineteenth century. Elsewhere in the South, Black representation in law enforcement during Reconstruction signaled a significant break from the social and political world of slavery.[85] But, following Reconstruction, all-white police forces were the rule in most of the South. "To whites in the postbellum South," writes Howard Rabinowitz, "the policeman stood as the first line of defense against the freedmen." From 1865 to 1890, in the five southern cities he studied (one of which was Nashville), African American citizens were arrested in higher numbers than white citizens even though they constituted a majority in only two of the five.[86]

The records of Nashville's police department show that African Americans were subjected to much higher rates of arrest than the city's white residents. Although African Americans were never more than 40 percent of Nashville's population in the nineteenth century, they comprised 62 percent of those arrested in 1900.[87] The percentage was even higher in Black Bottom. In 1888, for example, Nashville newspapers published reports about seventy crimes that occurred in Black Bottom. In 90 percent of the reports, the alleged perpetrator was Black.[88]

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[84] Anthony Gregory, "Policing Jim Crow America: Enforcers' Agency and Structural Transformations," *Law and History Review* 40, no. 1 (February 2022): 91-122 (quotation on 105).
[85] Eric Foner identified forty-one Black sheriffs who served across the South during Reconstruction and, in a few locations, such as Beaufort, South Carolina, briefly dominated the police force. Eric Foner, *Freedom's Lawmakers: A Directory of Black Officeholders during Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), xvii, xxvii.
[86] Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South*, 41, 43. Rabinowitz examines Nashville, Tennessee; Atlanta, Georgia; Richmond, Virginia; Montgomery, Alabama; and Raleigh, North Carolina.
[87] *Reports of Departments of the City of Nashville*, 1900.
[88] Black Bottom Crime Reports.

Table 3.2. Black Nashvillians as Percentage of Population and of Arrests

	% of Population	% of Arrests
1880	38	49
1890	39	50
1900	37	62

Source: *Daily American*, October 6, 1880; *Nashville Banner*, November 15, 1890; "Report of the Police Department," in *Reports of Departments of the City of Nashville for the Fiscal Year Ending December 31, 1900*, ed. J. P. Byrne (Nashville: Jas. J. Ambrose Co., 1900), 115-131.

Table 3.3. Race of Perpetrators in Newspaper Reports of Crimes in Black Bottom

	% Black	% White
1881-1885	58	42
1886-1890	76	24
1891-1895	79	21
1896-1900	82	18

Source: Black Bottom Crime Reports.

The ubiquity of stories of crime in Black Bottom and the rate at which African Americans were alleged to be criminals eventually generated an organized response from white Nashvillians. In 1886, affluent white residents of South Nashville formed a Law and Order League to "clean out" the city through more aggressive policing and rigorous criminal prosecution.

The Law and Order League

In the late 1880s, opponents of Black Bottom organized a public movement to subjugate the neighborhood through police power. Their actions constitute a significant shift in the backlash against Black Bottom from public discourse to civic action. To defend white Nashville against the threat of Black Bottom, residents of the city's affluent suburban neighborhoods formed the Law and Order League of South Nashville. In the fall of 1886, the league rode a wave of popular support that had been stoked by the condemnation of Black Bottom in the press and

transformed a grassroots movement into a highly efficient organization designed to augment the presence of the Nashville police department. The solution to the problem of Black Bottom, the Law and Order League claimed, was to purge the city of an unwanted population of African Americans through heightened surveillance, hard-nosed policing, and uncompromising criminal prosecution. After enjoying initial success, the Law and Order League receded from its fixation on Black Bottom when white residents of North Nashville and Edgefield became concerned that "Black Bottom brutes" would take up residence in their parts of the city.[89]

Wealthy white citizens of South Nashville convened the inaugural meeting of the South Nashville Law and Order League "to adopt ways and means for ridding the city of the disgrace and horrors of 'Black Bottom.'" Attendees gathered on September 8, 1886, in an assembly hall on South Cherry Street. They listened to rousing speeches "full of determination" and elected leaders and committees to oversee the league's finances and operations. The leaders were white, wealthy, and well-connected in local political, legal, and business circles. William McCarty, a banker, was elected president, while James Wyatt, superintendent of the Nashville Water-Works, and Robert Turner, a real estate agent, served as vice presidents.[90] The league also elected an executive committee composed of merchants Lou Whorley and William Duckworth, county judge John Ferriss, attorney William Covington, and Robert Turner, the league's vice president.[91] Many of the league's leaders were connected to Black Bottom by virtue of owning property in the neighborhood proper or on its fringes. Henry Langford and William Brien, who delivered

[89] *Nashville Banner*, September 9, 1886; *Chattanooga Daily Times*, September 9, 1886.
[90] *Nashville Banner*, September 9, 1886; *Nashville Directory: Containing Full Alphabetical Record of Its Inhabitants, A Business Directory, A Complete List of Post-Offices in the United States, and Miscellaneous Information*, vol. 17 (Nashville: Marshall & Bruce, 1881), 334 (McCarthy), 515 (Wyatt), 478 (Turner).
[91] *Daily American*, September 11, 1886; *Nashville Directory* (1881), 501 (Whorley), 178 (Covington), 178 (Duckworth), 217 (Ferris).

speeches at the inaugural meeting, lived near McCarthy and Ferris on South Summer Street. Their quartet of homes was located close to Broad Street and the northern edge of Black Bottom. Other members lived or owned businesses on the neighborhood's main thoroughfares, South Front Street, South College Street, and South Cherry Street.[92]

Black Bottom's physical location frustrated members of the league. If not for its proximity to the central business district, they might have simply ignored Black Bottom, as they did other working-class neighborhoods such as Crappy Shoot (Edgefield) or Hell's Half Acre (North Nashville). Even members of the league who did not live in or near Black Bottom commuted through it daily. By 1887, streetcars carried passengers directly through Black Bottom along four of its seven main streets. These lines moved affluent residents from the white enclaves of South Nashville to the city's commercial districts in North Nashville without lingering in neighborhoods like Black Bottom that they regarded as undesirable or dangerous.[93] As the league's discussion of the streetcar lines suggest, the use of urban space was a central concern to white opponents of Black Bottom.

The Law and Order League capitalized on the sentiments of South Nashville residents who experienced their commute through Black Bottom as a daily indignity. The Cherry Street line was the most popular streetcar for commuters, and it ran directly through the heart of Black

[92] *Nashville Directory* (1881), 315 (Langford), 136 (Brien). For other members of the Law and Order League living adjacent to Black Bottom, see *Daily American*, September 11, 1886; *Nashville Directory* (1881), 334 (W. M. McCarthy), 478 (Robert W. Turner), 515 (James Wyatt), 114 (M. M. Barnes), 114 (William Allen).

[93] According to the *Daily American*, Cherry Street was "the most available and convenient route from the city proper to one of Nashville's most populous and beautiful suburbs." *Daily American*, February 6, 1887. For a similar description of Cherry Street as a commuter thoroughfare, see *Daily American*, August 12, 1889. By 1897, streetcar service had expanded to four of the seven main streets in Black Bottom: South Front Street, South College Street, South Cherry Street, and South High Street. All streetcar lines in Black Bottom ran north-south, encouraging transit through the neighborhood without enabling travel east-west within the neighborhood. "Map of Nashville, Tenn.," ca. 1897, #43503, Map Collection, Tennessee Historical Society, TVA.

Bottom.[94] White residents of South Nashville complained that commuters, "*especially women and children*, could not get to market, the churches, theaters, nor the business portion of the city without endangering their lives and being insulted by the thieves and thugs of Black Bottom."[95] Beyond potential insult and injury, the league claimed that the commute through Black Bottom threatened the wealth of South Nashville residents by deflating the value of their property. A league resolution declared that "the property of South Nashville lying south of this infested district has greatly depreciated in value, mainly, as we believe, on account of the citizens of South Nashville having to pass through this lawless part of the city to reach their homes and places of business."[96]

In addition to ostensibly objective observations, the Law and Order League relied on the language of race and gender to claim that Black Bottom threatened the city's moral order. The commute through Black Bottom posed particular danger to white women and children, the league warned. An inciting influence on the league's formation was an allegation that a Black man had harassed a white woman and the criminal justice system had failed to exact justice. During the founding meeting of the league, one man recounted the story of "a great big negro" who "insulted Mrs. Moffatt on South College Street." A police officer on the scene who attempted to arrest the unnamed offender allegedly met with resistance and "had to knock the negro down." Residents of Black Bottom came to the defense of the Black man, and, as

[94] "Map of Nashville, Tenn.," TVA. A passenger could travel the entire length of the city, approximately three miles, on the Cherry Street line. For a discussion of how streetcars affected the development of Nashville in the late nineteenth century, see above, Chapter 2, and Doyle, *Nashville in the New South*, 87-91.
[95] *Nashville Banner,* September 9, 1896 (emphasis added).
[96] *Nashville Banner,* September 11, 1886. In another resolution, the league demanded that aggressive prosecution be imposed on "all law-breakers alike, and that all low dives and houses of prostitution in Black Bottom be at once cleared out, in order that respectable citizens may pass to and from their businesses without being assaulted by thieves and vagabonds." *Daily American,* September 11, 1886.

recounted by the future secretary of the league, "a great crowd quickly gathered around and insulted and threatened the officer until he could scarcely get off with his prisoner." Attendees at the league meeting were irate to learn that the arrested man had been released the next day after paying a fine of only $10. "Three dollars is not an unusual fine for those Black Bottom brutes!" shouted an enraged audience member.[97] As this example illustrates, white residents of South Nashville understood Black Bottom as a threat to their ability to enforce the privileges of white womanhood. When a white woman summoned police power to punish a perceived insult from a Black man, residents of Black Bottom had impeded the officer's authority.

Black Bottom was a neighborhood where, on occasion, direct action by Black residents was employed to counter the worst excesses of police brutality. The incident recounted at the meeting was not the first time that African American residents of Black Bottom had challenged the authority of Nashville's all-white police force. Police encounters in Black Bottom were frequently violent, often bloody, and occasionally fatal.[98] Collective resistance was prominent enough to merit mention in the city's newspapers at least five times between 1878 and 1892.[99] In each case, crowds had intervened on behalf of a Black resident to either deescalate or disrupt police encounters. These visceral examples of resistance to white authority deeply disturbed white residents of South Nashville. In the imagination of the Law and Order League, Black Bottom was a wicked, disreputable, and lawless neighborhood where hierarchies of race and gender were trespassed with impunity.

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[97] *Nashville Banner*, September 9, 1886.
[98] For examples of police using violent, sometimes fatal, force in Black Bottom, see *Daily American*, August 7, 1880, August 15, 1881; *Nashville Banner*, November 9, 1889, April 5, 1894, February 27, 1895, December 22, 1899.
[99] *Daily American*, August 7, 1878, October 17, 1881, August 26, 1892; *Nashville Banner*, August 15, 1881, September 9, 1886.

Complaints by the Law and Order League used racially coded language such as "Black Bottom brutes," "toughs," "thugs," and "disreputable characters" when discussing the residents of Black Bottom.[100] Ever since the Civil War, Nashville's newspapers had manufactured a connection between crime in Black Bottom and the influx of formerly enslaved African Americans into the neighborhood. On occasion, they racialized the neighborhood by calling it "Ebony Center."[101] In 1881, the *Nashville Banner* described a man arrested for public disorder as "a representative colored individual of Black Bottom."[102] The league's founding resolution opened with the claim that "Black Bottom is and has been for years infested with loafers, thieves, vagabonds and common prostitutes, both black and white, committing all kinds of unlawful acts." While the league preferred to use race-neutral language when describing residents of Black Bottom as a whole and acknowledged at least one white troublemaker, the anecdotes on which its members relied were exclusively of Black poverty, vice, and violence.

The Law and Order League aimed to generate a municipal response to the threat Black Bottom allegedly posed to the wealth, honor, and safety of white residents of South Nashville. Its strategy was to enhance street-level policing. At the founding meeting of the league, John Ferris declared that "there was never a better code of laws than that of the State of Tennessee." Nashville did not need new laws, the league believed; it needed more capable and energetic enforcement of existing law. Advocates of greater enforcement pointed in particular to the laws regulating rental properties and prohibiting vagrancy. According to the league, the state criminal

[100] *Nashville Banner*, September 9, 1886 (brutes, disreputable characters); *Daily American*, September 12, 1886 (toughs); *Daily American*, September 9, 1886 (thugs). See also *Daily American*, September 10, 1886, which characterized the neighborhood's residents as "vagrants, "bummers," and "hoodlums."
[101] *Daily American*, March 22, 1887.
[102] *Nashville Banner*, August 15, 1881.

code and city ordinances would be sufficient to clear trouble from Black Bottom if they were aggressively enforced.[103]

League members concerned about property values often pointed to the tenements and shacks that housed poor African Americans to make their case. They complained that the city ordinance "against renting houses to disreputable characters" was disregarded in Black Bottom, and the result was "ruining all that part of South Nashville." League members concluded that "we must see that it is enforced."[104] In 1887, the *Daily American* echoed the league's belief that African Americans were damaging real estate values. Lots just south of Black Bottom "are now being ornamented with little shanties, such as negroes of low and degraded characters abide in," the paper reported, and "every hut that is built depreciates the balance of the property." If the pattern continued, "it would not be long before the property in this portion of the city would be worthless" and the city would have another neighborhood like "Black Bottom, Hell's Half Acre, Wilson Spring, or Devil's Den."[105] By citing declining property values and the erection of shanties, the league argued that Black Bottom was threatening to spread to other parts of the city.

The presence of African Americans in Black Bottom was further targeted by the league's focus on persons it regarded as vagrants. The league drew directly from the state's vagrancy code to design a plan of action for increased policing. While the vagrancy sections of Tennessee's legal code made no mention of race, they criminalized poverty in lieu of race. Under the code, a vagrant was "any person" with "no apparent means of subsistence," or who failed to have an "honest calling," or who was found "loitering about saloons or dram shops, gambling houses or

[103] *Daily American*, September 9, 1886.
[104] *Nashville Banner*, September 9, 1886.
[105] *Daily American*, March 22, 1887.

houses of ill-fame . . . without any visible means of support."[106] In the eyes of the Law and Order League, there was hardly a resident of Black Bottom who did not fit the definition. Nearly all were poor and lived near the neighborhood's many saloons, sporting houses, and dram shops. The saloons were gathering places for African Americans from across the city who came to the bars and dance halls of Black Bottom to socialize. The league hoped that more aggressive application of the state vagrancy code would restrict such public gatherings. They promised that those convicted of vagrancy would "not be shown any mercy by the Criminal Court."[107]

There was significant debate among league members as to whether the police force was to blame for what they considered the lawlessness of Black Bottom residents. "I am getting tired of reading in the daily papers, after some atrocious crime has been committed, 'The police have had their eye on him some time,'" declared one member at the founding meeting of the Law and Order League. "Why don't they arrest him just after they get their eye on him?"[108] The topic was taken up again at the next league meeting on September 10, 1886. According to the *Nashville Banner*, a league member claimed that the police and other city authorities "have utterly failed to enforce the law, or in any way prevent the committing of all kinds of unlawful acts' [*sic*] in the Black Bottom district." Judge John Ferris, one of the league's most vociferous advocates of hardnosed policing, claimed that officers were hesitant to make arrests because "they were afraid of hurting somebody and losing their places." He accused police officers of socializing at the Maxwell House, a prominent Nashville hotel, instead of patrolling the streets. "Every Sunday

[106] Robert T. Shannon, W. A. Milliken, and John J. Vertrees, *The Code of Tennessee: Being a Compilation of the Statute Laws of the State of Tennessee, of a General Nature, in Force June 1, 1884* (Nashville: Marshall & Bruce, 1884), Sec. 2283-2284, 396. The vagrancy provisions of the code were read aloud during a public meeting of the Law and Order League on September 11, 1886. See *Daily American*, September 12, 1886.
[107] *Daily American*, September 12, 1886.
[108] *Nashville Banner*, September 9, 1886.

you see half a dozen or more policemen sitting about the Maxwell House watching the boys slip into saloons and get drinks," he declared, "but you can hardly find a single one in Black Bottom, where every sort of crime is being committed." Others countered that Joe Watson, a notorious Black saloon proprietor in Black Bottom, "had been arrested four times in three months" and "these arrests showed that authorities were making some efforts to suppress crime."[109] Ferris ended the debate by saying that the league was committed to helping the police in every way, "but if the law won't do the work we want to take the torch and burn up the whole business."[110]

The heart of the problem, the league decided, was a failure of government coordination. "The mayor occupies one corner of the triangle, the board of public works and affairs another, the police another," complained one league member. This "lack of harmony" among municipal officers meant that vice and crime were given free rein in Black Bottom. One speaker at a league meeting drew from the words of Abraham Lincoln to drive the point home. "A house divided against itself cannot stand," he declared.[111] The Law and Order League sought to remedy inefficiency on the part of municipal governance and, in so doing, "expected to make things in Black Bottom howl."[112]

The league received enthusiastic support from white residents of South Nashville. The founding meeting of the Law and Order League was so successful that organizers had to move its second meeting to a larger venue. Held just two days later, on September 10, 1886, the second meeting was in Central Baptist Church. More than 300 people attended, with Mayor Kercheval taking a front-row seat.[113] The league's growing public support had clearly caught the eye of city

[109] *Nashville Banner*, September 11, 1886.
[110] *Daily American*, September 11, 1886.
[111] *Nashville Banner*, September 9, 1886.
[112] *Daily American*, September 14, 1886.
[113] *Daily American*, September 10, 1886; *Nashville Banner*, September 11, 1886.

officials. Officials who did not voice outright support were soon cowed into tacit approval. After only one week of existence, the league boasted 107 members.

One of the first acts of the Law and Order League was to draft resolutions that would translate the frustrations of white South Nashvillians into action. A "Committee on Resolutions" drafted four resolutions. The first resolution demanded that the city appoint more police officers to patrol Black Bottom, "one thousand if that number are [*sic*] required." Second, the league asked the board of public works to install electric lights at three of the neighborhood's busiest street corners. The third and fourth resolutions declared that the league "will render all necessary aid to the city police of Nashville in their efforts to maintain law and order throughout the city" and "that, the attention of the grand jury of Davidson County is respectfully called to the within-mentioned locality."[114] After adopting all four resolutions at the league's meeting on September 10, members of the league voted to elect an executive committee. The executive committee was empowered to draw on funds raised by the league to hire private detectives to assist in identifying supposed lawbreakers and lawyers to assist in prosecuting. The meeting closed with an appeal for support from the local press. The league admonished the city's newspapers to promote "public morals" and "wield [their] great power against crime."[115] The league sought to augment the power of the criminal justice system, from policing to prosecution.

The complaints of the Law and Order League fell on eager ears. The *Nashville American* and *Daily American* reported uncompromising justice for criminals in Black Bottom under headlines such as "The Grand Jury Working on Black Bottom" and "Dinah Was

[114] *Daily American*, September 11, 1886. The League asked that electric streetlights be installed on the corners of Broad and Cherry, Cherry and Demonbreun, and Market and Demonbreun.
[115] *Nashville Banner*, September 11, 1886.

Accommodating and Put in the Box."[116] The papers also increased the number of stories about crime in the neighborhood. In 1886, newspapers identified African Americans as perpetrators in 56 percent of crimes reported in Black Bottom. That number increased to 87 percent the following year.[117]

The press also published responses from officials in the municipal government to the league's calls for an enthusiastic eradication of crime. The board of public works promised to install two electric lights in Black Bottom and "render any aid in its power to carry out the wishes of the people." Chief of Police Kerrigan promised to "select the best and bravest officers for patrol duty in the bottom." Mayor Kercheval suggested that "a calaboose should be established south of Broad street, and if found necessary to increase the police four or five members."[118] But the league's most bullish advocate was Tennessee State Attorney General Moses Priest, who assured the league that he would "use all the machinery of his office to wipe out the infamous blot known as Black Bottom."[119] Priest boasted that "within a few days, either the objectionable parties would leave the city and the disorderly houses would be closed, or the Davidson County jail would be packed with criminals."[120] Public support for the league by state and municipal officials elicited a response from the saloon owners of Black Bottom. The *Nashville Banner* reported that after only two meetings of the league, "people who pass through Black Bottom say that improvement is already very apparent" and that "saloons . . . have been

[116] *Daily American*, September 11, 1886, September 16, 1886 (Dinah); *Daily American*, September 22, 1886 (grand jury).
[117] Black Bottom Crime Reports.
[118] *Nashville Banner*, September 11, 1886.
[119] *Daily American*, September 10, 1886. Priest had been elected attorney general for the state of Tennessee earlier in 1886 and was lauded as "one of the best criminal lawyers" of Nashville at the time of his election. *Daily American*, June 1, 1886.
[120] *Daily American*, September 10, 1886.

closing before 10 o'clock at night—a thing unheard of before."[121] Asked by the press, Assistant Attorney General Eben Flemming reported that the criminal court had been kept busy with charges brought against parties already in jail but was now ready "to pursue vigorously and effectually that class of offenders who have given the citizens such previous cause of complaint."[122]

The prompt response of the authorities to the demands of the South Nashville Law and Order League generated concern from white citizens in other parts of the city that the "disreputable and dangerous" population of Black Bottom would migrate to their neighborhoods.[123] On October 2, 1886, Police Sergeant McAlister told the *Nashville Banner* that "Black Bottom has been pretty well rid of the worst characters, and we may expect less crime in that locality hereafter." His declaration of victory over crime in Black Bottom was tempered with a word of caution: "The lawless element has gone to other portions of the city, however, and will doubtless give the public and police considerable trouble."[124]

White residents of North Nashville and Edgefield, encouraged by the success of the South Nashville league but also worried that unwanted characters were being pushed into their neighborhoods, soon formed their own law and order leagues.[125] In an article titled "From Black Bottom to Edgefield," the *Nashville Banner* reported that the citizens of Edgefield planned to form their own league. "Some bad characters, who have been scared away from their old haunts by the citizens' law and order leagues of North and South Nashville, are taking up their abode in North Edgefield," the newspaper explained, "and the citizens of that suburb very seriously object

[121] *Daily American*, September 10, 1886.
[122] *Daily American*, September 22, 1886.
[123] *Daily American*, September 15, 1886.
[124] *Nashville Banner*, October 2, 1886.
[125] For a report of the Law and Order League of Edgefield, see *Nashville Banner*, October 9, 1886. For a report of the Law and Order League of North Nashville, see *Daily American*, September 15, 1886.

to the move."[126] According to the *Nashville Banner,* the Edgefield league was founded to "provide against the coming in of blather-skites run out of Black Bottom and North Nashville by the Leagues in those places." Houses in Edgefield along the railroad were already crowded with African Americans who had crossed the Cumberland, and "it is desired to get them away." "The citizens of North Edgefield have a quiet neighborhood," wrote the *Nashville Banner,* "and they don't want its character changed by an influx of rowdies and lawbreakers."[127] A city policeman interviewed by the *Nashville American* lauded the goals of the law and order leagues but confirmed suspicion that their efforts were merely shifting people about. "Prostitutes are leaving Nashville," the policeman reported, "everything is getting too hot for them." The article, published under the headline "Seeking New Fields," suggested that criminals would do better to leave Nashville and its suburbs for another city entirely. "North Nashville, South Nashville, and Edgefield are on the war path," the police officer warned. "If they go to any other part of the city, leagues would be immediately organized there," he predicted. According to the article, one way for the police to reduce crime in Black Bottom was to drive unwanted residents out of the city.[128]

By the end of 1886, the energy of the Law and Order Leagues had begun to falter. The *Daily American* ran a story of a November assault with the headline "Black Bottom: Who Knows Where the South Nashville Law and Order League Is?"[129] By the following February, the paper was challenging the league to "make another move against the scoundrels and run them away forever."[130] After an energetic period of organization, the movement had lost its zeal. In the

[126] *Nashville Banner*, October 9, 1886.
[127] *Nashville Banner*, October 9, 1886. A predominantly working-class and African American neighborhood had developed along the banks of the Cumberland River in Edgefield. It became known as "Crappy Chute" due to an association with gambling houses in the area.
[128] *Daily American*, October 11, 1886.
[129] *Daily American*, November 12, 1886.
[130] *Daily American*, February 6, 1887.

ensuing years, Nashville again settled into the assumption that Black Bottom was beyond redemption. “We suppose in every city the size of Nashville there must be some favorite resort for lawbreakers and social outcasts,” wrote the *Daily American*, “some receptacle for the moral filth and alluvion of the population.”[131] Comparing residents of Black Bottom to the filth that accumulated in the streets and in the river, the *Daily American* drew on the rhetoric of crime and vice to condemn the neighborhood.

In the years following the organization of the Law and Order League, South Nashville residents became disillusioned with the belief that Black Bottom could be redeemed through increased policing. Not only was the neighborhood a daily nuisance to the white men and women who commuted through it, but its proximity to the city center also rendered it a contagious boil. In 1889, the *Daily American* published an editorial that suggested the problem of Black Bottom had more to do with its location than it did to do with crime. “Black Bottom lies between the business portion of the city and some of the choicest residence localities of the city and suburbs,” the paper reported. “It is a foul pool which spreads its baleful influence far and near.”[132] The newspaper’s logic implied that Nashville would never succeed in quarantining vice, crime, and disease when Black Bottom was so close to downtown. “[T]hat perennial nuisance, that fecund breeder of death and crime, that house of refuge for thugs, ruffians and lawbreakers known as Black Bottom. . . . [I]t ought to go.”[133] White residents of South Nashville decided that if the people of Black Bottom could not be redeemed, the neighborhood itself must be razed and the land reclaimed.

[131] *Daily American,* August 12, 1889.
[132] *Daily American,* February 6, 1889.
[133] *Daily American,* August 12, 1889.

The Black Bottom Park Committee

In 1891 the citizens of South Nashville once again took aim at Black Bottom. If policing could not eliminate crime from the neighborhood, South Nashvillians would eliminate the neighborhood. The occasion arose when the city council announced plans to purchase land in Edgefield for a park. Opponents argued that the $75,000 appropriated for the land east of the Cumberland would be better spent renovating land nearer the city center. Critics of Black Bottom saw the possibility of a park there as a way to replace the unwanted neighborhood. Once again, debates over the future of Black Bottom whipped white residents of South Nashville into fervor for reform, and in 1891, they formed another citizens organization: the Black Bottom Park Committee. The backlash against Black space in Nashville had reached its apogee. Black Bottom had been maligned by Nashville newspapers since refugees from slavery arrived in the neighborhood during the Civil War. In the 1880s, white Nashvillians had organized to quarantine and police the neighborhood. As the century entered its final decade, white reformers began articulating plans for the destruction of Black Bottom.

Public support for proposals to replace Black Bottom with a park exemplified the battles over race and place in the center of the city. On May 7, 1891, the evening after the city council considered the Edgefield park proposal, the *Daily American* reported that "[o]ne hundred or more of the representative citizens of South Nashville" met at the Masonic hall "to discuss methods of transforming the mephitic precincts of Black Bottom into a city park." Advocates for turning Black Bottom into a public park mirrored the tactics of the Law and Order League. They formed committees to stoke public sentiment and lobby municipal officers. The meeting closed

with a decision to reconvene five nights later and hear from the group's organizers, who operated as the Black Bottom Park Committee.[134]

On May 12, South Nashvillians gathered once again to hear the committee's plan for action. Park advocates had spent the interim sending notices to the city's newspapers announcing the meeting and imploring local ministers to use the power of the pulpit to encourage attendance.[135] The meeting opened with a statement from the organizers: "The city should condemn and appropriate for the purpose of a park a sufficient amount of the territory now known as Black Bottom." Like the Law and Order League, advocates for replacing Black Bottom with a park relied on arguments denigrating the neighborhood as an irredeemable den of crime, vice, and disease. "[B]y converting Black Bottom into a park," the committee declared, "the population now inhabiting would be removed, this great source of vice and crime abolished, and a hot-bed of disease blotted out."[136] Also like the Law and Order League, those named in the newspapers as leading the movement were white professionals and businessmen.[137]

Advocates for "reclaiming" Black Bottom by converting it into a park made claims to urban space that the Law and Order League had rejected. During a league meeting on September 11, 1886, a resolution had been introduced proposing "that the City Council condemn as a nuisance all the objectionable part of Black Bottom; have a committee appointed to place a value

[134] *Daily American*, May 7, 1891; *Nashville Banner*, May 7, 1891.
[135] *Daily American*, May 9, 1891; *Nashville American*, May 9, 1891.
[136] *Daily American*, May 12, 1891.
[137] The *Daily American* identified nine men as comprising the Black Bottom Park Committee: A. S. Colyar, John Ruhm, J. D. Goodpasture, J. W. Thomas, L. J. Loventhal, A. S. Williams, J. H. Yarbrough, J. W. Gaines, and J. P. Drake. *Daily American*, May 14, 1891. Where possible, full names have been identified in Nashville city directories. See *Nashville City Directory: Containing A General Directory of the Citizens, A Classified Business Directory, Miscellaneous Information, and A Correct Map of the City*, vols. 24-27 (Nashville: Marshall & Bruce, 1888-1891): Jefferson D. Goodpasture, Albert S. Williams, and James H. Yarbrough (*Nashville City Directory*, 1888, 320, 774, 796); John Ruhm, James W. Thomas, and John W. Gaines (*Nashville City Directory*, 1890, 672, 752, 319); Arthur S. Colyar and Leopold J. Loventhal (*Nashville City Directory* 1891, 870, 557). No name matching J. P. Drake could be identified in the directories for the years 1888-1891.

upon it and purchase it." The resolution was voted down without any debate or explanation that was published in the press.[138] Five years later, white Nashvillians were ready to use the power of municipal government to remake urban space.[139] Unlike the Law and Order League, the Black Bottom Park Committee hoped to eliminate Black Bottom entirely and remake the neighborhood according to its plans.

The committee gathered information on the benefits of transforming Black Bottom into a public park and presented it at public meetings and in the press. The location was ideal, the committee agreed; it "is near the geographical center of the closely settled parts of the city." The central business district was badly wanting for shade trees, and Black Bottom, with its rich alluvial soil, was perfectly suited to fill the need. "There is not a green or shady spot except the capitol grounds in all that locality," the committee claimed. The committee concluded by recommending an area of about eighteen acres in Black Bottom to be cleared for a city park, "[t]aking Demonbreun street as a centre line, running 500 feet north and 500 feet south on the east side of Cherry Street, and from those points at right angles of the river."[140] The area in question included a mix of shops, stables, small factories, and residences whose occupants were mostly African American.[141] South Nashville residents believed that they, not the residents of Black Bottom, were entitled to decide the future of the neighborhood. They used rhetoric that cast Black Bottom's residents as pollutants, vectors of disease, and criminals who stood in the way of progress. Park advocates argued that if the neighborhood's residents and, by extension,

[138] *Daily American*, September 11, 1886.
[139] *Nashville American*, August 23, 1899.
[140] *Daily American*, May 12, 1891.
[141] Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Nashville, Tennessee (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1897), vol. 2, Geography and Map Collection, Library of Congress; U.S. manuscript census, 1900, population, Nashville, Enumeration District 94-95 [hereafter E.D. 94-95], pp. 123-149.

the institutions they formed were displaced, Black Bottom could become a pastoral refuge in an otherwise shade-free city.

Public reaction at the May 12th meeting was largely positive. "It was right to begin in the central part of the city," declared one attendee who criticized the city council for proposing a park in Edgefield. Another man voiced his support by reminding the attendees of their shared disdain for Black Bottom. "Think of the dangerous ulcer that would be eradicated from the city's system," he exclaimed, "and of the delightful young Eden into which the location may be turned. The only dissenting voice described in the *Daily American*'s summary of the meeting cautioned that Black Bottom was not only a space, but a neighborhood—one with residents who would be difficult to displace. "[T]hat park may prove as dangerous a cancer as the bottom now is," warned a speaker the newspaper identified as "Dr. Cain." "Parks in the South are a failure," he warned. "They are overrun with negroes, and a place for the general congregation of the most dangerous elements of society." According to Cain, the danger presented by Black residents would not be expunged by the creation of a park. His racial concerns, which park supporters dismissed, foreshadowed the challenges they would face. The meeting concluded with the nomination of a nine-man Black Bottom Park Committee to lead efforts to finally eradicate Black Bottom.[142]

The Black Bottom Park Committee, no doubt energized by the enthusiastic public response, was optimistic about its prospects for success. It circulated a petition in support of the campaign that was later submitted to city council.[143] The petition's language drew upon long-standing stereotypes of Black Bottom. Replacing the neighborhood with a park, the petition

[142] *Daily American*, May 12, 1891. The 1890 city directory lists one physician with the surname Cain: John S. Cain, a physician at the City Hospital. *Nashville City Directory* (1890), 174. For the names of members of the Black Bottom Park Committee, see *Daily American*, May 14, 1891.
[143] *Nashville Banner*, May 20, 1891.

suggested, "would remove the blot that now disfigures the city and furnishes a prolific source of disease, and at the same time would supply the necessity that exists for a green spot near the center of the city to which all could resort for the restoration of health and pleasant relaxation."[144] Those who signed the petition asserted a claim to space in the urban core of Nashville.

Progress of the Black Bottom Park Committee faltered when the petition was brought before the city council and the proposal began to receive feedback from residents outside South Nashville. The day after the petition was delivered to the city council, the *Daily American* published an article criticizing the proposal. A park in Black Bottom "wouldn't remove the rubbish from one-third of that much-tabooed section," the author declared. If removing "the 'ulcer'" was the goal, construct a new bridge across the Cumberland River, he advised. He was confident in his proposal and estimated that it "would, within the next five years, wipe Black, Bottom off the face of the earth, and leave it but a memory in the minds of our people."[145] The next day the *Daily American* likened the plan for a park in Black Bottom to another ambitious, but ultimately unattainable plan. "The Black Bottom park scheme is about as feasible as the proposed removal of the Coliseum of Rome to the World's Fair at Chicago," it declared.[146] The *Nashville Banner* also criticized the proposal for a park in Black Bottom, citing its expense.[147]

Like the Law and Order League, the Black Bottom Park Committee found the potency of its civic zeal diluted when it attempted to influence public policy. One month after the committee's initial meeting, the park movement lost momentum. Indicative of the slowdown, the *Daily American* reported on May 23 that the Black Bottom Park Committee had canceled a

[144] *Daily American,* May 16, 1891.
[145] *Daily American*, May 21, 1891.
[146] *Daily American*, May 22, 1891.
[147] *Nashville Banner*, May 30, 1891.

meeting "owing to the absence of several persons interested."[148] Newspaper reports suggest that critics of the Black Bottom park proposal shared the general disdain of white Nashvillians for the neighborhood but lacked the political will to reach an agreement on a proposal for its destruction.[149] "The reason why Nashville doesn't cry out for a park is because it is built in the midst of the most beautiful park on earth," suggested the *Daily American*. "Speaking of parks," the article continued, "what has become of the committee which was to redeem Black Bottom so wonderfully soon?"[150]

Conclusion

As the neighborhood of Black Bottom developed, white Nashvillians organized a backlash against the space African Americans claimed in the heart of the city. Newspapers had maligned Black Bottom since the Civil War when refugees from slavery came to the neighborhood in great numbers. In the 1880s, white residents of South Nashville organized to press the criminal justice system to subordinate neighborhood residents through increased policing and hardnosed criminal prosecuting. Nevertheless, the Black community of Black Bottom persisted. In response, the neighborhood's opponents changed tactics. In the 1890s white Nashvillians articulated the city's first plans to destroy the neighborhood, displace the residents, and redevelop the land.

From the early 1880s to the end of the century, newspaper coverage contributed to the erasure of Black place-making in Black Bottom. The treatment that the neighborhood's Black

[148] *Daily American*, May 23, 1891.
[149] For examples of newspaper reports that derided Black Bottom but opposed spending public money to replace the neighborhood with a park, see *Daily American*, May 21, 1891, May 22, 1891, May 23, 1891, September 27, 1891, January 17, 1892; *Nashville Banner*, May 30, 1891.
[150] *Daily American*, September 27, 1891.

residents received in the press played into the hands of white reformers who wanted to see Black Bottom quarantined and condemned. Through crime and gossip stories, editorials, and reports of reform organizations, Nashville's newspapers depicted Black Bottom as a den of Black crime that threatened public health, morals, and safety. The frequency with which the city's newspapers published stories of crimes allegedly committed by African Americans in Black Bottom and the racialized rhetoric used to condemn the neighborhood not only influenced public perceptions and public discourse, but also affected municipal health and safety policies and practices. The Law and Order League of South Nashville, the first of its kind in the city, cited derogatory newspaper reports as grounds for its founding. Furthermore, the league understood the press as essential to carrying out its mission and called for local newspapers to support cleansing Nashville of those populations the league deemed unsavory, beginning with Black Bottom. A few years later, the Black Bottom Park Committee similarly relied on stereotypes of the neighborhood that the city's newspapers had created and popularized.

In response to news reports of crime and disease in Black Bottom, public health officials and the police department subjected the neighborhood's Black residents to increasingly forceful tactics of control. Health officials singled out African Americans as sources of disease and partnered with the police department to force vaccinations on the neighborhood's residents. When the police department hired new officers, the Law and Order League clamored to have them assigned to Black Bottom. As the number of officers grew, arrests increased, with African Americans composing a majority of those arrested. Black Nashvillians had been arrested at higher rates than their white counterparts ever since the end of the Civil War, but the difference became larger than ever in the 1880s and 1890s.[151]

[151] For the annual reports of the Nashville police department during those decades, see *Daily American,* October 6, 1880 (1880 report); *Daily American,* October 3, 1881 (1881 report); *Daily American*, October

Newspaper coverage played a significant role in racializing space in late nineteenth-century Nashville. The city's newspapers perpetuated the association of African Americans with Black Bottom, and Black Bottom with crime, vice, and disease. Newspaper reporting on Black Bottom became the evidence that white citizens' associations such as the South Nashville Law and Order League and the Black Bottom Park Committee mobilized in campaigns to reform or even eliminate the neighborhood. The formation of these organizations, their words, and their actions all point to the central role that racialized discourse played in late nineteenth-century contests over race and space. White Nashvillians claimed the urban space of Black Bottom in opposition to the stake Black residents already had in the neighborhood. Their attempts to malign the neighborhood in the press and form organizations intent on its destruction make it clear that the work of Black place-making was consistently under fire in the late nineteenth century. Like the first refugees from slavery who claimed Black Bottom, later generations carried the burden of claiming space for Black life in the center of Nashville.

6, 1883 (1883 report); "Report of the Chief of Police," *Nashville, The Workings of the City*, ed. James T. Bell, 69-80 (1884 report); *Nashville Banner*, October 20, 1885 (1885 report); *Nashville Banner*, October 20, 1887 (1886, 1887 reports) *Nashville Banner*, October 13, 1888 (1888 report); *Nashville Banner*, October 17, 1889 (1889 report); *Nashville Banner*, November 15, 1890 (1890 report); "Report of the Police Department," in *Reports of Departments of the City*, ed. James T. Bell, 23-45 (1891, 1894, 1896, 1897 reports); "Report of the Police Department," in *Reports of Departments of the City*, ed. James T. Bell, 29-41 (1892 report); *Nashville Banner*, January 8, 1894 (1893 report); *Nashville Banner*, March 3, 1896 (1895 report); "Report of the Police Department," in *Reports of Departments of the City*, ed. J. P. Byrne, 37-52 (1898, 1899 reports); "Report of the Police Department," in *Reports of Departments of the City*, ed. J. P. Byrne, 115-131 (1900 report).

Part III

Placing Claim

Chapter 4

"Seek, and Ye Shall Find": Vernacular Information-gathering and African American Struggles for Civil War Pensions[1]

In the fall of 1899, Richard Blanton, a Black minister, and Joseph Kellogg, a white former police officer, hiked up Nashville's St. Cloud Hill in the dead of night, purportedly to hunt for gold.[2] Neither man held a lamp to light the way. Blanton had told Kellogg the gold would disappear if they made noise when approaching and would sink farther underground if they carried a light in its presence. The location of the gold would be marked by "some kind of a light, a jack-o'lantern." As the two ascended St. Cloud Hill, Kellogg followed Blanton's instructions, eager to find the promised gold. Crowned by the remnants of Fort Negley and overlooking Black Bottom, the neighborhood both men called home, the hill was the tallest point in the city, its elevation exceeding even the state capitol, a mile and a half to the north atop Capitol Hill. From their vantage point, they could view the city below, lit by the glow of lanterns and the glimmer of electric lighting.[3]

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[1] Matt. 7:7 (KJV)

[2] In 1895, 1896, and 1898, Blanton appears in the Nashville city directory as "Blanton, Richard H. Rev." In the 1899 directory, his occupation is "pension agent." In the 1900 census, Blanton's occupation is "preacher." *Nashville Directory* (1895); *Nashville Directory* (1896); *Nashville Directory* (1898); *Nashville Directory* (1899); U.S. manuscript census, 1900, population, Civil District No. 13, Davidson County, Enumeration District 145, p. 162. In 1869, Kellogg is listed as a member of the Nashville Police Department. In the 1870 directory, his occupation is "saloon." See *Nashville Directory* (1869); *Nashville Directory* (1870).

[3] The description of this episode comes from Direct Examination of Dr. J. A. Beecham, October 16, 1899, *United States v. J. A. Kellogg*, no. 822, U.S. Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit (1900), RG 276, NARA, Chicago, 268. Fort Negley is 620 feet above sea level, while the state capitol is approximately 550 feet above sea level. St. Cloud Hill and Capitol Hill are the two highest natural points in Nashville. In contrast, Black Bottom sat on some of the lowest ground in the city, only around 410-425 feet above sea level. Elevation data from U.S. Geological Survey, "The National Map," accessed May 1, 2020, https://viewer.nationalmap.gov/basic/#startUp. On how topography affected the early settlement of Nashville, see Blanche Henry Clark Weaver, "Shifting Residential Patterns of Nashville," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (Spring, 1959): 20-34; and Anita Shafer Goodstein, *Nashville, 1780-1860: From Frontier to City* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1989), 1-13.

Blanton had first climbed St. Cloud Hill more than three decades earlier. Between August 1862 and April 1863, the U.S. army had impressed more than 2,700 enslaved and free Black men as military laborers who had spent nearly a year of excruciating labor on St. Cloud Hill constructing Fort Negley and other military defenses. Almost 800 of them had died.[4] Blanton had been among those laborers who applied shovel and hoe to the hill's earth and rock. Later, when confronted in court with a hostile account of his 1899 expedition with Kellogg, Blanton claimed that after the war he had never again lifted a shovel on that hill.[5] Perhaps Blanton's familiarity with the site led him to refuse to dig on St. Cloud Hill. Perhaps he did not wish to disturb the ground where so many friends and acquaintances had labored, fought, and died in their struggle for freedom. The Civil War disturbed this ground. Seeking gold among the unmarked burial plots of Black soldiers whose names went unrecorded in the ledger books of the Union army may have deterred Blanton from once again lifting a shovel on St. Cloud Hill. Perhaps he simply wanted to avoid any association with grave robbing by digging in the earth where so many had been buried, disinterred, and reinterred. If there was digging to be done on St. Cloud Hill in 1899, Blanton expected Kellogg to pick up the shovel.

It is worth taking seriously this account of jack-o'lanterns and disappearing gold for what it suggests about Richard Blanton's methods of information-gathering. Blanton's and Kellogg's hike up St. Cloud Hill, fanciful as it may seem, was a journey of discovery. Improbable as they may sound, Blanton's practices were neither random nor illogical. Blanton had developed the tools he needed to read the terrain of St. Cloud Hill and translate it into meaningful information for locating something of value, in this case hidden gold. Searching for a spooklight, an orb of

[4] For the impressment of Black laborers during the Civil War, see above, Chapter 1.
[5] Direct Examination of R. H. Blanton, October 16, 1899, in *United States v. J. A. Kellogg*, no. 822, U.S. Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit (1900), RG 276, NARA, Chicago, 268.

light with no known source, under the midnight sky and approaching disappearing gold in silence were modes of discovery legible only to Blanton. He sought gold on his own terms. Blanton applied the same ingenuity to his business practices, namely his efforts to help African Americans in Black Bottom claim Civil War pensions.

Though different, Blanton's practices as a pension sub-agent were not entirely dissimilar from his prospecting on St. Cloud Hill. Blanton could read the social landscape of Black Bottom, the neighborhood he called home, for information that yielded value. He shared history with the Black residents of Black Bottom. Blanton understood that the refugees from slavery who claimed space in Black Bottom had laid the foundation for collective claims-making for years to come. Indeed, Blanton was among the many enslaved who traveled to Nashville during the Civil War and forever transformed the city into a place of freedom. As a pension sub-agent, Blanton located and mobilized relationships among Black Bottom residents in an effort to make Civil War pensions accessible to some of the neighborhood's founding members.

Practices of information-gathering were central to African American strategies of survival and flourishing in the late nineteenth-century South. Taking Blanton's means of discovery seriously creates an opportunity to examine how information supported Black claims-making. Blanton offers a revealing example of Black vernacular information practices because he shared a history with many of the poor men and women of Black Bottom and, as an applicant himself, shared their struggles for Civil War pensions. Blanton had been enslaved in nearby Maury County, Tennessee, and his route to freedom brought him to Nashville. As was the case for many enslaved men in Middle Tennessee, Blanton's emancipation came by way of impressment for military labor, followed by enlistment into the U.S. army. Blanton not only survived the war, he also contributed to Union victory and the destruction of slavery. Even years later, Blanton

retained a passionate belief that such contributions warranted federal recognition and compensation. As he told a potential client in 1899, "any man who worked for the government could get pay for it."[6]

A minister of the gospel, Blanton also worked diligently as a pension sub-agent—an intermediary between prospective applicants and the attorneys who filed claims with the U.S. Pension Bureau. Blanton recognized that a Civil War pension could be life-changing for poor Black Nashvillians. In 1900, the median amount allotted to Civil War pensioners was $12 a month.[7] For a resident of Black Bottom, where rent ranged from $2 to $6 a month, a $12 pension all but ensured economic security.[8] Blanton worked for a number of pension attorneys headquartered in Washington, D.C., to make federal entitlements accessible to poor African Americans, including many who lived in Black Bottom. He solicited clients and gathered information on behalf of Black pension applicants, but he was not authorized to submit applications to the Pension Bureau on his own.[9] Without a law degree or, indeed, any formal schooling at all, Blanton nevertheless learned the intricacies of filing for a Civil War pension. As he did on St. Cloud Hill, he developed his own methods for soliciting and compiling the information necessary to obtain monetary reward.

This chapter compares Blanton's vernacular information-gathering with the information

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[6] Deposition of Melvina McMurray, January 21, 1899, in claim of George Moore, Co. G, 72nd Indiana Infantry [SC 1195531], Civil War Pension Files, Department of Veterans Affairs (hereafter Civil War Pension Files), RG 15, NARA, Washington, DC.

[7] Dora L. Costa, *The Evolution of Retirement: An American Economic History, 1880-1990* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 200.

[8] For the cost of rent in Black Bottom, see *Daily American*, June 15, 1890.

[9] The Pension Bureau developed specialized terminology to describe its procedures. Attorneys paid to file paperwork on behalf of applicants were said to "prosecute" a pension. Only attorneys admitted to practice before the bureau were authorized to prosecute pensions. Attorneys who were suspected to have violated U.S. pension law were suspended, investigated, and, if found guilty, "disbarred" and prohibited from prosecuting pensions. More severe punishments included fines and jail time. For a helpful description of bureau regulations regarding pension attorneys, see Gustavus Adolphus Weber, *The Bureau of Pensions: Its History, Activities and Organization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1923), 29-30, 41.

practices of the U.S. Pension Bureau. Like Blanton, the Pension Bureau recognized the importance of geographical information. Unlike Blanton, for whom the use of space was productive, the Pension Bureau considered space an impediment. To overcome it, the bureau established a costly system of field offices, known as "agencies," dispersed across the U.S. for the efficient movement of information. Moreover, at a more granular level, information about the location of individual applicants was essential for both the evaluation and disbursement of pensions. The bureau used the U.S. postal system to connect disparate localities and conduct business across great distances. Applicants from across the country mailed materials to the bureau's headquarters, and bureau clerks replied in the same manner. To ensure accurate delivery of mail, the bureau maintained a record of the address and post office of each applicant. Geographical information was a two-way street. By maintaining accurate locational data on applicants and recipients, the bureau ensured the delivery of crucial pension materials, not the least of which were pension checks. The bureau also used locational information to evaluate the authenticity of applications and investigate suspect claims.

The same geographical information used to distribute pension checks was also used to investigate pension claims. The bureau's Special Examination Division, tasked with investigating and verifying the authenticity of claims, relied heavily on geographical information to perform its basic functions. Special examiners traveled to collect affidavits from applicants, claimants, and their acquaintances. The bureau maintained a record of historical locations for each applicant, sometimes dating back to before the Civil War. This geographical documentation was crucial for evaluating contested pension claims—those in which more than one applicant claimed a pension based on the military service of a single veteran—and for investigating false and fraudulent applications. By 1900, nearly one million men and women were collecting federal

pensions, and hundreds of thousands applied every year. The evaluation of each claim relied on the bureau's information practices, of which the ability to acquire, maintain, and access authoritative geographical information about any pension applicant was a crucial component.

This chapter contrasts two archives of geographical information, the formal archive of the Pension Bureau and the vernacular archive of the Black pension sub-agent, Richard Blanton. The two archives were based on competing practices of information-gathering, retrieval, and use. In 1890, Commissioner of Pensions Green B. Raum instituted a new system of record keeping and information processing known as "the system of 'Completed Files.'" Applications and inquiries mailed to bureau headquarters were delivered to the Records Division for certification of receipt and forwarding to the proper division. The process was highly bureaucratic and relied on a centralized location of information (the bureau's headquarters in Washington, D.C.), hierarchical organization, and a card index of individual claims. Raum instructed the bureau's clerks to maintain all files "in systematic order, according to date," and demanded rigid compliance. He expected clerks to manage records such "that at any time up to its final adjudication the whereabouts of a claim may be known."[10]

Blanton's practices, by contrast, left room for discovery. He relied on shared ownership of information that was widely dispersed among people in a localized space. The entire neighborhood of Black Bottom was his office and archive. Unlike the bureau's practices of file and recall, Blanton's information-gathering was akin to browsing, an intentional wandering that was open to discovery, experimentation, and adaptation. Blanton's tools for this rival archival practice were developed out of the particulars of his personal history and his social location

[10] Weber, *Bureau of Pensions*, 4; *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Pensions to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1890* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1890), 6.

within Nashville. He did not have an army of clerks at his disposal, but he was local to Black Bottom and, as a lay minister, had made himself familiar to Black communities throughout the city. Blanton's methods were particularly applicable to Black Bottom where neighbors frequently socialized in common areas: streets, porches, and the courtyards of tenements. His literacy enabled him to operate independently as a sub-agent within the pension system. He was a Civil War veteran and drew on his wartime experience to develop specialized knowledge of military organization that at times stupefied both special examiners of the Pension Bureau and U.S. district attorneys for the Middle District of Tennessee.

Building on broader historiographical work on African Americans' interaction with the Pension Bureau, this chapter argues that the Civil War pension system, while national in scope, was shaped by local relationships and contingencies.[11] It begins with an examination of the organization and information practices of the U.S. Pension Bureau and their consequences for

[11] Historian Brandi Brimmer articulates the importance of place and local contingency in African American struggles for pensions. "[B]lack women's battles for survivors' benefits cannot be understood apart from the neighborhoods in which they were rooted or how they lived their lives," she writes. See Brandi Clay Brimmer, *Claiming Union Widowhood: Race, Respectability, and Poverty in the Post-Emancipation South* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 6. See also Brimmer, "'Her Claim for Pension Is Lawful and Just': Representing Black Union Widows in Late-Nineteenth Century North Carolina," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 1, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 207-236; Brimmer, "Black Women's Politics, Narratives of Sexual Immorality, and Pension Bureaucracy in Mary Lee's North Carolina Neighborhood," *Journal of Southern History* 80, no. 4 (Fall 2014): 827-858. For other studies of African Americans and the Civil war pension system, see Corinne T. Field and Nicholas L. Syrett, "Age and the Construction of Gendered and Raced Citizenship in the United States," *American Historical Review* 125, no. 2 (Spring 2020): 438-450; Dale Kretz, *Administering Freedom: The State of Emancipation after the Freedmen's Bureau* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022), Kretz, "Pensions and Protest: Former Slaves and the Reconstructed American State," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 7, no. 3 (Fall 2017): 425-445; Michelle E. Krowl, "'Her Just Dues': Civil War Pensions of African American Women in Virginia," in *Negotiating Boundaries of Southern Womanhood: Dealing with the Powers That Be*, ed. Janet L. Coryell et al. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 48-70; Megan J. McClintock, "Civil War Pensions and the Reconstruction of Union Families," *Journal of American History* 83, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 456-480; Elizabeth Regosin, *Freedom's Promise: Ex-Slave Families and Citizenship in the Age of Emancipation* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2002); Elizabeth A. Regosin and Donald R. Shaffer, eds., *Voices of Emancipation: Understanding Slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction through the U.S. Pension Bureau Files* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); Donald R. Shaffer, *After the Glory: The Struggles of Black Civil War Veterans* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

claims made by African Americans. The claims of African Americans in Nashville, Tennessee, are then used to examine the information practices of Richard Blanton. It does so by walking with Blanton through the neighborhood of Black Bottom and reconstructing a day in his life from the sparse historical record of his work.[12] As Blanton walked, he gathered vernacular knowledge and organized it for the sake of securing Civil War pensions for African Americans. While he left no diary of his daily routine, information about his practices is scattered throughout his own pension application, records of the Pension Bureau's investigation into his work, and criminal court proceedings in his trial for alleged violation of U.S. pension law.

The U.S. Pension Bureau

The first U.S. pension law was enacted on the heels of the Declaration of Independence in 1776. A more formal national pension system developed in the antebellum years, generally offering war-specific aid to disabled veterans and their widows before extending service pensions to all surviving veterans several decades after each conflict. In 1849, Congress transferred the Pension Bureau, previously the office of the Commissioner of Pensions, to the newly created the Department of the Interior. During the Civil War in response to unprecedented casualties and the resulting need for assistance, the pension system was practically remade. In 1862, Congress expanded the size of the Pension Bureau and the number of persons eligible for pensions in what became known as the "general law" pension system. Under the general law, disabled veterans had to prove that their disability had been incurred in the line of duty. Widows of soldiers had the double burden of proving a legal relationship to the deceased and that their

[12] For an example of this approach, see Cornelia H. Dayton and Sharon V. Salinger, *Robert Love's Warnings: Searching for Strangers in Colonial Boston* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

husband's death was war-related. Initially, the first of those requirements excluded the widows of Black soldiers who had been enslaved, as slave marriages were not recognized by law, but in 1866, Congress enacted a supplementary pension law to allow formerly enslaved people to prove a marital relationship by submitting evidence in the form of sworn affidavits. Widows of Black soldiers could solicit affidavits from acquaintances who could attest to the fact that the couple had lived as man and wife for a period of at least two years prior to the soldier's enlistment. Eligibility requirements were even more stringent for the mothers and children of deceased soldiers. Mothers' and children's pensions were granted only if the claimant could prove a legitimate relation to the deceased soldier, that they were dependent on the soldier's wages at the time of his death, and that the soldier had materially contributed to their support.[13]

The categories defining pension eligibility were not significantly altered until 1890, when Congress created a parallel pension system by passing the Disability Act, commonly known as the "new law," which waived the requirement that the death or disability of a veteran had to be war-related.[14] In effect, the Disability Act transformed Civil War pensions from a service-related disability and survivor's benefit into an old-age entitlement for Union war veterans and their widows. Radically expanding the number of people eligible for a pension, the new law also exposed applicants to new forms of surveillance and examination. Applicants under the new law,

[13] Kretz, *Administering Freedom*, 102-103 (Department of the Interior), 127-131 (eligibility of widows), 132-136 (eligibility of mothers and children); Brimmer, *Claiming Union Widowhood*, 61 ("general law"), 62 (supplementary law of 1864).

[14] For a description of the 1890 Disability Act, see Weber, *Bureau of Pensions*, 16, which explains that the new law "provided a service pension without regard to rank, the rate of which ranged from $6 to $12 per month, according to the degree of inability of the survivor to earn a livelihood, to all persons who served ninety days or more during the Civil War, who were honorably discharged, and who were suffering from permanent mental or physical disability which incapacitated them from earning a support." Widows and dependent children of deceased Civil War veterans could qualify for a pension if they had "no means of support other than their own manual labor" and could prove that the soldier's death was "due to injury or disease which would have entitled him to an invalid pension."

writes historian Dale Kretz, "found every inch of their bodies assessed for impairments, each receiving its own rating out of eighteen," filed in a report, and reassessed at the whim of the Pension Bureau. Not only did these procedures heighten the stakes of medical examination for individual applicants, they also represented a significant moment in the medicalization of disability law in the United States.[15] Following the new law, disability needs would be measured based on medical tests of ever-increasing specificity.

For those who could prove eligibility, Civil War pensions were highly coveted for the lifetime economic security they offered. Even with stringent physical testing, the number of men and women who secured a Civil War pension soared following passage of the new law. In 1889, fewer than 500,000 men and women received pensions based on disability incurred in the line of service by a veteran. In the decade after the new law, the number of pensioners nearly doubled to just shy of one million.[16] By the end of the century, 58 percent of all Civil War veterans' pensions and 60 percent of all Civil War widows' pensions had been awarded under the new law.[17] Pension Bureau officials speculated that the lower number of pensions awarded under the general law was not the service requirement itself, since many veterans had survived the war with lasting disabilities. The obstacle was proving that a disability was *service-related*. In effect, the challenge facing applicants was one of information-gathering. In 1900, the commissioner of pensions reported that most applicants had difficulty "obtaining the necessary testimony

[15] Kretz, *Administering Freedom,* 200-207 (quotations on 202, 207). See also Brimmer, *Claiming Union Widowhood*, 1-19.
[16] Weber, *Bureau of Pensions*, 96. In 1889, 489,7925 people were collecting pension payments. In 1900, the number of pension recipients had risen to 991,519.
[17] U.S. Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Department of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended in June 30, 1900* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1900.), 11. In 1900, there were 742,787 veterans and 227,376 widows who were pensioned on account of military service rendered since March 4, 1861.

establishing claims under the general laws."[18] As veterans moved, aged, and passed away, their networks of information also aged, some of them breaking down over time and geographical distance. Aging information networks were particularly troublesome for Black applicants for whom the documentary evidence created during the war was often deemed insufficient by the Pension Bureau. The new law did not end the prejudicial evaluation of Black applicants' claims. The bureau continued to set a particularly high bar for authoritative testimony in the case of Black applications, often privileging the testimony of white former enslavers and white officers of Black regiments over that of the applicants themselves or that gathered from comrades, kin, and acquaintances.[19]

Although they were written in non-discriminatory language, the requirements established by the Pension Bureau meant that African Americans faced barriers to securing entitlements. To begin with, Black veterans often struggled to prove the legitimacy of their service. In 1883, one bureau official informed to the commissioner of pensions that the records of the U.S. Colored Troops "are very meager" and special examination was therefore required to "obtain the testimony necessary to make up for the lack of an official record."[20] Such problems proved especially severe in Nashville, where the chaos of war and a blurred distinction between military laborers and enlisted soldiers meant that the Pension Bureau viewed every claim from a Black Nashvillian with skepticism.[21] Widows of Black soldiers faced even greater evidentiary challenges. The new law, while intended to broaden the availability of pensions to formerly

[18] *Annual Report*, 1900, 11.
[19] Elizabeth A. Regosin and Donald R. Shaffer, eds., *Voices of Emancipation: Understanding Slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction through the U.S. Pension Bureau Files* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 38-40.
[20] L. E. Dickey to Commissioner of Pensions, August 15, 1883, quoted in Kretz, *Administering Freedom*, 116.
[21] For the lack of clear distinction between Black military laborers and enlisted soldiers in Civil War Nashville, see above, Chapter 1.

enslaved Black women, opened their lives to greater surveillance and scrutiny. Special examiners evaluated not only the legitimacy of a widow's domestic relationships but also her respectability. In order to evaluate a woman's eligibility for a widow's pension, they asked family members, past and present acquaintances, employers, and former enslavers questions about her intimate and domestic relationships.[22]

African American pension applicants thus encountered a discriminatory application system based on special examinations that placed their bodies and their intimate relationships under intense scrutiny.[23] The pension application system, by its very structure, created barriers for African Americans beyond those already imposed by prejudice about race, class, and respectability. Lay intermediaries like Blanton played an essential role by transposing the vernacular archives of poor African Americans into a key that registered with the bureaucratic archives of the Pension Bureau.

At the first hint of inconsistency, the Pension Bureau ordered special investigations into the claims of Black applicants. Historian Donald Shaffer estimates that nearly half of Black pension applicants were subjected to special examination, compared to only a quarter of white applicants.[24] The new law of 1890 expanded eligibility to unprecedented numbers of veterans and dependent family members. It also spurred political backlash from Democrats and from members of Congress who opposed government spending. At a time when veterans' entitlements should have been more available than ever to Black applicants, the Pension Bureau faced

[22] See Brimmer, *Claiming Union Widowhood*, 129-140.
[23] On the discriminatory treatment of African Americans by the Pension Bureau, see Brimmer, "'Her Claim for Pension Is Lawful and Just,'" 207-236; Brimmer, "Black Women's Politics," 827-858; Regosin, *Freedom's Promise*, 79-113; Kretz, *Administering Freedom*, 108-143; Shaffer, *After the Glory*, 122-137; Donald R. Shaffer, "'I Do Not Suppose That Uncle Sam Looks at the Skin': African Americans and the Civil War Pension System, 1865-1934," *Civil War History* 46, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 132-147.
[24] Shaffer, *After the Glory*, 129.

increasing pressure to root out fraudulent applications and investigate pension recipients.

Bureaucratic Information-gathering

The Pension Bureau developed an organizational structure designed to process a high volume of information sent and received across vast distances. To provide standard services across space, the bureau was divided into nine divisions, all of which operated under a commissioner and deputy commissioner, chief clerk, and board of review.[25] Keeping track of nearly one million pension recipients, hundreds of thousands of applications, and the attorneys and medical examiners practicing before the bureau required precise record keeping. The Record Division, for example, was subdivided into five sections, each with specific duties designed to organize information and facilitate its retrieval. When an application arrived at bureau headquarters, receipt was acknowledged and the contents were jacketed and numbered by Section A of the Record Division before being forwarded to the appropriate division for review. Section B recorded and certified all pensions that were awarded and maintained a card index of pensioners. Section C furnished post office addresses of pensioners, corrected index cards, made copies, and conducted other miscellaneous work. New applications were forwarded to the fourth section, the Review Board, "the clearing house of the bureau," which was charged with adjudicating all applications. All classes of claims were evaluated on the basis of "law and evidence." The fifth section was the Board of Re-Review, which evaluated rejected applications after applicants submitted new evidence.[26] The result was not only a sprawling national bureaucracy but a large and elaborate physical archive of information about U.S. veterans and

[25] Weber, *Bureau of Pensions,* 37-49. The nine divisions were Law Division, Record Division, Invalid Division, Retirement Division, Medical Division, Special Examination Division, Certificate Division, Finance Division, and Disbursing Division.
[26] Weber, *Bureau of Pensions,* 42-43.

their families.

Scholars have pointed to the Pension Bureau as an example of the growth of the federal state during and after the Civil War.[27] Sociologist Theda Skocpol argues that the work of the Pension Bureau was indicative of the many ways the federal government became more closely intertwined with the day-to-day lives of individual citizens in the late nineteenth and twentieth century.[28] By the beginning of the twentieth century the Pension Bureau was a massive bureaucracy composed mostly of clerks, stenographers, and messengers who were tasked with the cataloguing, storage, and retrieval of information.[29] In 1900, federal pension payments to Union Civil War veterans and their dependents constituted over 40 percent of total federal expenditures.[30]

Unlike Blanton's highly localized information network, the Pension Bureau had to gather and disperse information at a national scale. The challenge of maintaining information across space structured the shape and size of the Pension Bureau. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., the bureau created a network of field offices across the United States. It divided the nation into a system of eighteen districts (known as agencies in bureau parlance), each headquartered at a single office. All the states of the former Confederacy except Virginia were combined into a single agency headquartered in Knoxville, Tennessee.[31] An office was typically managed by a

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[27] On the growth of the national state, including federal bureaucracy, see Richard Franklin Bensel, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859-1877* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 366-415; Brian Balogh, *A Government out of Sight: The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 285-292.
[28] Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 41-47.
[29] In 1922, the Pension Bureau reported 1,229 employees, 1,056 of which held the titles, clerk, stenographer, messenger, or assistant messenger. See Weber, *Bureau of Pensions*, 51-63.
[30] See Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers,* figure 3.
[31] Due to the large numbers of Union war veterans and therefore pension applicants in the Northeast and Midwest, agencies of the bureau were concentrated there. New York and Pennsylvania, the states with the greatest number of pensioners, were each divided into two agencies. Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, and

single pension agent and a staff of clerks. The bureau sought to overcome regional variation in the number of Union veterans and offer the same access to applicants no matter where they were located by dividing the country into agencies and maintaining field offices in each region. The vastness of space threatened the bureau's mandate to provide pensions to disabled Union veterans and their widows regardless of location.

The bureau's information network was maintained at considerable expense. In 1900, the Department of the Interior reported that the field offices and their staffs had cost more than half a million dollars annually since 1892. In 1900, the annual expenses of the Knoxville agency, included the $4,000 salary of pension agent John T. Wilder, $23,193 for clerks, and $1,049 for "other necessary expenses." Salaries for the entire Pension Bureau in the same year amounted to $2,135,542. Expenses related to management of the widely dispersed network of field offices and the movement of information between them and Washington, D.C., were also substantial. In 1900, the bureau spent $522,812 on general "costs of disbursement," including the cost of maintaining field offices. The material elements of information management also came at significant cost; the bureau spent $435,854 on "other expenses," including, among other things, "stationery, printing and binding."[32]

The expansion of eligibility that came with passage of the 1890 law coincided with a restructuring of the Pension Bureau's organizational structure. Expanded eligibility came with new forms of surveillance. Congress increased the bureau's budget, and the bureau expanded operations across the country. By the end of the nineteenth century, a sprawling network of field offices was charged with collapsing space and erasing regional variation—a goal that threatened

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Illinois, as well as Kentucky in the Upper South and Maine in the Northeast, each had its own agency. Most states west of the Mississippi river were combined into four agencies. *Annual Report*, 1900, 58.

[32] *Annual Report*, 1900, 51, 58 (annual expenditures), 114 (annual salaries).

the effectiveness of forms of vernacular information-gathering, including those of Richard Blanton in Nashville, Tennessee.

Reforming the Bureau's Information Management

The new law of 1890 not only dramatically expanded the number of people eligible for a Civil War pension, it also instigated significant changes in the operations of the Pension Bureau. In preparation for an expected flood of new applicants, Congress authorized an increase in the bureau's clerical force, as well as additional medical examiners.[33] Expansion would come with modernization efforts led by Green B. Raum, the bureau's new commissioner, who had been appointed in 1889. In his first annual report, Raum outlined his expectations for efficient information management. "Upon taking charge of the Bureau of Pensions," he wrote, "I examined into the organization of the office and the methods of transacting business." He "soon decided that a number of important changes were necessary to secure satisfactory results." Raum drew particular attention to a division called the Board of Re-Review, which he described as existing for the sole purpose of re-examining cases that had already been denied by the Board of Review. Raum considered such re-examinations a waste of bureau resources.[34]

Raum also identified a lack of efficiency in the bureau's communication with the public and among its own staff. Failure to process information expeditiously created a backlog in applications waiting to be evaluated. "I found that several thousand letters were daily received from claimants and their attorneys, making complaints of delay and inquiries as to the condition of pension claims, to which no acknowledgment or reply was made," Raum reported. He singled out the number of unprocessed claims in the Special Examination Division as another example.

[33] *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Pensions*, 1890, 3, 13.
[34] *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Pensions*, 1890, 4.

While "about 18 per cent. of the official force was assigned to duty in the field for the special examination of cases," nearly 15,000 unprocessed claims languished in the division's files.[35]

The sheer volume of incoming applications overwhelmed the Pension Bureau, and, from Raum's perspective, the cause was clear: poor information management. "The pending claims now on file in the bureau constitute so great a mass that it is a physical impossibility to give them all immediate consideration," he reported. Ruam's grim evaluation of the challenge posed by the large number of applications was neither hyperbolic nor metaphorical. Congress approved the Disability Pension Act on June 27, 1890. In the three months following its enactment, the Pension Bureau received 1,276,729 pieces of mail and sent 485,462. The movement of information from applicants to the bureau's headquarters was so complex and extensive that the bureau devoted an entire division—the Mail Division—to the task. The Mail Division reported that, after the new law, it received "more than 32,000 pieces of mail per day, to be opened, classified, and properly disposed of." The Records Division was similarly inundated. "At this writing (October 1)," Raum reported, "the division is handling 10,000 claims each day."[36] The bureau continued to receive a high volume of mail as the century waned. In 1900, communications with pension applicants, claimants, and their representative attorneys comprised the three largest categories of mail. The greatest volume, over one million items, was "pieces of additional evidence" sent by applicants in support of their claims. The second two categories of mail received by the bureau were "letters, miscellaneous" and "letters of inquiry, office letters."[37]

Raum vowed to streamline the bureau's practices by eliminating redundancy. On November 4, 1889, he issued Order 145, which reorganized the bureau into a more hierarchical

[35] *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Pensions,* 1890, 4.
[36] *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Pensions,* 1890, 5, 11, 13.
[37] *Annual Report,* 1900, 67.

form by consolidating authority in the hands of a few executives and creating a new workflow for the processing of applications. Order 145 brought all bureau operations under the purview of one of four executives. The chief clerk oversaw the clerical divisions, while the commissioner of pensions himself managed the divisions tasked with investigating and reviewing applications. Oversight of the field offices were divided between two deputy commissioners.[38]

The consolidation of authority was accompanied by a new system for processing pension applications, "the system of 'Completed Files.'" Raum boasted that it provided "an orderly method of procedure" that would streamline communication and make it easier for claimants to receive information on the status of their applications. The system standardized the way the bureau solicited evidence from applicants by creating a series of forms, or "blanks" as he called them. Each filled-in form received by the bureau was numbered and dated. A corresponding card catalog was created and updated with the status of each application. "I enjoin upon the entire official force—those on duty here in Washington, those assigned to duty as special examiners, and the boards of medical examiners—promptness, diligence, and fidelity in the performance of every duty," Raum declared. Order 145 concluded with two admonitions: "Recommendations for promotion will be made upon merit. The inefficient will be recommended for retirement."[39]

In processing and evaluating claims, the Pension Bureau attempted to render human experience legible and fixed in what political scientist James Scott has called "high modernism."[40] Standard forms reduced the complexity of human relationships to categories

[38] *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Pensions,* 1890, 5. The chief clerk managed the Record Division, Stationery and Accounts Division, Mail Division, and the "force of messengers, laborers, etc." The eighteen field offices operated under the direction of two deputy commissioners. The commissioner of pensions managed the Medical Division, Law Division, and Special Examination Division, and exercised executive authority over the chief clerk and deputy commissioners.
[39] *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Pensions,* 1890, 5-9 (quotations on 5, 6, and 9).
[40] Scott points to the development of "authoritarian high modernism" in the West as occurring in the mid-

defined by the bureau. As recent historical studies have shown, pension laws and the bureau's guidelines for special examiners enforced precise definitions of legal marriage, lineage, age, and disability.[41] This process required African American applicants to collapse the complexity and malleability of intimate relationships into a single model based on heterosexual, monogamous partnership and the nuclear family.[42] The information management system of the Pension Bureau thus did more than organize and maintain information; it established boundaries as to what counted as legitimate knowledge. These methods stood in stark contrast to the vernacular information-gathering practiced by Black pensioners and facilitators like Blanton who leveraged human relationships to secure pensions.

Richard Blanton and Vernacular Information-Gathering

In Nashville, Richard Blanton created a rival archive of information derived from knowledge of and association with his neighbors. Unlike the sprawling bureaucratic archive, Blanton's archive extended as far as his feet could take him, about a mile radius from his residence in Black Bottom. While the Pension Bureau certified, jacketed, and numbered application materials in Washington, D.C., Blanton walked and talked in his neighborhood. He

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nineteenth century with the combination of three elements: "the administrative ordering of nature and society," "the unrestrained use of the power of the modern state as an instrument for achieving these designs," and "a weakened or prostrate civil society that lacks the capacity to resist these plans." James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 88-89.

[41] On marriage, see Brimmer, "Black Women's Politics," 827-858; Tera W. Hunter, *Bound in Wedlock: Slave and Free Black Marriage in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017), 274-278; Sharon Romeo, *Gender and the Jubilee: Black Freedom and the Reconstruction of Citizenship in Civil War Missouri* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016), 130-151. On ability and disability, see Kretz, "Pensions and Protest," 425-445; Shaffer, *After the Glory*, 54-55. On race, see Shaffer, "'I Do Not Suppose That Uncle Sam Looks at the Skin,'" 132-147. On age, see Field and Syrett, "Age and the Construction of Gendered and Raced Citizenship in the United States," 438-450.

[42] Hunter, *Bound in Wedlock*, chap. 5.

meandered along city streets, relying on word-of-mouth solicitation and informal conversation. Though unplanned and unscheduled, his meetings with prospective clients did not occur by chance. Blanton understood the social landscape of Nashville and walked to locations where striking up a conversation about Civil War pensions was not only possible, but welcome. He approached men and women walking on the street or waiting for trains at railroad depots. He stopped to have conversations with couples sitting on their front porch on cool evenings, and with saloon keepers working behind the bar. He visited the nearby National Cemetery, where soldiers of the U.S. Colored Troops were buried, browsing the headstones, and reading the names of deceased veterans, the regiments in which they served, and the dates of their deaths. Blanton recognized these places as part of a network of information that, if mobilized correctly, could be used to bring federal entitlements to individuals who had ample reason to doubt that the government could work on their behalf.

Blanton's use of space contrasts that of the Pension Bureau. Blanton's movements in and through Nashville used place as a resource for gathering information. The Pension Bureau expended exceptional time and money establishing field offices and equipping its agents with standardized forms to flatten human and physical geography. The structure of the bureaucratic archive relied on access to authoritative records—muster rolls from the War Department, medical records from a board of surgeons—that were readily accessible only to employees of the federal government. Many poor African Americans lacked the time or resources to draw on official records and relied, instead, on a rival archive created through informal networks of information-gathering and exchange. Walking with Blanton offers a view of how he mobilized his familiarity with the social and physical geography of Black Nashville to create a competing archive of information that was not reducible to the expectations or structure developed by the Pension

Bureau.

Activated by Blanton's knowledge of place and use of space, this rival archive of relationships and folk knowledge enabled many African Americans to make claims for pensions. It also, however, put Black applicants at risk of exploitation by unscrupulous pension agents and drew the suspicion of the Pension Bureau. In time, the alternative means of obtaining knowledge practiced by sub-agents such as Blanton placed late nineteenth-century Black communities under heightened scrutiny from the federal government. The legal troubles of Joseph Kellogg and Blanton will be discussed below, in Chapter 5. But in order to understand Blanton's community archive, Blanton himself must first be located in the social history of Black Bottom.

Richard Blanton had been enslaved on a farm in Maury County, Tennessee, before he enlisted in the Union army at Franklin, Tennessee, in August 1863 and served in Company A of the 13th U.S. Colored Infantry.[43] He was discharged in Nashville at the close of the war, then lived in Maury County until 1888, when he moved to Nashville. In 1892, he left for Leavenworth, Kansas, where he briefly resided in a Soldiers Home for Union veterans but returned to Black Bottom in the mid-1890s.[44] It was then that he took up work as a sub-agent for several pension attorneys.

As a Civil War veteran, Blanton not only enjoyed relationships with other veterans, but also developed an understanding of military organization. In fact, Blanton knew so much about the organization of U.S. Colored Troops in Tennessee during the Civil War that investigators for the Pension Bureau suspected that he possessed copies of the regimental muster rolls, which was

[43] Service Record of Richard Blanton, December 7, 1886, in claim of Richard Blanton, Co. A, 13th USCI, Civil War [SC 2496184], Civil War Pension Files, RG 15, NARA, Washington, DC.
[44] Richard Blanton, Western Branch, Leavenworth, KS, Register of Members, 1885-1935, Entry 5734, Historical Register of National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, 1866-1938, Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, RG 15, NARA, Washington, DC.

not the case.[45] Blanton had acquired his knowledge of the U.S. Colored Troops through his own military service, his life after the war, and research he conducted as part of his pension work.

Blanton's place of residence changed frequently in a pattern that was common for Black Nashvillians unable to purchase property. "I live in various buildings near Fort Negley, Nashville, Tennessee," he stated in an 1889 affidavit submitted as part of his own application for a veteran's pension.[46] After Blanton's return to Tennessee from Kansas, Nashville city directories listed his address as 1268 S. College Street in 1893, as 30 Highland Avenue in 1895, as 1104 Church Street in 1896, as Bucks Alley near Peabody Street in 1898, and as 309 South Summer Street in 1899. All of which were probably rented rooms. For most of his time in Nashville, Blanton lived in Black Bottom. The address on College Street, Bucks Alley, and South Summer Street were all located in Black Bottom. The Summer Street address was a house owned by Joseph Kellogg, Blanton's future business partner.[47] Blanton's methods of information-gathering differed little from the usual socializing that took place in Black Bottom on a regular basis. He knew the social relationships of neighbors, kin, and acquaintances in the neighborhood because he was from the neighborhood.

Joseph Kellogg had been "reared bred and born" in Cincinnati, Ohio. He moved to Nashville sometime during the Civil War and in 1865 married a "native southern girl" with whom he raised six children.[48] Kellogg made a living through an eclectic combination of

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[45] A. W. Roome to George C. Stewart, January 19, 1899, in Legal Case File of J. A. Kellogg (hereafter cited as LCF-JAK), Case Files of Attorneys, Agents, Pensioners and Others Relating to the Prosecution of Pension Claims and the Investigation of Fraudulent Practices 1862-1914, Law Division, Records of the Bureau of Pensions and Its Predecessors, 1805-1895, RG 15, NARA, Washington DC.
[46] Affidavit of Richard Blanton, December 16, 1889, in claim of Richard Blanton, Co. A, 13th USCI, Civil War [SC 2496184].
[47] *Nashville Directory* (1893), 133; *Nashville Directory* (1895), 166; *Nashville Directory* (1896), 159; *Nashville Directory* (1898), 158; *Nashville Directory* (1899), 165.
[48] J. A. Kellogg to Commissioner of Pensions, June 7, 1898, in LCF-JAK.

occupations from real estate dealer to hotel owner, city police officer, and notary public.[49] Try as he might, he was never able to break into Nashville's elite white society. Neither a native of Tennessee nor successful enough in his business dealings to be regarded as respectable in the eyes of the city's white elite, Kellogg was labeled a "carpetbagger" and "white trash."[50]

By the 1890s, Kellogg was living in a house on Union Street owned by his wife and operating the Depot Hotel, which was across the street from the railway depot. The hotel offered cheap rooms and catered to a working-class clientele. Along with his hotel business, Kellogg engaged in a series of speculative property sales based on land inherited by his wife. The failure of these dealings led to ridicule by both members of his own family and business associates and left Kellogg searching for new means to pay off debts.[51] It was during these economically precarious years that Kellogg secured a license as a notary public and began a side business soliciting pension applications and processing the paperwork for the charge of a small notary fee. Together with Richard Blanton, Kellogg processed more than one hundred pension applications between 1896 and 1898, when their partnership came under investigation.[52]

Blanton and Kellogg were partners in a Civil War pension-processing business that served African American applicants. Each drew upon the resources of the other for his own ends. Blanton walked the city, developing relationships with Black men and women, many of whom were connected through labor or kinship to Union military service during the Civil War. If Blanton carried out most of the solicitation, Kellogg, as a notary public, stamped the documents

[49] For a history Kellogg's employment, see *Nashville Directory* (1869); *Nashville Directory* (1870); *Nashville Directory* (1874).
[50] A. W. Roome to H. Clay Evans, January 7, 1899, in LCF-JAK.
[51] *United States v. J. A. Kellogg*, no. 822, U.S. Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit (1900), RG 276, NARA, Chicago, 215.
[52] J. A. Kellogg to Commissioner of Pensions, June 7, 1898, and A. W. Roome to George Stewart, January 19, 1899, both in LCF-JAK.

with the official seal of a legitimate business. They were close associates. For a time, Blanton lived in the back of Kellogg's house in Black Bottom.[53] They cooperated with one another and were friendly, though it is not clear if they considered each other friends.

Richard Blanton, like all pension sub-agents, occupied a liminal space in the pension-application process. He could accept contract work from the office of an attorney but had no authority to charge fees directly to clients.[54] Only claims agents, also known as pension attorneys, and notaries public were authorized to do so. Many pension applicants employed the services of large pension attorney firms with offices near the Pension Bureau headquarters in Washington, D.C. These applicants rarely, if ever, met the claims agent whom they had authorized to process their application. Instead, local sub-agents were employed to operate on behalf of the claims agent. Within the economy of pensions, sub-agents were the middlemen of middlemen. For many clients, however, sub-agents such as Blanton were the face of their claims-making.

Local and literate, Blanton creatively wove the bureaucratic requirements of applying for a Civil War pension into the fabric of African American life in Black Bottom. He actively searched for African Americans who might be eligible for a Civil War pension and mediated their claims, first within the predominantly white legal culture of Nashville and then within the Pension Bureau's application process. His partnership with Kellogg, born of both necessity and convenience, circumvented the white supremacist racial code. Blanton's business regularly took

[53] Direct Examination of R. H. Blanton, October 16, 1899, in *United States v. J. A. Kellogg*, no. 822, U.S. Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit (1900), RG 276, NARA, Chicago, 215.
[54] By his own account, Blanton contracted as a sub-agent for six different pension attorneys, including Nathan Bickford, T. W. Tallmadge, and P. J. Lockwood, all of which operated major firms in Washington, D.C. Deposition of Richard Vinson alias Blanton, January 13, 1899, in claim of Ellen McGavoc, widow of Edmund McGavoc, unassigned, 17th USCI [WC 533147], Civil War Pension Files, RG 15, NARA, Washington, DC.

him to the house of his white associate, where he entered not as a client or employee, but as a partner. Together, Blanton and Kellogg fashioned a pension business that catered to Black residents of Black Bottom.[55]

In efforts to bring poor Black Nashvillians access to Civil War pensions, Kellogg and Blanton developed a partnership that drew on each of their particular abilities. Blanton connected African Americans who believed they might qualify for a Civil War pension with the resources they needed to process an application. For many residents of Black Bottom, age, disability, poverty, illiteracy, and racial prejudice left them with limited access to pension agents, attorneys, and notaries public who prosecuted applications before the Pension Bureau. Kellogg not only lived in Black Bottom but, as Blanton put it, would "fix up" an application on the cheap.[56] The two men developed a system in which Blanton worked as recruiting agent to bring prospective applicants to Kellogg, who would notarize and file their applications. Although their services would eventually run afoul of the Pension Bureau, for a time the two men provided an opportunity for poor Black Nashvillians to test their claims for a pension.

The economy of pensions granted Kellogg power over applicants well beyond what is normally acknowledged for a notary public. Most pension-application documents required the seal of a notary public, and, in Nashville, notaries were appointed by the Davidson County Court.[57] In 1899, Blanton's busiest year as a sub-agent, every notary public named by the court was white. Between 1890 and 1900, only 1 of 589 notaries was listed as "colored."[58]

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[55] On Black Bottom, see above, Chapters 2 and 3.
[56] Richard Blanton to Commissioner of Pensions, July 13, 1899, in LCF-JAK.
[57] *A Digest of the Laws of the United States Governing the Granting of Army and Navy Pensions and Bounty-Land Warrants, Decisions of the Secretary of the Interior, and Rulings and Orders of the Commissioner of Pensions Thereunder* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1890), 214.
[58] Number of notaries appointed by the Davidson County Court compiled from *Banner*, January 7, October 6, 1890; January 6, January 7, April 6, July 6, July 7, October 7, 1891; January 7, January 7,

Furthermore, notaries could charge a fee for their services. This fee was paid by clients up-front, regardless of the outcome of a pension application. Unlike Richard Blanton, who received a fee from the claims agent and, importantly, only if a pension was awarded, Kellogg could charge clients a small fee for every document he notarized. Evidence suggests that Kellogg's rates were exorbitant. Richard Blanton explained to one pension applicant that Kellogg charged a notary fee of $1 for each affidavit he notarized. A special examiner for the Pension Bureau reported that Kellogg charged a notary fee of 50¢.[59] Kellogg's fees may have been high, but Blanton had limited options for executing an affidavit for his clients in Nashville, much less in Black Bottom. His labors on behalf of African Americans seeking pensions literally required a seal of approval from a white Nashvillian. He chose to work with a man he knew and a man local to Black Bottom, his neighbor, Joseph A. Kellogg.

Walking with Blanton

Acting as a facilitator between poor African Americans and the Pension Bureau required more than the transposition of vernacular information into bureaucratic form. It required movement. Blanton sought out prospective pension applicants by walking the streets of Nashville and conversing with acquaintances new and old. His work required the application of

April 4, July 11, 1892; January 3, April 4, October 3, 1893; January 9, July 2, April 3, October 2, 1894; April 3, July 3, 1895; July 6, October 5, 1896; April 5, July 6, 1897; January 5, 1898; April 4, 1899; and *Daily American*, January 11, July 8, 1890; October 4, 1892; July 11, 1893; April 5, 1898; July 9, 1899. J. C. Napier, a prominent African American attorney, was appointed a notary public during the January, 1891, session of the county court. His name did not appear with a racial notation; given his prominence in Nashville city politics, it rarely did. Napier was therefore an exception to the practice of Nashville's white newspapers of regularly recording the race of any African Americans they mentioned.

[59] R. H. Blanton to Albert Henderson, n.d., and A. W. Roome to District Attorney for the Middle District of Tennessee, February 23, 1899, both in LCF-JAK. The online comparative worth calculator, Measuring Worth, estimates that a $1 fee charged 1900 is equivalent to $36.40 in 2022. See, "Real Cost Calculator," Measuring Worth, accessed, July 7, 2023, https://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/uscompare/.

feet to street. Blanton well understood the political economy of Black Nashville and the potential value of a Civil War pension to the city's poor Black residents. His behavior suggests that he also believed that Black communities in Nashville were underrepresented on the pension rolls. Blanton played a proactive role in expanding access to pensions by prospecting for applicants.[60] His peripatetic practice of solicitation and information-gathering was evident in his interactions with the built and social landscapes of the city.

Blanton left behind no diary and kept no ledger from which to reconstruct his business. A composite description of his mobile information practices can, however, be pieced together from discrete moments in the historical record: testimony and occasional letters in pension applications, correspondence of the special examiner of the Pension Bureau tasked with investigating him, and depositions in the ensuing criminal cases. Although it is hypothetical in its construction, the description of Blanton's perambulations that follows reconstructs actual events, meetings, and conversations in which Blanton took part.[61]

When Blanton left his wood-frame house at 1104 Church Street one morning in 1899, he

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[60] Blanton's behavior was distinct from that described in other studies of African Americans' struggles for Civil War pensions. Most studies emphasize the role of the individual applicant whereby a prospective applicant sought assistance from a pension attorney to file an application before the Pension Bureau. Blanton, by contrast, actively recruited applicants. His actions suggest a belief in pensions as a collective entitlement that was owed to Black Nashvillians on the basis of service during the Civil War. Historian Brandi Brimmer emphasizes the important role Black pension attorneys played in supporting the pension claims of Black women. According to Brimmer, they "translated black women's experiences into terms the federal government recognized." Brimmer, *Claiming Union Widowhood*, 7; Brimmer, "'Her Claim for Pension Is Lawful and Just': Representing Black Union Widows in Late-Nineteenth Century North Carolina," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 1, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 207–236.

[61] The principal sources for Blanton's activities are Deposition of R. H. Blanton, January 17, 1899, Deposition of Melvina McMurray, January 21, 1899, both in claim of George Moore, Co. G, 72nd Indiana Infantry [SC 1195531]; Deposition of Tisla Smith, January 19, 1899, in claim of Joseph Smith, Co. D, 12th USCI [WO 661019]; J. A. Kellogg to R. H. Blanton, n.d., Joseph Kellogg to the Commissioner of Pensions, April 13, 1899, Deposition of Richard Blanton, July 21, 1899, Acting Chief, Law Division, to Chief of Special Examination Division, January 25, 1899, and A. W. Roome to Commissioner of Pensions, January 27, 1899, all in LCF-JAK; Deposition of Belle Henderson, Feb. 1899, in claim of Jack Green, Co. E, 16th USCI [665370]; *United States v. J. A. Kellogg*, no. 822, U.S. Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit (1900), RG 276, NARA, Chicago.

would have stepped into the busy thoroughfare to be greeted by neighbors and clients alike. He would have been accustomed to the noise of the streetcars that ran down the middle of the street. Streetcars shared Church Street with horses, carriages, and pedestrians.[62] Blanton's first stop of the day was within comfortable walking distance, westward across an overpass of more than thirty railroad lines and the covered platforms of Union Station to return to level ground at Walnut Street.[63]

Walking facilitated Blanton's information-gathering. Space was an impediment for the Pension Bureau, but, for Blanton, it was generative. Movement through space sustained Blanton's form of word-of-mouth solicitation, and solicitation was a means of archival maintenance. A porch-side conversation with an acquaintance could turn into a visit with a client.[64] When George Moore told Melvina McMurray, a Black housewife, that he had been "a waterman for a captain in the Union army," McMurry referred him to Blanton, whom she described as "a man who works up pension claims for people and gets pay due them from the government."[65] Before Moore had time to follow through, McMurray visited Blanton and told him a man named George Moore was seeking back pay for services to a Union captain. Blanton eventually met Moore on McMurray's porch to discuss his options for remuneration. After learning that Moore had been a cook for the 72nd Indiana Infantry, he walked with Moore to find Kellogg "to have his application filled out."[66] If needed, Blanton frequently escorted clients to the office of a notary, perhaps making new acquaintances who would become future clients along

[62] Weaver, "Shifting Residential Patterns of Nashville," 31.
[63] For a map of Black Bottom, see above Figure 2.2.
[64] See deposition of R. H. Blanton, January 17, 1899, in claim of George Moore, Co. G, 72nd Indiana Infantry [SC 1195531].
[65] Deposition of Melvina McMurray, January 21, 1899, in claim of George Moore, Co. G, 72nd Indiana Infantry [SC 1195531].
[66] See deposition of R. H. Blanton, January 17, 1899, in claim of George Moore, Co. G, 72nd Indiana Infantry [SC 1195531].

the way.

On this day, Blanton was on the lookout for his business associate, Joseph Kellogg. As a local Black pension sub-agent, Blanton was able to tap into networks of communication and exchange that existed alongside the sanctioned spaces of pension business. He met poor Black Nashvillians where they were: talking on front porches, walking down the street, and leaving the train station. Rather than requiring pension applicants to come to the office of a white pension attorney, Blanton brought the pension system to prospective Black applicants by visiting them in their homes and in places of work and leisure. As a sub-agent, Blanton's role in the economy of pensions was an intermediary between applicants and claims agents. It was Blanton, however, who brought the potential of federal entitlements to the people of Black Bottom. For many of his clients, Blanton was their conduit to the pension application process.

In a typical day of business, Blanton would probably have stopped at the hotel and informal office owned and operated by Kellogg. Kellogg was known to keep his notary seal at the hotel, and, if he were there, Blanton would be spared a trip to his house on Summer Street. Walnut Street was nearly always a bustle of activity. Just behind a retaining wall six city blocks long sat the freight bays of the Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis Railway and the Louisville & Nashville Railway. They serviced all of the city's inbound and outbound railroad freight. Dodging the crowded street filled with carriages and railroad workers, Blanton would have found himself in front of the aptly named Depot Hotel, which catered to workers who labored on the railroad. In 1881 an advertisement for the hotel in the Nashville city directory boasted "Prices Cheap as the Cheapest."[67]

Even if Kellogg was not at the hotel, Blanton's literacy enabled him to use it as a site of

[67] *Nashville Directory* (1880), 306. The same advertisement appeared in the 1881 directory. See *Nashville Directory* (1881).

information exchange. It was common for Kellogg to leave messages for Blanton at the desk. Scrawled in Kellogg's handwriting, Blanton read, "Come see me on Friday afternoon, do not delay."[68] The note would not have surprised Blanton, who often received mail and other communications at the hotel, where he boarded briefly in the late 1890s. If the morning was still young, perhaps Blanton remained at the hotel for a while. Doing so would have afforded him the opportunity to read a newspaper, converse with some of the hotel's long-term residents, or exchange news and information with lodgers who were visiting the city. For example, Blanton met Belle Henderson and her husband at the railroad station across the street from the hotel just as they arrived in Nashville. He approached them and asked if they "knew any people that was killed in times of the war." Henderson and her husband said yes. Belle Henderson explained that her father had died in the war, but she had not applied for a pension based on his service because "it had been so long I could not tell enough to give any satisfaction." Blanton assured her that the inquiry was worth her time. "I will go to work and find out" what was needed, he told her. Blanton encouraged the couple to accompany him to his house, where they discussed details of the potential application before he escorted them to the house of Kellogg, the notary.[69]

Kellogg's house was eight city blocks southwest of the Depot Hotel, through the heart of Black Bottom, a working-class maze of streets and alleys that lay just south of the central business district on Broad Street. The house was located just below "Hog Alley," which was named for the slaughterhouses that lined the street. Kellogg had acquired the house through his marriage, and he would later lose it to pay off a debt.[70] Kellogg often met Blanton there, and it was routine for Blanton to accompany pension applicants there for the processing of their

[68] J. A. Kellogg to R. H. Blanton, n.d., in LCF-JAK.
[69] Deposition of Belle Henderson, Feb. 1899, in claim of Jack Green, Co. E, 16th USCI [665370].
[70] Cross Examination of Edward Karl, October 16, 1899, in *United States v. J. A. Kellogg*, no. 822, U.S. Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit (1900), RG 276, NARA, Chicago, 220.

paperwork. In the eyes of Nashville's white business class, Kellogg's pension activities were a sign that he had fallen on hard times, and they tarnished his reputation. It was not Kellogg's association with African Americans per se that did so, but the fact that they were working-class and poor.[71] Kellogg's partnership with Blanton and his presence in Black Bottom made him an important resource for African Americans seeking notary services. Kellogg claimed that "during the course of his business experience he ha[d] executed over eight hundred affidavits for different colored people."[72]

While walking to Kellogg's house in Black Bottom, Blanton passed the residences of their pension clientele. One such acquaintance was Tisla Smith, whom he met as he passed through Keegan's Alley on his way to Broad Street. "My husband and I were standing on our porch," Smith later recounted, "and Mr. Blanton was passing by and my husband spoke to him."[73] Blanton's visibility in the neighborhood made him approachable, and he was a source of knowledge about the pension application process not otherwise available to the Smiths. Blanton's movement through space unlocked the possibility that the Smiths could receive a federal entitlement. When Blanton visited the house of Lou White, a pension client, he met Amanda Brown, who, he learned, had been a nurse for the army during the Civil War.[74] Blanton was not isolated behind office doors or reachable only by post. He could be seen around town doing his business. His clients could talk to him, and he would listen and assure them that their business was being attended to. For the poor African Americans with whom he lived and worked,

[71] In his appeal, Kellogg's association with his African American neighbors in Black Bottom was offered as evidence of his insanity. See *United States v. J. A. Kellogg*, no. 822, U.S. Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit (1900), RG 276, NARA, Chicago.
[72] Joseph Kellogg to the Commissioner of Pensions, April 13, 1899, in LCF-JAK.
[73] Deposition of Tisla Smith, January 19, 1899, in claim of Joseph Smith, Co. D, 12th USCI [WO 661019].
[74] Deposition of Richard Blanton, July 21, 1899, in LCF-JAK.

Blanton's practice of browsing neighborhoods translated vernacular information into the bureaucratic language of the Pension Bureau.

While in Black Bottom, Blanton may have taken the opportunity to check in on another of his pension clients, Mary Hassenpflung, who operated a saloon in the neighborhood. Hassenpflung's saloon catered to many needs. Part saloon, part grocery, part sporting house, and allegedly part brothel, Hassenpflung's establishment was typical of the neighborhood's working-class businesses.[75] In 1900, Nashville was home to 170 saloons, a full quarter of which operated in Black Bottom.[76] Like her saloon, Hassenpflung crafted an identity that resisted categorical boundaries. Her biography befuddled the special examiners tasked with evaluating her pension claim. She was known by many names, including Mary Hassenpflung, Mary Ross, Mary Young, or simply Indian Mary. "This woman is alleged to be an Indian," reported the special examiner assigned to her case, "but runs with negroes, and claims to have married a German soldier in a colored church."[77] One pension examiner, frustrated with the residents of Black Bottom, complained to his supervisor that "the clients and witnesses in our cases live all huddled together and each negro goes by three or four different names—so you can imagine what a time we are having."[78]

Hassenpflung's saloon confounded the Pension Bureau's attempt to impose definitive categories on lived experience, but what amounted to categorical confusion for the Pension

[75] Sol Cohn's establishment was another example. "[I]n the rear of his grocery store is a saloon and to one side is a barber shop," reported the *Banner* on August 6, 1894. Howard Rabinowitz suggests that such use of space was typical of groceries and saloons across the urban South in the late nineteenth century. "Most of these groceries were small frame dwellings which sold meat, vegetables, and liquor," he writes. "Frequently there was a small saloon attached." *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 113.
[76] Summerville, "The City and the Slum," 184.
[77] Acting Chief, Law Division, to Chief of Special Examination Division, January 25, 1899, in LCF-JAK.
[78] A. W. Roome to Commissioner of Pensions, January 27, 1899, in LCF-JAK.

Bureau was perfectly legible to Blanton, who was himself also known by the name Richard Vincent. It is likely that Blanton was introduced to Hassenpflung through the same word-of-mouth solicitation by which he found other pension applicants. Or perhaps she was introduced to Blanton through his association with Kellogg, who frequented local gambling halls and saloons.[79] Neither Blanton nor Kellogg were strangers in Black Bottom's communities of working-class white and Black residents, and their shared social location was central to their ability to make claims on the federal government. A neighborhood that the city's newspapers and the Pension Bureau could see only as a place of entertainment or even vice was, for Hassenpflung and Blanton, a site of community and social relationships. Working with Blanton as a sub-agent, Hassenpflung made a claim for entitlements from behind the bar of her saloon.

Claiming Landscape

Alongside his grassroots network of people, Blanton developed information surrogates from the landscape, in particular the Nashville National Cemetery. Browsing the names of members of the U.S. Colored Troops interred at the cemetery was far more time and cost effective than mailing individual requests to the Pension Bureau. At the cemetery, Blanton gathered information from the interred legacy of wartime Black Nashville and turned it into a meaningful tool for the living.

Just as Blanton conversed with the living Black communities of Nashville, he also turned to the national cemetery for information. For Blanton, the cemetery was both a memorial and an archive. As the resting place of hundreds of Black Civil War soldiers, it was a space of memorialization. At the same time, it was an archive of information about the military service of

[79] Direct Examination of John S. Warren, October 16, 1899, in *United States v. J. A. Kellogg*, no. 822, U.S. Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit (1900), RG 276, NARA, Chicago, 169.

men who had fought and died in the Union army. The cemetery was thus both a repository of bodies and a body of information. Blanton saw the cemetery as a place for the living as well as the dead, and he used it as a resource for information-gathering that was altogether different from the processes employed by the Pension Bureau.

Blanton circumvented the bureau's monopoly of information by visiting the Nashville National Cemetery, which had opened in 1866.[80] For Blanton, the cemetery was a vital space. He would visit the cemetery and examine the names of the Black soldiers buried there. Each headstone included the deceased soldier's name, rank, company, regiment, and date of death. It is not known whether Blanton also had access to the cemetery manifest, which listed the location of each burial plot and the name of the interred. If so, he would have been able to easily look up the names of men buried on the grounds. If not, he had to rely on browsing among the headstones. Either way, Blanton's visits to the national cemetery typified his vernacular means of accessing, by other means, information in the official records that were so important to the Pension Bureau.

Blanton's visits to the national cemetery followed his own logic and needs. Traveling to the cemetery would almost certainly take an entire day, as it was located seven miles north of downtown Nashville and therefore required hired transportation via train, horse, or carriage. The cemetery was valuable to Blanton because it included more information than a muster roll, which he did not have, or an inquiry sent to the Pension Bureau, which was costly and time-consuming. Furthermore, the bureau would answer inquiries only by individual applicants or their agents—not sub-agents like Blanton. At the cemetery, Blanton could review the records of deceased soldiers *en masse*.

The cemetery offered Blanton two opportunities. First, reading the headstones provided a

[80] J. W. Denis, "The Nashville City Cemetery," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1943): 30-42.

list of deceased Black soldiers, many of whom had ties to Middle Tennessee, if not Nashville itself, prior to enlistment into the army and death during the war. With a list of names and regiments in hand, Blanton could confer with acquaintances in Nashville to identify living relatives and assess their eligibility for a widow's or dependent's pension. In this way, Blanton solicited business for himself and expanded the Black pension network of Nashville.

Second, Blanton visited the cemetery much as a researcher would visit an archive. When a widow or dependent child of a deceased veteran approached Blanton with interest in filing a pension application, few had detailed knowledge of the veteran's military service, precise date of death, or even, in some cases, name recorded at enlistment. If the soldier had perished during the war and was buried at the national cemetery, his headstone offered Blanton a means to quickly verify his rank and regiment. Of course, Blanton could have asked Kellogg to write to the Pension Bureau and request a special examination to gather the missing information. But special examinations, while valuable to many applicants, proceeded on a timetable set by the bureau and also opened the applicant's life to the bureau's scrutiny. Furthermore, inquiries cost time and postage, neither of which Blanton and his clients could afford. Blanton, for his part, managed almost 100 pension applications as a pension sub-agent. The Nashville national cemetery, while not feasible for Blanton to frequent, provided him with an opportunity to access authoritative information that was unmediated by the Pension Bureau or legal professionals. As he walked through the cemetery, Blanton read the history of Nashville's Black military service and transformed the record of the dead into a tool for the living.

Richard Blanton's perambulations across Nashville were a means of community archiving, a process of gathering and organizing information for practical use. Blanton's methods of information-gathering through social interactions followed a "hidden transcript" that was not

legible to the Pension Bureau.[81] Interaction with the Pension Bureau was transactional. Information was required by the bureau, and information was produced by the applicants. However objective the transactions were designed to be, they were made up of actions that were shaped by society, politics, and technology. Blanton's work as an intermediary illustrates more than how African Americans applied for a pension; it is a rare glimpse of how poor African Americans claimed access to the federal government in the late nineteenth-century South. Blanton created a community archive by conversing with local people, drawing on personal and shared historical experiences, and transforming a cemetery into a place of research.

Blanton's Clients

Blanton worked on behalf of African Americans in Nashville who experienced challenges claiming Civil War pensions. He helped Black residents of Black Bottom draw on social relationships to enable applications. Community information, he believed, could remedy the deficiencies of government records and satisfy the evidentiary standards of the Pension Bureau. Just as Black men and women had vouched for their kin, co-laborers, and acquaintances who were seeking back pay in 1864, social relationships were also a source of evidence for Civil War pension claims.

Among the most common relationship mobilized to support pension claims were those of comrades in arms. Pension officials sought confirmation in military records and requested information on hospital stays and discharge status from the War Department. But all too often, pension applicants were unable to provide enough information to enable such inquiries. Ann Pate, a Black Bottom resident, was in an unenviable but common position when she applied for a

[81] For "hidden transcript," see James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

widow's pension without knowledge of the company in which her deceased husband had served. After receiving Pate's application, pension officials wrote to the War Department "requesting that a careful search be made for record of service of Henry Pate in Co. A, or any other company of the 110 U.S.C. Inf."[82] When the records were insufficient to prove disability or military service, special investigators sought testimony from officers and comrades who could corroborate an applicant's claim.[83] Wary after her claim's initial rejection, Pate pursued her own means of gathering evidence. She employed Blanton to search for her husband's comrades.[84]

Blanton's introduction to Ann Pate was not by chance; it was the result of a vernacular method of solicitation and service that connected poor African Americans to the Pension Bureau outside what the bureau regarded as official channels. Pate did not visit a law office; Blanton met her at her house. Such meetings were common for Blanton, who regularly worked with poor clients like Pate who had already unsuccessfully tried to take claims to white attorneys. Another such claimant was Chatta Booker, an African American widow whose father had labored and

[82] Commissioner of Pensions to Secretary of War, March 18, 1895, in claim of Ann Pate, widow of Henry Pate, Co. A, 110th USCI [CC 441326]. For similar requests to the War Department, see Assistant Adjutant General to Commissioner of Pensions, May 8, 1869, in claim of Matilda Fox, widow of Benjamin Fox, Co. A, 13th USCI [WC 134437]; Commissioner of Pensions to Secretary of War, October 15, 1895, in claim of Albert Bernard, Co. I, 17th USCI [CC 514133]; Auditor of the War Department to Commissioner of Pensions, December 30, 1898, in claim of Cato Briggies, Co. K, 13th USCI [CC 671709]; Auditor of the War Department to Commissioner of Pensions, January 31, 1910, in claim of Henrietta Young, widow of John Joyce, Co. A, 13th USCI [WC 132930]; Commissioner of Pensions to Secretary of War, April 19, 1890, in claim of Frank Kinnard, Co. J, 13th USCI [XC 1065565]; Assistant Adjutant General to Commissioner of Pensions, April 4, 1866, in claim of Minnie Martin, widow of Martin Lewis, Co. A, 13th USCI [CC 82575]; and Commissioner of Pensions to Secretary of War, August 24, 1897, in claim of Ellen McGavoc, widow of Edmund McGavoc, unassigned, 17th USCI [WC 533147], all in Civil War Pension Files, RG 15, NARA, Washington, DC.

[83] Special investigators were pension clerks assigned to field duty and dispatched across the U.S. Historian Gustavus Weber writes that special investigators were "in charge of cases requiring special examination in the field and preparing indexes thereof; directing the method of inquiry by special examiners; aiding in prosecuting offenders against the pension laws; and auditing the expense accounts of special examiners." Weber, *Bureau of Pensions*, 46.

[84] A. W. Roome to District Attorney for the Middle District of Tennessee, January 31, 1899, Claimant Statement of Ann Pate, March 4, 1897, both in claim of Henry Pate, Co. A, 110th USCI [CC 441326].

died in the construction of Fort Negley. For Booker, Blanton was something of a last resort. She had gone from pension agent to pension agent only to have her application put on hold after she had already paid the processing fees. At one point, Booker asked her then-agent, P. W. Adams, about the status of her application and he told her to mind her own business. Adams would not even tell her the application number the Pension Bureau had assigned to her father's claim. At various times, Booker paid Adams as much as $20, yet, as she told Blanton, "I can't get no satisfaction from him." Her application lay dormant for six years before she sought Blanton's assistance. With renewed hope, Booker brought her claim to Blanton because she was "poor and needed the money." Blanton encouraged her to write directly to the commissioner of pensions inquiring about the status of her application and offered to help.[85]

Unlike the Pension Bureau and unlike white attorneys in Nashville, Blanton promised fast results and regular communication. Blanton said of one client, a veteran of the 13th U.S. Colored Infantry named Bazzle Moss, "I see him every week." Like Chatta Booker, Moss took his business to Blanton after "he tried to get his money and failed" with other pension agents. Blanton took Moss to Kellogg's office, where Kellogg wrote up his affidavit and notarized the paperwork that same day.[86] Blanton's reputation thus preceded him as he walked the streets of Black Bottom. He was a Black veteran, local, and reliable, a man who believed that "any man who worked for the government could get pay for it."[87]

Claiming Relationships

[85] Pension Bureau Envelope, July 27, 1899, and Chatta Booker to Commissioner of Pensions, March 19, 1898, both in claim of Briggies Cato, Co. K, 13th USCI [CC 671709].
[86] Blanton quoted in Commissioner of Pensions to Secretary of the Interior, March 31, 1899, in LCF-JAK.
[87] Quotation in Deposition of Melvina McMurray, January 21, 1899, in claim of George Moore, Co G., 72nd Indiana Infantry [SC 1195531].

Unfortunately, Blanton's belief in rightful remuneration proved difficult to bring to fruition for many Black pension applicants. Often Pension Bureau functionaries could not identify a soldier's commanding officer either from the information provided by the applicant or from relevant military records. In such circumstances, applicants were asked to provide the names of compatriots of the soldier who could be interviewed. For instance, when Albert Bernard applied for an increase to his invalid pension in 1895, the Pension Bureau reviewed its own records before requesting references from Bernard himself. Frank E. Anderson, chief of the bureau's Law Division, wrote to W. H. Nicholson, chief of the Army and Navy Survivors' Division, to request "a full list of the post-office addresses of the surviving members . . . and of the staff officers" of Company I, 17th U.S. Colored Infantry.[88] Such requests were frequent enough that the bureau created a printed form headed "List of Officers and Comrades" with space for the name, rank, and address of up to nine references. Although Bernard had enlisted and served in Tennessee and remained a resident of the state, his comrades had moved across the country. Nevertheless, the bureau's archive succeeded in providing the names of potential witnesses even when such witnesses lived far from one another. The Survivors' Division furnished the names of seventeen men who had served in Bernard's company and regiment.[89] Even so, there was no guarantee that any of the men would remember Bernard or be able to provide evidence to aid in the evaluation of his application. For example, when Julian Webster, a pensioner and veteran of the 84th U.S. Colored Infantry, was shown a photograph of a man who had reportedly served in his company, he responded that he recognized neither the photograph

[88] Frank E. Anderson to W. H. Nicholson, July 11, 1895, in claim of Albert Bernard, Co. I, 17th USCI [CC 514133].

[89] The officers and comrades identified as potential sources of information lived in nine different states (Alabama, California, Kansas, Maryland, Mississippi, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Tennessee) and the District of Columbia. S. W. Roberts to W. H. Frank E. Anderson, November 25, 1895, in claim of Albert Bernard, Co. I, 17th USCI [CC 514133].

nor the man pictured in it.[90]

Blanton knew the importance of gathering information from comrades and acquaintances for pension applications. He and other veterans in effect constituted a communal archive—witnesses on call to corroborate the claims of comrades. Soldiers who swore affidavits for one comrade were likely to swear affidavits for others as well. The applicants for whom they acted as witnesses often returned the favor and corroborated evidence in the witnesses' own claims. Blanton relied on the men of Company A, 13th U.S. Colored Infantry, in which he had served, to swear affidavits for his own pension application as well as to give testimony supporting other Black veterans. Richard Blanton, Thomas Perkins, William Frierson, and Junius Armstrong, who had all served in the same company and regiment during the Civil War, provided corroborating testimony in support of the pension claim of William Rankins.[91] Three of them (Armstrong, Frierson, and Perkins) also gave testimony to support the pension claim of Susan Bailey, the widow of their comrade Alfred Bailey.[92] When former soldiers could not provide corroborating evidence for a comrade's claim, they suggested other men who might be able to do so. Blanton himself told a special examiner that he never knew the claimant under investigation but offered the name and location of another veteran who did know the claimant and had served in the same regiment.[93]

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[90] Deposition of Julian Webster, February 3, 1911, in claim of Mary Miller, widow of Martin Chambers, Co. C, 13th USCI [WC 717586].
[91] Affidavit of William Frierson, December 24, 1894, Affidavit of Julius Armstrong, January 5, 1895, Affidavit of Richard Blanton, January 11, 1895, Affidavit of Thomas Perkins, January 10, 1895, and Affidavit of Solomon Gant, January 10, 1895, all in claim of William Rankins, Co. A, 13th USCI, [CC 393354], Civil War Pension Files, RG 15, NARA, Washington, DC.
[92] For a list of all affidavits provided in the claim of Susan Bailey, see Chief of the Army and Navy Survivors Division to Chief of the Southern Division of the Pension Bureau, July 8, 1901, in claim of Susan Bailey, widow of Alfred Bailey, Co. A, 13th USCI [CC 985545], Civil War Pension Files, RG 15, NARA, Washington, DC.
[93] Deposition of Richard Blanton, January 18, 1899, in claim of Hannah Mayes, minor of Jack Kimbro, unassigned, 40th USCI [WC 661519], Civil War Pension Files, RG 15, NARA, Washington, DC.

Blanton was aware of the skepticism with which the Pension Bureau viewed the claims of Black applicants. At one point, his own application for a pension stalled after the bureau declared his personal statement insufficient proof of his age. Bureau agents eventually located W. B. Brown, a white man who had grown up in the same area as Blanton. When deposed by examiners, Brown stated that Blanton's mother had been enslaved by his uncle when Blanton was born. He estimated Blanton's age by recalling that he had been six or seven years old at the time. Brown knew of no record of Blanton's birth but stated that "we were boys together."[94]

Blanton could draw on the social landscape of Black Bottom for the purpose of pension applications because he and his clients had a shared history and faced many of the same evidentiary struggles. Blanton had difficulty verifying the basic facts of his own military service, and, as a result, his application was rejected repeatedly. He supplied the Pension Bureau with affidavits from men he had known before enlistment, during military service, and after he fell ill as a soldier in the 13th U.S. Colored Infantry. One fellow soldier who remained in Nashville, Julius Blare, swore that he had known Blanton his entire life, "knew him before he went into the Army and know of his being a soldier, and still acquainted with him" and saw "him nearly every day."[95] With the assistance of Eugenia Walker, a Black schoolteacher who recorded the testimony, Blanton forwarded affidavits from eight other men who had served alongside him in the same company and regiment and had been his "constant companions" throughout the war.[96]

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[94] Deposition of W. B. Brown, May 1, 1905, in claim of Richard Blanton, Co. A, 13th USCI [SC 2496184].

[95] Affidavit of Julius Blare, December 3, 1896, in claim of Richard Blanton, Co. A, 13th USCI [SC 2496184]. See also Affidavits of James Coleman, December 3, 1896, and George Burnett, December 3, 1896, in the same file.

[96] Affidavit of Thomas Perkins, June 5, 1894, Affidavit of Greene H. Anderson, June 5, 1894, Affidavit of Ben Oney Martin, June 5, 1894, Affidavit of Ben Martin, May 4, 1894, Affidavit of Solomon Grant, May 4, 1894, Affidavit of Thomas Perkins, May 4, 1894, Affidavit of William Frierson, February 20, 1896, and Affidavit of Junius Armstrong, February 20, 1886, all in claim of Richard Blanton, Co. A, 13th USCI

All of them had fought in the battle of Nashville. Even so, the bureau rejected Blanton's claim after not finding his name on the regiment's muster rolls and after Blanton failed to identify an officer in his regiment who could attest to his service. Blanton informed the bureau that he was "unable to obtain the affidavit of a commissioned officer or orderly sergeant" of his company or regiment, and neither could he "secure the affidavits of the surgeon or assistant surgeon" of his regiment. "[T]heir whereabouts are unknown to me," Blanton wrote. While Blanton maintained close relationships with comrades, many of whom he continued to see daily, he had not maintained a relationship with white officers of his regiment.[97]

Blanton's connections to a local network of Black veterans proved equally valuable for widows of Black soldiers. Widows were even more reliant on the testimony of others because their relationship to the soldier was not documented in military records. Widows who had married a soldier before emancipation seldom had any record of their marriage, especially if they had been enslaved. They therefore had to draw upon testimony by friends and neighbors as witnesses to the union. William Allen appeared before the clerk of the Davidson County Court to swear that he was present when Minnie Martin married Lewis Martin in 1843. At the time, all three were enslaved in Gallatin, Tennessee, and no record was kept of the marriage, although Allen remembered that Tom Scurray, a Black minister, had officiated. Lewis Martin enlisted in Co. E, 13th U.S. Colored Infantry, and perished from wounds incurred in the battle of Nashville.[98] Henrietta Joyce faced the same documentary burden. On October 25, 1865, she and Elisha Helms stood before the clerk of the court of Davidson County, Tennessee, to confirm

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[SC 2496184]; U.S. manuscript census, 1900, population, Civil District No. 15, Davidson County, Enumeration District 131, p. 6.

[97] Affidavit of Richard Blanton, June 5, 1894, in claim of Richard Blanton, Co. A, 13th USCI [SC 2496184].

[98] Affidavit of William Allen, n.d., and Commissioner of Pensions, April 4, 1866, both in claim of Minnie Martin, widow of Martin Lewis, Co. A, 13th USCI [CC 82575].

Henrietta's marriage to her late husband, John Joyce. They did so as part of Henrietta's effort to secure a widow's pension based on her husband's military service and his untimely death in the regimental hospital of the 13th U.S. Colored Infantry. Like other African American widows seeking a pension, Henrietta had to prove her marriage to a skeptical Pension Bureau. Richard Blanton, who had served in the same company as Henrietta's husband, connected her with his former comrade Elisha Helms. Blanton and Helms each swore before the clerk of the court that he had known Henrietta and John as "living together as husband and wife" for the two years before John enlisted.[99] Similar records are ubiquitous in the pension claims of formerly enslaved women widowed by the Civil War. African American widows relied on their social relationships to overcome the silences in slavery's archival record.[100]

Blanton's movement about Black Bottom brought potential access to federal entitlements to the places where poor African Americans lived, worked, and enjoyed what leisure they could. "The government did not want to beat anyone," Blanton told one acquaintance, "but so many had tried to beat the government that it was mighty particular to have a claim well proved."[101] Blanton mobilized the informal relationships he cultivated on porches, in the streets, and in saloons to "well prove" the claims of Black Nashville.

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[99] Declaration of Widow's Army Pension, October 25, 1865, and Claim for Widow's Pension, with Minor Children, July 25, 1866, both in claim of Henrietta Joyce, widow of John Joyce, Co. A, 13th USCI [WC 132930], Civil War Pension Files, RG 15, NARA, Washington, DC. John Joyce enlisted on August 12, 1863, and died of scurvy just over a year later on September 25, 1864, at Johnsonville, Tennessee.

[100] The Pension Bureau began accepting marriages "proved by credible eye witnesses" after the Supplemental Act of July 1864. Brimmer, *Claiming Union Widowhood*, 6. For other examples of marriages proved by affidavit, see Claim for Widow's Pension, with Minor Children, November 13, 1865, in claim of Matilda Fox, widow of Benjamin Fox, Co. A, 13th USCI [WC 134437]; Widow's Pension, with Minor Children, July 25, 1866, in claim of Henrietta Joyce, widow of John Joyce, Co. A, 13th USCI [WC 132930].

[101] Quoted in Deposition of Melvina McMurray, January 21, 1899, in claim of George Moore, Co. G, 72nd Indiana Infantry [WO 1195531].

Conclusion

The efforts of refugees from slavery who claimed space for Black community in Black Bottom laid the foundation for collective claims-making in the years to come. Richard Blanton knew this better than anyone. Not only was he a veteran who had served in Nashville during the Civil War, but by the 1890s, he was also a resident of Black Bottom. He knew many of the residents shared a history of military service because it was his history. Blanton's methods of vernacular information-gathering—a form of browsing that mobilized the physical spaces of Black Bottom as repositories of information—utilized the informal practices of socialization common among residents in the neighborhood. This chapter identified two competing archives, the formal archive of the Pension Bureau that was designed to overcome distance and reduce variation among pension applications and a vernacular archive mobilized by Blanton. As Blanton demonstrated by searching for gold on St. Cloud Hill, he was open to discovery.

The Pension Bureau solicited information to evaluate, while Blanton solicited information to enable. Unlike the recordkeeping system designed by Commissioner of Pensions Raum, which placed the burden of proof on individual applicants, Blanton trusted his clients. He operated on the belief that Black men and women who had worked for the U.S. government or served in its armies deserved payment for their labor. To deliver such entitlements, Blanton walked the streets of Black Bottom. Rather than see space as a barrier to overcome, Blanton laid claim to place, using the neighborhood as a resource for making persuasive pension applications. He browsed the public spaces of Black Nashville—cemeteries, homes, porches, streets, saloons—and sought information that might establish entitlement to a pension. Blanton was entrusted with the faith of his community. He translated lived experience into the bureaucratic language of the pension application process. His walking mobilized claims-making.

Chapter 5

"Filed in good faith": Vernacular Information-Gathering under Investigation

Melvina Patton protested when she saw Joseph Kellogg write the name of Carroll Simpson. "Carroll Simpson might be dead," she cautioned. Brushing aside Patton's concern, Kellogg forged Simpson's signature.[1] It was January, 1898, and Patton may have sat back, a bit uneasy, at her kitchen table. She had employed Kellogg, a white notary public, to process her application for a Civil War widow's pension based on her late husband's service in the U.S. Colored Infantry. Patton had been introduced to Kellogg by Richard Blanton, who lived not far from her in Black Bottom. Patton certainly knew that Blanton was "working up" the pension papers of many other Black women in the neighborhood, and he had accompanied Kellogg to her house.[2]

"Where does Carroll live?" Kellogg asked, beginning to write the affidavit he would attribute to Simpson.

"Out in Estill Springs, Franklin County," she replied.

Kellogg had been interviewing Patton about details that could prove she had been married to her late husband, Moses Patton. Having already notarized Patton's affidavit attesting to her marriage, he told her that she would need a corroborating affidavit. A man by the name of Carroll Simpson had attended their wedding, Patton told Kellogg. After completing the

[1] Abram M. Tillman, "Brief and Argument on Behalf of the United States," *United States v. J. A. Kellogg*, no. 822, U.S. Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit, (1900), 6, in Legal Case File of J. A. Kellogg (hereafter cited as LCF-JAK), Case Files of Attorneys, Agents, Pensioners and Others Relating to the Prosecution of Pension Claims and the Investigation of Fraudulent Practices 1862-1914, Law Division, Records of the Bureau of Pensions and Its Predecessors, 1805-1895, RG 15, NARA, Washington DC.
[2] Deposition of Melvina Patton, January 14, 1899, in claim of Melvina Patton, widow of Moses Patton, Co. B, 35 USCI [WO 657855].

fraudulent affidavit, Kellogg asked Patton's daughter, Mandy, and her fourteen-year-old grandson, Larry, to sign as witnesses; both complied.[3] One by one, their marks were fixed on an affidavit to secure a pension for the widowed, and now elderly, Melvina Patton.[4]

Once the ink had dried, Kellogg folded the affidavit twice, tucked it into his jacket pocket, and left the kitchen and the Patton family to their afternoon.[5] At the time, neither Kellogg nor Blanton knew that clerks at the U.S. Pension Bureau in Washington, D.C., were already reviewing documents they had submitted on behalf of Black Nashvillians, scrutinizing them for potential criminal practices.[6] Over the next year, the Pension Bureau would unleash a team of special examiners to conduct a criminal investigation that targeted Black pension applications from across the city—the "Nashville cases," as they were known within the bureau.

Kellogg had, of course, committed forgery—a felony punishable by up to five years in prison or a fine of between $1,000 and $5,000.[7] His actions violated both the vernacular information practices of Blanton and the requirements of pension law by failing to represent Patton in good faith. Patton trusted Blanton and, by extension, Kellogg to translate her lived experience into legal documentation that was recognizable to the Pension Bureau. Kellogg violated his obligations as a notary public and claims agent and forged the affidavit against the protestations of both Patton and Blanton, as they would later swear in depositions taken under

[3] Deposition of Larry DeMoss, January 25, 1899, in claim of Melvina Patton, widow of Moses Patton, Co. B, 35 USCI [WO 657855].
[4] General Affidavit of Carroll Simpson, January 20, 1898, in claim of Melvina Patton, widow of Moses Patton, Co. B, 35 USCI [WO 657855].
[5] Deposition of Mandy DeMoss, January 26, 1899, in claim of Melvina Patton, widow of Moses Patton, Co. B, 35 USCI [WO 657855].
[6] Chief of Law Division Stephen A. Cuddy to Chief of the Special Examination Division, October 20, 1898, LCF-JAK.
[7] U.S. Pension Bureau, *A Digest of the Laws of the United States Governing the Granting of Army and Navy Pensions and Bounty-Land Warrants; Decisions of the Secretary of the Interior, and Rulings and Orders of the Commissioner of Pensions Thereunder* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1885), 238.

criminal investigation.[8] Kellogg's decision to falsify evidence was irresponsible at best. He misled Patton, endangered her claim, and put everyone involved—himself, Patton, and Blanton—in potential legal jeopardy. Ironically, Kellogg's forgery was also an act of trust, a choice to believe. Whether Kellogg expected Patton to receive a pension or not, he decerned potential value in relying on the vernacular information practices of Richard Blanton and the clients he recruited in Black Bottom. Kellogg forged the signature of Carroll Simpson because Melvina Patton told him that Simpson could confirm her marriage. Kellogg had the faith to believe Patton and the audacity to deceive her.

This chapter argues that the politics of space—the way people, groups, and institutions navigated challenges posed by geographical and temporal distance—was consequential for the ways in which Civil War pensions were claimed by African Americans and evaluated by the Pension Bureau. Melvina Patton's memory and the vernacular information practices of Richard Blanton described above, in Chapter 4, illustrate a politics of place that relied on lived experience, memory, and mutual trust to locate sources of knowledge. The Pension Bureau, on the other hand, developed very different methods for locating, identifying, and evaluating pension applicants and the witnesses who testified on their behalf. The bureau relied on the record-keeping of clerks in Washington, D.C., the acumen of field agents dispersed across the country, and an ability to share information with other federal agencies to police and prosecute violations of U.S. pension law. Spatial information was central to the way the Pension Bureau managed and evaluated claims. Mobilizing local relationships was a low-cost means of information-gathering for a member of the local community, such as Blanton. For the Pension Bureau, however, investigating such relationships proved an expensive endeavor. It took a team

[8] Deposition of Melvina Patton, January 26, 1899, Deposition of Richard Blanton, January 24, 1899, in claim of Melvina Patton, widow of Moses Patton, Co. B, 35 USCI [WO 657855].

of special examiners to first comprehend and then retrace the communal claims that Blanton mobilized from the streets of Black Bottom.

Melvina Patton's memory of Carroll Simpson and the liberties that Kellogg took with her recollection are indicative of the opportunities and challenges Black pension applicants faced when they relied on vernacular methods of information-gathering. Patton had no marriage certificate but remembered the name of a man who could attest to her relationship. She did not know if Simpson was still alive but knew that he used to live in Estill Springs, more than eighty miles away. Tracking Simpson down would require time and money. Melvina Patton, a single mother, had little of either. By forging Simpson's affidavit, Kellogg wagered on the strength of Patton's social relationships. He trusted what she said to be true. For a brief moment, as his pen touched the paper, the distance between Nashville and Estill Springs collapsed, as did the decades between past and present, leaving only the bond between Melvina Patton and Carroll Simpson. Patton may have looked down at her kitchen table and seen Simpson's signature at the bottom of the affidavit as if he had been there himself. With few material resources, Patton relied on vernacular methods of information-gathering in an attempt to secure government entitlements she believed were due her and her family.[9]

When Melvina Patton gave the name of an acquaintance who had known her before the Civil War, she drew on a long history of Black women who mobilized social relationships to make claims for widows' pensions.[10] Patton knew what she said to be true, and so did Simpson.

[9] Deposition of Melvina Patton, January 14, 1899, in claim of Melvina Patton, widow of Moses Patton, Co. B, 35 USCI [WO 657855].

[10] To apply for a Civil War soldier's or widow's pension, African Americans delivered testimony before justices of the peace, submitted affidavits to county clerks, and swore oaths before notaries public. Black pension applicants had to mobilize social relationships to gather testimony from acquaintances near and far, past and present, in order to establish entitlement to a pension. This was no easy task, as the process of interacting with a sprawling federal bureaucracy was complicated, time-consuming, and costly.

Special examiners of the Pension Bureau later located Simpson. He testified before the U.S. Circuit Court that the forged signature might just as well have been his.[11] Everything recorded in Melvina Patton's affidavit was true and accurate except the signature of the absent witness, Carroll Simpson. Although her relationship with Simpson extended more than thirty-five years into the past and more than eighty miles across Tennessee, Patton was attempting to transform their connection into what historian Steven Hahn calls "socially meaningful power."[12] Central to the success of Patton's claim was her ability to recall relationships that existed across both distance and time, awaken them from dormancy, and draw on them in an attempt to claim a Civil War widow's pension.

The Pension Bureau evaluated the applications of Black claimants with a critical eye toward geographical distance. Historians have used the pension applications of Black veterans and their kin to explore the life and culture of the enslaved, the nature of Black domestic relationships in slavery and in freedom, postwar struggles for citizenship, and late nineteenth-century Black working-class politics.[13] They have shown that African Americans faced an

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Historian Brandi Brimmer argues that Black soldiers' wives, widows, and mothers formed a grassroots pension network to assist one another in navigating the complex federal bureaucracy. Brandi Clay Brimmer, *Claiming Union Widowhood: Race, Respectability, and Poverty in the Post-Emancipation South* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 101-121.

[11] Deposition of Carroll Simpson, January 30, 1899, in claim of Melvina Patton, widow of Moses Patton, Co. B, 35 USCI [WO 657855]. See also Abram M. Tillman, "Brief and Argument on Behalf of the United States," *United States v. J. A. Kellogg*, no. 822, U.S. Court of Appeals, Sixth Circuit, (1900), 6.

[12] Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South, from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 3.

[13] Examples include Leslie A. Schwalm, *A Hard Fight for We: Women's Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 1997); Donald R. Shaffer, "'I Do Not Suppose That Uncle Sam Looks at the Skin': African Americans and the Civil War Pension System, 1865-1934," *Civil War History* 46, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 132-147; Noralee Frankel, *Freedom's Women: Black Women and Families in Civil War Era Mississippi* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); Elizabeth Regosin, *Freedom's Promise: Ex-Slave Families and Citizenship in the Age of Emancipation* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2002); Beverly Schwartzberg, "'Lots of Them Did That': Desertion, Bigamy, and Marital Fluidity in Late-Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 3 (Spring 2004): 573-600; Donald R. Shaffer, *After the Glory: The Struggles of Black Civil War*

application process that discriminated on the basis of race, gender, sexuality, age, and conformity to the norms of respectability held by white employees of the bureau. The tactics used by the Pension Bureau to investigate the "Nashville cases" illustrate the important role that geographical information played in the bureau's efforts to surveil and criminalize grassroots Black strategies of claims-making.

This chapter explores the work of Albert W. Roome, a Pension Bureau special examiner and lead investigator in the Nashville cases. It argues that geographical information about the location of Black pension applicants was essential to Roome's ability to comprehend the relationships that sustained Blanton and Kellogg's client base. Dispatched to Nashville in late December, 1898, Roome immediately recognized that he was at an information deficit compared to the local knowledge of Blanton and Kellogg. In order to comprehend their practices, Roome turned to the Pension Bureau for information and manpower. The bureau reassigned four investigators to join the two already stationed in Nashville. Equally significant for the success of the investigation, the bureau created and sent to Roome a document set containing the name and last recorded location of every pensioner in Nashville and surrounding Davidson County who had been awarded a pension in the past three years. Roome used this spatial information to retrace the relational networks that sustained Blanton's client base. The bureau's investigative team fanned out across Nashville in search of pension recipients who had worked with Blanton

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Veterans (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); Andrew L. Slap, "'No Regular Marriage': African American Veterans and Marriage Practices during Reconstruction," in *This Distracted and Anarchical People: New Answers for Old Questions about the Civil War-Era North*, ed. Andrew L. Slap and Michael T. Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 171-183; Tera W. Hunter, *Bound in Wedlock: Slave and Free Black Marriage in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017); Anthony E. Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Dale Kretz, *Administering Freedom: The State of Emancipation after the Freedmen's Bureau* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022); Holly A. Pinheiro Jr., *The Families' Civil War: Black Soldiers and the Fight for Racial Justice* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2022).

and Kellogg. But even with meticulous records at his disposal, Roome also had to rely on a community informant—a Black Nashvillian named Stephen Lyons—to gather the information required to evaluate the networks Richard Blanton had created and maintained.[14]

Following Roome's investigation, and at his recommendation, the U.S. attorney for the Middle District of Tennessee chose Kellogg's forgery of Carroll Simpson's signature, along with several other examples of forgery, as the centerpiece of a criminal case against Kellogg. The prominent role that the meeting at Melvina Patton's kitchen table played in the Nashville investigations illustrates the importance of the politics of space for both the operations of the Pension Bureau and Black claims-making in the late nineteenth century. Space created a fissure in the vernacular information practices of Black pension applicants. Patton could recall a past relationship and identify a witness who was miles away, but the information practices of the Pension Bureau required that every affidavit be signed in the presence of a notary. In the end, distance was essential to proving forgery. The district attorney was careful to select a clear-cut instance in which Kellogg had forged the signature of a man not physically present. In the argument of the district attorney and in memos by the special examiners of the Pension Bureau, it was presumed that distance between pension applicants and their social networks encouraged corner-cutting and, as suggested by the evidence in Patton's case, outright fraud.

The Nashville Cases

[14] For Roome's arrival in Nashville, see A. W. Roome to H. Clay Evans, January 7, 1899, LCF-JAK. For Roome's request for more information and manpower, see A. W. Roome to George C. Stewart, January 10, 1899, LCF-JAK. For the list of pensioners residing in Nashville and Davidson County, see John T. Wilder to H. Clay Evans, December 6, 1898, enclosing "Nashville Cases," RG 15, NARA, Washington, DC. For the employment of Stephen Lyons, see A. W. Roome to H. Clay Evans, January 31, 1899, LCF-JAK.

Richard Blanton began working with Joseph Kellogg in the late 1890s. The timing of their partnership was not propitious. As discussed above, in Chapter 4, the pension law enacted in 1890 made a new class of people eligible for Civil War pensions by no longer requiring a veteran's disability to be service-related. As the number of awarded pensions swelled, the Pension Bureau came under pressure to cut costs and investigate allegations of widespread fraud. To root out false and fraudulent claims, special investigators reviewed individual applications.[15] When they learned that Joseph Kellogg, a pension claims agent operating in Nashville, may have forged affidavits, they recognized an opportunity to evaluate many, possibly hundreds, of pension claims at once.

On May 18, 1898, the Pension Bureau notified Kellogg that his operations were under scrutiny. The bureau was aware that Kellogg was notarizing affidavits without witnesses being present, a letter from the bureau told him and warned against continuation of this illegal practice. "Having had your attention called to these irregularities," the bureau wrote, "it is assumed . . . that hereafter you will cause the pensioners to be properly sworn, to exhibit their certificate and produce witnesses who are cognizant of the facts to which they testify." Kellogg wrote to the bureau nearly a month later to acknowledge receipt and to suggest that the bureau's time would be better spent investigating other businesses in Nashville. [16]

Unbeknown to Kellogg, the Pension Bureau continued to review applications for which he had served as notary, and clerks of its Law Division compiled a personal and professional profile of Kellogg. Investigators learned that he had been, in bureau parlance, "admitted to

[15] Dale Kretz, *Administering Freedom*, 220-221.
[16] H. Clay Evans to J. A. Kellogg, May 18, 1898, and J. A. Kellogg to H. Clay Evans, June 7, 1898, LCF-JAK. Kellogg cited "certain banking businesses" in Nashville that held pension certificates as collateral for small loans. A single loan "shark" in Nashville held more than forty pension certificates, he claimed.

practice" and certified to act as a claims agent on June 2, 1892.[17] They noted that he had partnered with Richard Blanton to service the claims of many poor African Americans living in Black Bottom. After Kellogg began working with Blanton, they discovered that the number of applications submitted by Kellogg as *claims agent* dropped precipitously, while the number of applications in which he acted as *notary* dramatically increased. Kellogg seemed to be forgoing the larger fees he could collect as a claims agent in the long term (up to $10 per pension) for the smaller fees he could collect as a notary public in the short term (less than $1 per document). Crucially, the Pension Bureau allowed notaries to collect fees up-front, while claims agents only collected fees if an application for pension was approved. The assumption of the bureau was that Kellogg expected to make up the difference through the sheer quantity of notary fees, a possibility that, in the eyes of the investigators, increased the likelihood of fraud. According to investigators, the legitimacy of a pension application may have mattered little to Kellogg if his goal was simply to collect notary fees.[18]

The partnership of Blanton and Kellogg conformed to popular stereotypes of pension fraudsters profiting from the pension claims of patriots. George Vest, Democratic senator from Missouri and a former member of the Confederate congress, brought such allegations to the floor of the U.S. Senate. "There are men in this city of Washington," Vest asserted, "whose sole business in life is to originate schemes for increase of pensions and new schemes for pensions in

[17] "Notes for Use in Blanton – Kellogg Cases," n.d., LCF-JAK.
[18] On October 9, 1900, the acting commissioner of pensions articulated this assumption in a letter to the Secretary of the Interior. "Mr. Kellogg was an attorney of record before the bureau," he wrote, "but preferred in his capacity as a notary public in and for Davidson County, Tenn., to prepare papers to be filed in connection with claims in which he was not the attorney of record; this to the end that he might collect fees for the papers so prepared, that course being made more immediately profitable to him then to wait for the U.S. pension agent to pay the fees provided by law after the allowance of a claim." Acting Commissioner of Pensions to Secretary of the Interior, October 9, 1900, LCF-JAK. A newspaper report also claimed that Kellogg "made money by charging "negros' [*sic*] fees." "Kellogg Convicted," unidentified newspaper clipping, n.d., LCF-JAK.

order that they may be the recipients of large fees at the expense of claimants."[19] A lithograph in *Judge* magazine in 1898 illustrated the widely shared belief that pension agents and attorneys were profiting at the expense of honorable veterans and their dependents. In the lithograph, "Throwing Light on the Subject," a furious Uncle Sam leans over a banister labeled "Pension Office" and casts the light of a lantern on an old man in a tattered army uniform. The veteran, whose left leg is missing below the knee, stands with the aid of a crutch. Behind the veteran, two men in fine suits, a pension agent and a pension attorney, gather bags of money. In the caption beneath the image, Uncle Sam tells the old soldier, "I'm not after you; I'm after the rascals behind you."[20]

Not only was Kellogg a pension agent; his clientele, by way of his partnership with Richard Blanton, was overwhelmingly African American. Many of their clients were also neighbors in Black Bottom. Of the ninety-two applications prepared by Blanton and Kellogg that the Pension Bureau investigated in 1899, a full 96 percent were by African Americans.[21] According to the commissioner of pensions, Henry Clay Evans, the mixture of military labor and enlistment in Middle Tennessee had engendered a belief among African Americans that any labor in support of the Union entitled the laborer to a pension, even though pensions were in fact available only to men who had enlisted as soldiers. In all but 17 of the 234 pending pension applications originating from Davidson County, Evans reported, "the alleged soldier did not perform the service upon which the claim was based, or that forged, false, or fabricated papers had been filed." Evans estimated that the Union army had employed "more than 23,000 refugees

[19] Senator George Vest, June 23, 1890, in *Congressional Record*, 51st Cong., 1st sess., vol. 21, pt. 7, p. 6383.
[20] Victor F. Gillam, "Throwing Light on the Subject," *Judge*, 1898, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, accessed May 15, 2023, https://lccn.loc.gov/2015645585.
[21] U.S. Pension Bureau, "Original Consolidated List of Blanton Cases from Bickford and Lockwood," n.d., LCF-JAK.

. . . in various civilian capacities" in Nashville during the war, and African Americans had a "lack of knowledge . . . as to the difference between an enlisted soldier and a civilian employee." Their ignorance, Evans concluded, "afforded unprincipled agents an opportunity to prey upon the innocent" by pocketing fees for the preparation of claims they knew would amount to nothing. "[S]o far as the claimants were concerned, the claims were filed in good faith."[22] A story in the *Nashville American* echoed Evans's concern. "Nashville, it is said, has been the worst center of pension fraud in the Union."[23] Residents of Black Bottom knew the history Evans summarized. They had lived it. Slavery was abolished in Tennessee three years after the Union army occupied the city. In the years prior to abolition, emancipation proceeded unevenly and came by way of military necessity more concerned with mustering laborers and soldiers than ending slavery.[24]

On December 30, 1898, George C. Stewart, chief of the Pension Bureau's Law Division, recommended to the chief of the Special Examination Division that the practices of Kellogg and Blanton warranted criminal investigation. After summarizing the evidence collected by field agents in Nashville, Stewart recommended that the bureau send "a sufficient number of Examiners familiar with criminal work" to the city to conduct a thorough investigation. To lead the investigation, Stewart chose Albert W. Roome. Roome was both a personal friend of Stewart and a special examiner with experience leading high-profile criminal investigations. Roome and a team of special investigators were instructed to "take up each case upon its own merits," "investigate the validity of each paper," and "endeavor to establish the identity of each party

[22] U.S. Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Department of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1900* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1900), 75-76. Evans characterized Joseph Kellogg, Richard Blanton, and others as the "ringleaders" of fraud in Nashville.
[23] *Nashville American*, April 29, 1900.
[24] For the process of emancipation in Nashville, see above, Chapter 1.

shown to have violated the law."[25] That seemingly objective language masked the particular ways the investigation would come to focus on the applications of African Americans.

The investigation, led by Roome, lasted for more than a year and involved an entire team of Pension Bureau field agents. Born in New York, Roome was fifteen years old at the onset of the Civil War.[26] He enlisted as a sergeant in the 37th New York Infantry in January 1863, was commissioned as a 2nd lieutenant in May 1864, and eventually achieved the rank of captain in a different regiment, the 71st New York Infantry.[27] In 1880 Roome was living in Washington, D.C., with his wife, three children, and Sara Early, a seventeen-year-old African American girl employed by the family as a live-in domestic servant.[28] Like many Union veterans, Roome found a career in civil service, initially at the Census Bureau. By 1886, he was a clerk in the Pension Bureau.[29]

Much of Roome's service with the Pension Bureau was spent on the road, with as much time in the seats of railroad cars and carriages or on horseback as behind a desk. Between 1888 and 1903, Roome investigated allegations of pension fraud from New England to the Upper

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[25] George Stewart to Chief of the Special Examination Division, December 30, 1898, LCF-JAK.
[26] Roome was born into a merchant family in New York, the youngest of three brothers. His father, Edward, died before the Civil War, leaving a personal estate valued at $1000, to his mother. U.S. manuscript census, 1850, population, New York, Enumeration District (hereafter E.D.) 1, p. 129; U.S. manuscript census, 1900, population, Washington, DC, E.D. 12, p. 14.
[27] General Index to Pension Files, 1861-1934, RG 15, NARA, Washington, DC, s.v. "Roome, Albert W."
[28] U.S. manuscript census, 1880, population, Washington, DC, E.D. 17, p. 14.
[29] Roome is listed as a clerk in the pension office in the 1886 Washington, D.C., city directory. His work as a civil servant likely began in 1881 when the city directory listed his employment as "laundry," but his name also appeared as an employee of the U.S. Census Bureau. *Boyd's Directory of the District of Columbia* (Washington, DC: R. L. Polk and Co., 1886), 708; *Official Register of the United States, Containing a List of the Officers and Employees in the Civil, Military, and Naval Service* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1881), 620. The 1900 census lists Roome's employment as "clerk government." His name also appears in the *Federal Register* as a "clerk" of the Pension Bureau in 1895 and 1901. His salary was $1,400 in 1895 and $1,800 in 1901. See U.S. manuscript census, 1900, population, Washington, DC, E.D. 12, p. 14; *Federal Register*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1895), 689; *Federal Register*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1901), 999.

South.[30] Newspaper reports referred to him as a "detective from Washington," a "special agent," "Deputy Marshal," an agent of the "secret service," and a "special examiner."[31] His assignments revealed the extent of federal power disguised in the title "clerk." In one particularly dramatic account, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported that Roome, a "Special Agent of the Government," had apprehended a "pension shark" after "a long chase over the States of Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia."[32] Roome established a reputation for investigating complicated cases of fraud in 1897, when he, in the words of one newspaper, "unearthed a big nest of pension swindlers" in Boston.[33] On the wings of successful criminal investigations there and elsewhere, Roome was selected to lead the investigations in Nashville.

The crackdown on Civil War pensions in Nashville was, in practice, a crackdown on Black pensioners. During 1898 and 1899, special examiners took 781 depositions and issued 132 case reports in connection to applications prepared by Blanton and Kellogg. They then submitted forty-four of those reports to the U.S. district attorney for criminal prosecution. Kellogg and Blanton became the chief targets of the investigations and, through them, nearly every Black person in Nashville who had applied for a pension in the past three years. Blanton and Kellogg had developed what one Nashville newspaper characterized as "quite a colony of pension frauds." While 53 percent of all Civil War pensioners living in Nashville in 1898 were African

[30] *Weekly Register* (Point Pleasant, WV), September 3, 1890; *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 4, 1909; *Evening Star* (Washington, DC), July 22, 1899; *Murfreesboro* (NC) *Index*, July 13, 1888; *Henderson* (NC) *Gold Leaf*, May 3, 1888; *Hartford* (CT) *Courant*, February 10, 1900; *Baltimore Sun*, February 20, 1909; *Miners Journal* (Pottsville, PA), September 6, 1897.
[31] *Henderson* (NC) *Gold Leaf*, May 3, 1888 ("detective from Washington"); *Charlotte* (NC) *Observer*, October 18, 1887 ("special examiner"); *Franklin* (PA) *Repository*, July 26, 1890 ("Deputy Marshal"); *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 2, 1890, ("Special Agent"); *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 4, 1909, *Dayton* (OH) *Herald*, May 7, 1889, and *Baltimore Sun*, March 10, 1903 ("secret service").
[32] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 2, 1890.
[33] *Miners Journal* (Pottsville, PA), September 6, 1897.

American, 90 percent of those found guilty of fraud as a result of the Nashville investigations were Black.[34]

Investigating Vernacular Information-Gathering

As a notary public and pension agent, Joseph Kellogg should have played a crucial role in transforming vernacular information into a form acceptable to the Pension Bureau. Instead, the liberties that he took with witness testimony undermined the very claims he was supposed to facilitate. Kellogg relied on Richard Blanton for a steady stream of clients. Blanton's efficacy as a sub-agent derived from his residence in and knowledge of Nashville's Black communities, especially Black Bottom. Living among his clients and interacting with them on a daily basis, Blanton developed a vernacular archive of information that he used to connect potential applicants to witnesses who could attest to the legitimacy of their claims.[35]

Roome and the other Pension Bureau investigators reviewed the practices of Blanton and Kellogg suspected illegal activity but found themselves at a loss for evidence. Skeptical of African American testimony and convinced of foul play, they struggled to locate men and women who could prove that Kellogg, and perhaps Blanton as well, had broken the law. As Roome developed a plan to investigate the two men, it became apparent that he would need a team of investigators to gather intelligence about the pension networks of Nashville.

Arriving in Nashville on January 7, 1899, Roome quickly recognized that his work was imperiled by an information deficit. He was an outsider. He did not know the people or the neighborhoods of Nashville. In other words, Roome could not deploy the methods used by Blanton with any degree of success; the vernacular politics of space were not just legally dubious

[34] John T. Wilder to H. Clay Evans, December 6, 1898, enclosing "Nashville Cases."
[35] For Blanton's vernacular practice, see above, Chapter 4.

to agents of the Pension Bureau, they were also inaccessible to its investigators. Roome's prospects of creating a criminal case against Blanton and Kellogg, therefore, depended on his ability to exploit information maintained by the Pension Bureau, coordinate with other federal officials, and find reliable local informants. Roome's first objectives in Nashville thus drew on two of the bureau's strengths, its power to deploy investigators in the field and its ability to transfer geographical information.

Roome joined two special investigators already stationed in Nashville, W. L. Harris and W. L. Sullivan. On the day he arrived, Roome wrote the commissioner of pensions to ask that "as many Special Examiners as you may deem proper be instructed by wire to report to me at this place at once—as their services are sadly needed and I desire to take quick action on the criminal features and to do so requires more help so that the game will not be finished permanently."[36] Roome repeated the request three days later, commenting on the need for special examiners experienced in criminal investigation and casting doubt on the abilities of the special examiners already in Nashville. "I am badly handicapped for want of assistance," Roome wrote George Stewart, "having only Harris—Sullivan is undoubtedly a good merit examiner—<u>but</u> as a criminal man—nix."[37] Like most of the bureau's special investigators, Harris and Sullivan mostly investigated individual pension claims. Their responsibilities consisted of traveling to meet with potential witnesses and gathering testimony used to verify claims for which supporting evidence was insufficient, suspect, or contradictory. Roome believed that Harris and Sullivan, practiced though they were at evaluating claims on a case-by-case basis, lacked sufficient experience for a criminal investigation that would involve hundreds of applications. Stewart put

[36] A. W. Roome to H. Clay Evans, January 7, 1899, LCF-JAK.
[37] A. W. Roome to George C. Stewart, January 10, 1899, LCF-JAK. "This is not an Official communication," Roome added, "but is sent you so that you may see how things are up to date—I shall soon 'touch the button' again."

the question to Commissioner of Pensions Henry Evans, who approved the request and reassigned four special examiners from the field office in Knoxville to report to Roome in Nashville. Less than a month after his arrival, Roome had tripled the size of his investigative team from two to six.[38]

Roome knew that, in addition to a sufficient number of skilled examiners, the success of the investigation depended on the quality of information he could obtain from Black Nashvillians—information more easily obtained through the vernacular approach of Blanton than the bureaucratic approach of the Pension Bureau. On December 8, 1898, a month before Roome arrived in Nashville, he had received a packet of information compiled at the Knoxville field office that provided an overview of pension activity in Nashville. On five closely typed pages, bureau clerks had recorded the name, application number, and military service information of every pensioner in Nashville whose claim had been "allowed and paid during the last three years."[39] The record showed that 156 Civil War pensions had been awarded to residents of Nashville from 1896 through 1898. The vast majority had been awarded under the 1890 law, but Roome was less interested in the particular law under which recent pensioners had received pensions than he was in identifying African American pensioners with newly awarded claims. Checkmarks on the list of Nashville pensioners appear next to each pension that was based on service in a Black regiment. These marks, likely made by Roome or an investigator under his supervision, are lasting traces of the focus on the Black pension networks of Nashville.[40] As

[38] The reassigned special examiners were J. A. Davis, S. M. Cutler, G. A. Crutchfield, and C. G. Townsend. See A. W. Roome to H. Clay Evans, January 31, 1899, LCF-JAK. After Roome's departure on January 31, 1899, Harris was given the lead in the Nashville cases. A. W. Roome to H. Clay Evans, January 31, 1899, LCF-JAK.
[39] John T. Wilder to H. Clay Evans, December 6, 1898, enclosing "Nashville Cases."
[40] To ensure that information was not lost, the Pension Bureau kept assiduous records of every time a document was mailed from one office to another. Because A. W. Roome is the last recorded recipient, it is therefore unlikely that the checkmarks on the document were made at a later date.

instructed by George Stewart, Roome and the other investigators in Nashville began to gather data on African Americans who had recently been awarded pensions. The checkmarks indicated that half of all pensions awarded to residents of Nashville in the past three years had gone to African Americans.[41]

The same day that Roome requested additional investigators, he asked the U.S. marshal in Nashville to recommend a local informant he could employ to gather information about pension recipients residing in the city. He hoped that a local African American man would be more successful than if he, a white officer of the Pension Bureau, sought depositions. Roome notified the commissioner of pensions that the marshal was looking for "a sharp negro . . . to assist me in running down and locating the many colored witnesses that I must find."[42] The marshal recommended Stephen Lyons, who was offered $1.50 per day for thirty days to aid Roome in the investigation.[43] Lyons, who had worked for the marshal before, accepted Roome's offer.

Although there is little documentary record of Lyons's work, his role proved crucial to Roome's success. The Pension Bureau maintained information about the names, aliases, physical descriptions, and residential or post office addresses of pension applicants and recipients in Nashville and wider Davidson County, as it did for all applicants and pensioners across the nation. The bureau's archive of information was valuable, however, only if it was accurate and up-to-date. In order to translate the bureaucratic record into meaningful information capable of illuminating the vernacular networks that sustained Blanton's and Kellogg's client base, Roome required a local informant. Lyons filled that role.

[41] J. T. Wilder to H. Clay Evans, December 6, 1898, enclosing "Nashville Cases."
[42] A. W. Roome to H. Clay Evans, January 7, 1899, LCF-JAK.
[43] A. W. Roome to H. Clay Evans, January 31, 1899, LCF-JAK.

The location data included in pension applications was not always precise. Many pension applicants received mail at a post office or pension attorney's office rather than at a residential address.[44] Others gave only a neighborhood as a place of residence, as Richard Blanton himself did when he told pension examiners that he lived in various buildings near Fort Negley.[45] Lyons translated such general information into usable intelligence for Roome's criminal investigation. As a local Nashvillian, Lyons aroused less suspicion than Pension Bureau examiners when locating people of interest.[46]

Lyons's participation in the investigation enabled Roome to retrace the vernacular information-seeking of Richard Blanton by augmenting bureaucratic records with the experiential knowledge that came with living in Nashville. Under the direction of Roome, Lyons paid visits to the residences of Black Nashvillians who were under investigation. On January 16, 1899, for instance, Lyons went to a house at 1008 North Cherry Street in search of a woman named Lou Thompson. When he arrived, a young girl answered the door and told him she did not know anyone by that name. Lyons adjusted his line of questioning and, without announcing his connection to a criminal investigation, asked if anyone named Lou or Lucinda lived there. The girl told Lyons that her mother's name was Lucinda Brown and they lived in the house

[44] Affidavit of Richard Blanton, December 16, 1889, in claim of Richard Blanton, Co. A, 13th USCI [SC 2496184], Civil War Pension Files, RG 15, NARA, Washington, DC.
[44] For examples of documents including the residential or post office address of the claimant, see Deposition of James Coleman, February 3, 1899, in claim of Cato Briggies, Co. K, 13th USCI [CC 671709], General Affidavit of W. J. Smith, April 16, 1901, in claim of Susan Bailey, widow of Alfred Bailey, Co. A, 13th USCI [CC 985545], General Affidavit of Robert Martin, January 19, 1877, in claim of Squire Daniels, Co. A, 13th USCI [SC 192979], General Affidavit of Moses Jones, February 21, 1868, in claim of Henrietta Joyce, widow of John Joyce, Co. A, 13th USCI [WC 132930], all in Civil War Pension Files, RG 15, NARA, Washington, DC.
[45] Affidavit of Richard Blanton, December 16, 1889, in claim of Richard Blanton, Co. A, 13th USCI, Civil War [SC 2496184].
[46] For an example of Lyon's work, see Deposition of Steve Lyons, January 18, 1899, in Abstract of the Evidence on File in Contesting Claims of Charlotte Davis, now Thompson [WO 568819], widow of Peter Thompson, Co. E, 109th, USCI, LCF-JAK.

together. She then invited Lyons to enter the house to meet Lucinda Brown. When the girl's mother entered the room, Lyons recognized her as someone he had met before and he recalled that she was the wife of a man named Prince Boyd. When Lyons explained that he was looking for someone named Lou Thompson, the woman replied, "I am the lady," and explained that she had divorced Boyd.[47] As this example illustrates, Lyons's local knowledge of Nashville and its Black residents provided Roome and his examiners with information not available in the records of the Pension Bureau.

The Pension Bureau Places Claims

At the request of George Stewart, chief of the Pension Bureau's Law Division, clerks at the Washington headquarters created an index of every man and woman in Nashville and Davidson County who was receiving a pension. Recorded for each pensioner were the pension certificate number, the pensioner's name, his or her post office, and the name and rank of the soldier upon whose service the pension was based. By the end of December, 1898, the Law Division had completed the index, which consisted of approximately 700 cards, each 4 x 8 inches in size. The cards, or "case slips" as the bureau called them, were forwarded to Nashville to await Roome's arrival. Stewart explained that the index had been compiled "with the hope that it may facilitate the Examiners in locating witnesses."[48] The case slips were indicative of the Pension Bureau's politics of space in which geographical information was leveraged not only to evaluate, but also to investigate Black pension recipients. Roome and his investigators used the

[47] Deposition of Steve Lyons, January 18, 1899, in Abstract of the Evidence on File in Contesting Claims of Charlotte Davis, now Thompson [WO 568819], and Lou Thompson [WO 670420], both claiming pension as widow of Peter Thompson, Co. E, 109th USCI, LCF-JAK.
[48] George Stewart to Chief of the Special Examination Division, December 30, 1898, and Nashville "case slips", in LCF-JAK.

slips as a tool to trace Blanton's and Kellogg's pension network by locating and deposing current and past clients.

The Nashville case slips were the product of a decade of expansion and reorganization that enabled the Pension Bureau to trace in ever-greater detail information regarding applicants and pensioners alike. They also illustrate the bureau's information practices and are an example of the connective tissue between the Pension Bureau's headquarters in Washington and its field offices. Unlike vernacular information, which was sustained by shared experience, memory, and trust, the case slips were a physical record that could be duplicated and transferred from one clerk to another or from one office to another. The case slips endowed Roome with a bureaucratic approximation of the local knowledge that Richard Blanton had spent nearly four decades accumulating.

Retracing Blanton's Pension Network

The Pension Bureau did not maintain client lists of pension agents, much less a record of which notaries worked with which applicants. While this information could be requested from pension attorneys or notaries themselves, Roome feared that such a request to Kellogg would lead to his discovery that he was under criminal investigation and cause him to flee the city.[49] Roome therefore proceeded the hard way, by, in effect, retracing Blanton's vernacular information network. Equipped with the Nashville case slips, Roome dispatched his team of examiners and Lyons, his local informant, to gather information from men and women who had employed Blanton's and Kellogg's services. Although Roome was equipped with the known location of every pensioner in Davidson County, the investigation focused only on African

[49] A. W. Roome to George C. Stewart, January 10, 1899, LCF-JAK.

Americans. Locating every pensioner would have overwhelmed the small force of investigators. They were therefore instructed to begin the review by focusing on those the bureau believed most likely to have worked with Kellogg and Blanton, that is, Black pensioners. In a letter accompanying the Nashville case slips, the chief of the Law division ordered that "in at least all of the colored cases the claims of residents of Davidson County be carefully searched and such data be obtained as may be necessary to determine what, if any, further investigation is necessary."[50]

With the vast information of the Pension Bureau at his fingertips, Roome and his investigative team began tracing the networks of association that constituted Blanton's and Kellogg's client base. Most of their work took place during the summer of 1899. The bureau's examiners visited the addresses written on the case slips in search of pensioners. Once a claimant was located, bureau examiners subjected him or her to a series of preliminary questions to determine whether the claim merited further investigation. Bureau examiners whether the claimant signed documents by signature or by mark. The pensioner also had to provide at least one identifying and one attesting witness who could verify his or her identity. The back of each case slip included space for the examiner to certify the information by signing the following pre-written statement: "I hereby certify that I have made careful inquiry and have ____ found that the pensioner mentioned on the reverse of this slip is living at the place stated and that there exists ____ reason to question title." If the examiner believed that the pension required further investigation, space was provided at the bottom of the slip for notes. Some examiners wrote remarks such as "This case appears alright."[51] A special investigator noted on the back of another

[50] George C. Stewart to Chief of Special Examinations Division, "General Letter of Instructions," July 14, 1899, LCF-JAK.
[51] Special Examiner L. F. Hanson on slip of Martha Bowers, August 1899, "Nashville Cases."

case slip that the claims agent "took a mortgage on pensioner's furniture for security, for money loaned to pensioner" and suggested that the pension claim be investigated.[52]

The inclusion of notes generally indicated that further investigation was called for. Bureau examiners attached additional cards to the case slip when lengthy notes were necessary. Examiners took depositions from claimants who had employed the notary services of Kellogg and marked them with a stamp indicating that they had been taken "under General Instructions of July 14, 1899, Relative to Nashville, Tenn., Cases."[53] A flurry of such depositions were taken in August and September, 1899.[54]

In the context of Roome's investigation, the Nashville case slips should be seen as artifacts of a federal bureaucracy struggling to make sense of a grassroots network of claims-making. Roome's use of the case slips to locate and identify an interconnected web of Black claimants broke with the typical practice of Pension Bureau examiners who evaluated claims on a case-by-case basis. Roome, realized that the case against Kellogg depended on an ability to replicate the information-gathering practices of Blanton and Kellogg. In order to prove that Kellogg had forged affidavits, Roome had to investigate all of the claims for which he had acted as notary public. It took a team of investigators and a local informant armed with the best location information available to the Pension Bureau to illuminate the web of relationships and community knowledge that Richard Blanton had mobilized.

The Arrest of Joseph Kellogg

[52] Special Examiner W. L. Sullivan on slip of Catherine Armstrong, n.d., "Nashville Cases."
[53] Special Examiner L. F. Hanson on slip of William Blackburn, September 1899, "Nashville Cases."
[54] John T. Wilder to H. Clay Evans, December 6, 1898, enclosing "Nashville Cases," RG 15, NARA, Washington, DC.

As a seasoned criminal investigator for the Pension Bureau, Roome knew how to use the bureau's information systems to track, trace, and identify the elements of a network to which he, an outsider, lacked access. His arrival in Nashville signaled a shift in the bureau's relationship with Blanton and Kellogg. Investigators in the city had long suspected that Kellogg operated outside the law. Roome assumed that there was illegal activity to uncover.[55] He sent the chief of the Law Division, George Stewart, updates on hotel stationery almost nightly, labeling the letters personal correspondence as opposed to official bureau briefs. Roome's reputation for using detective-like tactics to identify fraudulent pension operations and break them up was, by then, well established. His experience also demonstrated fluency in cooperating with other federal agencies, notably the Department of Justice. Within three days of his arrival in Nashville, Roome met with the U.S. marshal and a federal judge to request a warrant be issued for Kellogg's arrest.[56]

Fearing that Kellogg would flee the city to avoid arrest, Roome carefully hid the warrant from him.[57] Knowing that Kellogg was familiar with W. L. Sullivan, one of the special examiners stationed in Nashville, Roome asked Sullivan to contact him. On January 10, 1899, Sullivan found Kellogg and asked him to accompany him to his office in the U.S. Customs Building, ostensibly to review some paperwork, as Kellogg had done many times in the past. "Sullivan had me sent for as was his custom . . . ," wrote Kellogg, "but he this time introduced to me Mr. Room [*sic*] Special Examiner from Washington."[58] Surprised by the unexpected presence of a new special investigator, Kellogg was affronted when Roome showed him six different papers with his seal and signature and asked him to acknowledge them as genuine. No

[55] George Stewart to Chief of the Special Examination Division, December 30, 1898, LCF-JAK.
[56] A. W. Roome to George C. Stewart, January 10, 1899, LCF-JAK.
[57] A. W. Roome to George C. Stewart, January 10, 1899, LCF-JAK.
[58] J. A. Kellogg to Judge Clark, May 3, 1899, LCF-JAK.

sooner did Kellogg comply than Roome declared the papers to be known forgeries. Kellogg vehemently denied the charge, but Roome coolly presented Kellogg with a warrant for his arrest signed by the U.S. marshal the previous day.[59]

Roome had not wished to arrest Kellogg so soon, he told Stewart, but "this action was necessary as he was alarmed and was about to skip and I had to hunt for him all Monday until late last night before I got him." Kellogg was released on a $2,000 bond, an amount deemed sufficient to ensure he would not flee the city.[60] Roome had good reason to regret the need for an early arrest because the resulting publicity made it more difficult to receive depositions with which to build cases against Kellogg, Blanton, and others suspected of having violated pension laws.

After Kellogg's arrest, Roome's ability to use local relationships to his advantage became even more important. Even though the investigation itself was no longer a secret, Roome sought to disguise its methods. He believed that the best way to proceed was to rely on local relationships, a strategy that would require assistance from people more familiar with Nashville than he was.

Race and Place

Roome's opinion of Black Nashville, and specifically Black Bottom, mirrored the rhetoric of the Law and Order League and the Black Bottom Park Committee. His personal letters to Stewart make it abundantly clear why he believed it would be most effective to employ a local African American man to locate and identify other African Americans who could provide

[59] A. W. Roome to Commissioner of Pensions, January 12, 1899, LCF-JAK.
[60] A. W. Roome to George C. Stewart, January 10, 1899, copy of unsigned letter to Chief of the Special Examination Division, January 13, 1899, and A. W. Roome to George C. Stewart, January 10, 1899, all in LCF-JAK.

witness testimony. Roome despised visiting the poor neighborhoods of Nashville. He shared his negative assessment of Black Bottom with George Stewart. Roome's language shares a remarkable similarity to the Nashville newspaper stories that maligned the neighborhood in an effort to marginalize its Black community. It is a place where "no one but prostitutes (black and yellow), thieves and the toughest elements of Negroes live . . . ," Roome wrote, "and it is as much as one's life is worth to go through there after dark."[61] He denigrated his informant, Stephen Lyons, by referring to him as "the Coon detective" and sprinkled his letters with references to the lyrics of blackface minstrel songs such as "all coons look alike to me."[62] His evaluation of the neighborhoods where many of the men and women under investigation lived was an extension of this casual bigotry and provides further evidence that the Pension Bureau's investigative processes, while cloaked in the guise of efficiency and objectivity, operated in a fashion that systematically disadvantaged the residents of communities like Black Bottom.[63]

As Roome conducted the investigation, he kept the prospect of criminal trials in mind and was careful to proceed in a manner that would benefit the government's case. The way race later featured in the trials was an ever-present component of his strategic calculus. For example, Roome believed Kellogg was a "crooked notary" guilty of forgery, but the fact that he was "a white man and the witness is colored" was cause for caution.[64] Roome's assumptions about the

[61] A. W. Roome to George C. Stewart, January 27, 1899, LCF-JAK.
[62] A. W. Roome to George C. Stewart, January 20, 1899, and A. W. Roome to George C. Stewart, January 27, 1899, both in LCF-JAK.
[63] For examples of other settings in which the Pension Bureau subjected the claims of Black applicants to racially discriminatory treatment, see Brimmer, *Claiming Union Widowhood*, 163-183 (unmarried Black women disqualified due to cohabitation with men), Hunter, *Bound in Wedlock*, 276-282 (Black women disqualified due to serial marriage), Kretz, *Administering Freedom*, 201-224 (Black men subjected to prejudicial evaluation of all-white medical examiners).
[64] Roome wrote to George Stewart to express his concern about prosecuting Kellogg, a white man, on the basis of testimony by Black Nashvillians. "[I]t's a negro v.s. a white man," he wrote, "we must be strong in our cases." A. W. Roome to George C. Stewart, January 20, 1899, LCF-JAK.

difficulty of convicting a white man on the testimony of African Americans were not unfounded. Indeed, Kellogg himself complained on just such grounds in his later appeals to the U.S. Circuit Court judge.[65]

It is likely that the negative depiction of Black Bottom trumpeted in Nashville's white press colored Roome's opinion of the neighborhood and its Black residents. Roome cast aspersions on Kellogg because of his residence in Black Bottom and his business associations with African Americans such as Blanton. Kellogg "is what is called white trash or a poor white down here and lives in Black Bottom – right amongst the Negroes," Roome wrote.[66] He accused Kellogg of conspiring with Blanton to file false pension claims. In Roome's estimation, "Blanton hustled around and got the different claimants to make application and Kellogg fixed up the papers to suit the case out of whole cloth – and whatever money could be squeezed out of the claimants was divided share and share alike." Blanton occupied a curious place in this evaluation, alternately a "dupe" and a vital source of information about the Black communities of Nashville. Kellogg, in contrast, was characterized as both being in "partnership" with Blanton and "a terror" to African American residents of Black Bottom, who "are all afraid of him."[67] The source of Roome's claim that Black residents of Black Bottom feared Kellogg is unclear and not supported by evidence in the depositions of Kellogg, Blanton, or the African Americans for whom Kellogg processed pension paperwork.

Roome's racial prejudice informed strategic decisions in the investigation. He wrote openly about his logic in his letters to Stewart, marked "personal." Kellogg was "the prime mover in all cases and bossed the whole job," Roome reported, and Blanton and another Black

[65] J. A. Kellogg to Judge Clark, May 3, 1899, LCF-JAK.
[66] A. W. Roome to George C. Stewart, January 27, 1899, LCF-JAK.
[67] A. W. Roome to George C. Stewart, January 27, 1899, LCF-JAK.

man, Jim Coleman, "acted as chronic witnesses."[68] In other words, Roome accused Kellogg of acting in a manner that mirrored Roome's own investigative strategy, namely, relying on Black testimony to tap into networks of vernacular information that he was not a part of. "Blanton is ignorant and has been made the tool of Kellogg who is sharp as a whip," Roome added. Concluding that Kellogg had duped Blanton into participating, perhaps unknowingly, in fraudulent practices, Roome temporarily refrained from arresting Blanton in the hope that he could continue to pump him for incriminating details. Without informing Blanton that he was also soon to be arrested, Roome questioned him daily and received "valuable information" about his partnership with Kellogg. "He [Blanton] is nearly scared to death," wrote Roome, but "is going down beautifully." My "scheme has been to get James Coleman, Ben Carver, and Blanton to squeal on Kellogg" before acting on warrants for their arrest.[69]

By pitting Kellogg and Blanton against one another, Roome set the stage for criminal prosecutions in which testimony from Blanton would be used to incriminate Kellogg, and vice-versa. Roome questioned Blanton until he was convinced he had gathered all the information necessary to prosecute Kellogg. Only then, on January 25, 1899, fifteen days after Kellogg's arrest, did he arrest Blanton on charges of "knowingly making false affidavit in a pension claim."[70] Unlike Kellogg, Blanton was apparently unable to post bail. He had to await arraignment and trial from the confines of a cell.

The Prosecution of Kellogg and Blanton

[68] A. W. Roome to George C. Stewart, January 19, 1899, LCF-JAK.
[69] A. W. Roome to George C. Stewart, January 27, 1899. "I shall finish with Blanton tomorrow and then I shall arrest him (in the mean while he is constantly shadowed night and day)," Roome told Stewart.
[70] Warrant for the arrest of R. H. Blanton alias Richard Blanton, January 25, 1899, Closed Criminal Cases: 1898-1911, Records of the U.S. Circuit Court, Middle District of Tennessee, Nashville Division, Records of the District Courts of the United States, RG 21, NARA, Atlanta, Georgia.

Joseph Kellogg and Richard Blanton were indicted on multiple charges of forgery and a conspiracy to commit fraud. Both were indicted for forgery in the claim of Belle Henderson, Kellogg for forging an affidavit "for the purpose of obtaining" money from the U.S. government and enabling Henderson to do the same, Blanton for "willingly aiding or assisting" Kellogg and Henderson to commit forgery.[71] If found guilty, Kellogg and Blanton would each face imprisonment at hard labor for one to ten years or a fine of up to $1,000. The U.S. district attorney also sought charges against Blanton, Kellogg, and Lucinda Brown, alias Lou Thompson, for conspiracy to commit fraud in connection with the pension application filed in her name. The grand jury indicted all three on conspiracy charges, and they each faced a sentence of imprisonment at hard labor for one to five years or a fine of $1,000 to $5,000.[72]

After their indictment Kellogg and Blanton waited three months before being tried. Facing felony charges and unable to post bail, Blanton spent the time in the Tennessee State Penitentiary. Kellogg, facing eight felony charges, posted $1,000 bail and remained at home,

[71] Blanton could have been indicted for forgery even though he did not sign the forged affidavit. Section 5421 of the *Revised U.S. Statutes* was quite broad in prescribing who is guilty of forgery: "Every person who falsely makes, alters, or counterfeits; or causes or procures to be falsely made, altered, forged, or counterfeited; or willingly aids or assists in the false making, altering, forging, or counterfeiting, any deed, power of attorney, order, certificate, receipt, or other writing, for the purpose of obtaining, or enabling any other person, directly or indirectly, to obtain or receive from the United States, or any of their officers or agents, any sum of money." U.S. Pension Bureau, *A Digest of the Laws of the United States Governing the Granting of Army and Navy Pensions and Bounty-Land Warrants; Decisions of the Secretary of the Interior, and Rulings and Orders of the Commissioner of Pensions Thereunder* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1885), 238-239.

[72] U.S. Pension Bureau, *Digest of Laws*, 239-240. *Revised U.S. Statutes*, sec. 5438, on fraudulent claims, covered a broad array of activities: "Every person who makes or causes to be made, or presents or causes to be presented, for payment or approval, to or by any person or officer in the civil, military, or naval service of the United States, any claim upon or against the Government of the United States, or any department or officer thereof, knowing such claim to be false, fictitious, or fraudulent, or who, for the purpose of obtaining or aiding to obtain the payment or approval of such claim, makes, uses, or causes to be made or used, any false bill, receipt, voucher, roll, account, claim, certificate, affidavit, or deposition, knowing the same to contain any fraudulent or fictitious statement or entry, or who enters into any agreement, combination, or conspiracy to defraud the Government of the United States, or any department or officer thereof. . . shall be imprisoned at hard labor for not less than one nor more than five years, or fined not less than one thousand nor more than five thousand dollars."

with his family. Roome left Nashville immediately following the grand jury indictments. He sent a brief missive to the commissioner of pensions commending the work of the special examiners with whom he had worked, filed an invoice for the payment he had promised Stephen Lyons, and returned to Washington.[73] He left the remaining work in Nashville to district attorney Tillman and special examiners Harris and Sullivan.

Kellogg and Blanton were tried in the U.S. Circuit Court for the Middle District of Tennessee in April, 1899. Both were found guilty of forgery and filing false pension claims. Blanton was sentenced to two concurrent four-year terms of imprisonment at hard labor. Kellogg was sentenced to three years of imprisonment at hard labor in the first forgery indictment and filed an appeal of the conviction in the case of Lucinda Brown.[74] Kellogg was allowed to remain free on a bond of $3,000 until his appearance before the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit. Backed by a team of three lawyers, Kellogg mounted an unsuccessful plea of insanity.[75] In July, 1900, the Court of Appeals affirmed the lower court's decision, nearly a year after Blanton was imprisoned, Kellogg joined him in the Tennessee State Penitentiary.[76]

Blanton continued to seek the justice he believed he had not received in the courtroom. Writing directly to the commissioner of pensions, he mounted an appeal based on both his own innocence and his wife's failing health and destitution. His hand was shaky and the pencil light, but his purpose was clear. "I am here in the pen on a wrong charg[e]," he wrote. He was innocent of the forgery charges made against him in the pension application of Belle Henderson. By including details about Belle's husband, their children, and Belle's two brothers, Blanton's letter made it clear that his relationship with the Henderson family extended beyond the mechanics of

[73] A. W. Roome to Commissioner of Pensions, January 31, 1899, LCF-JAK.
[74] *Nashville American*, November 7, 1899.
[75] *Nashville Banner*, December 5, 1899.
[76] A. M. Tillman to Commissioner of Pensions, telegram, July 17, 1900, LCF-JAK.

a pension application. He closed in a conciliatory tone. "I am treated of course wright [*sic*] here by these officers of this prision . . . ," he wrote, "no folt [*sic*] of them."[77] In an earlier letter to the commissioner, Blanton had also asserted his innocence. I was "wrongfully accuse[d] and I did not get to testi[f]y in my trieal [*sic*]," he wrote. He asked for pity on account of his wife's ill health. "My wife is a sickly woman and has been for six years, she has been to the county asylum four times in her life and are [*sic*] likely to go [a]gain with this trouble." That Blanton wrote to the commissioner directly is a testament to his knowledge of the Pension Bureau. He also displayed familiarity with bureau officialdom by suggesting that the commissioner "send Dr. Sullivan down there [Nashville] and have him to go investigate the case in full."[78]

Drawing upon his access to lawyers and perhaps money, Kellogg took a different approach. Just hours after he was committed to the penitentiary, Kellogg's attorneys applied to the Department of Justice for a pardon. As the *Nashville American* pointed out, the request would have been sent to District Attorney Tillman, the man who had prosecuted Kellogg, and "it stands to reason . . . that the attorney recommended that the man be made to suffer the punishment imposed by the court."[79] On December 27, 1900, the *Nashville American* reported that President William McKinley had "refused a pardon for J. A. Kellogg, a pension attorney who was convicted of pension frauds at Nashville."[80]

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[77] Richard Blanton to Commissioner of Pensions, July 13, 1899, LCF-JAK.
[78] Richard Blanton to Commissioner of Pensions, March 17, 1899, LCF-JAK.
[79] *Nashville American*, October 23, 1900. Bureau memos suggest that there was no love lost between Kellogg and the assistant U.S. district attorney, Lee Brock, who, Roome wrote, was "after Kellogg's scalp for sure." A. W. Roome to George C. Stewart, February 21, 1899, LCF-JAK.
[80] *Nashville American*, December 27, 1900. In October, the acting commissioner of pensions advised the secretary of the interior that Kellogg's application for clemency should be refused. "The practices of this man and his associates have been a disgrace to civilization," he wrote, "and, as I believe that it would be dangerous to the treasury of the United States to permit him to be at large, I earnestly recommend that a pardon shall not be granted in this case." Acting Commissioner of Pensions to Secretary of the Interior, October 9, 1900, LCF-JAK.

After Blanton had spent a year and a half in prison, the Black pension network he served organized to assist him. Blanton's own appeals to the commissioner of pensions had gone unanswered. Special Examiner Sullivan, whom Blanton knew, was never ordered to reinvestigate the case put together so quickly by Roome and prosecuted so expeditiously by Tillman. Blanton had worked for years, guiding people through the intricacies of the pension application process, filling out paperwork, and connecting prospective applicants to affordable notaries and pension attorneys. Whereas Kellogg relied on lawyers to seek a pardon, Blanton relied on his network of relationships to petition the Department of Justice. Petitions drafted by "members of his family and friends" circulated in Nashville, "even appearing at the Custom House," the building that had once housed both Roome's office and the courtroom where Blanton was convicted, "seeking the aid of officials there in the undertaking." An article in the *Nashville American* alluded to the possibility that the petition received some support from federal employees. An application for pardon was eventually sent to Washington to be evaluated by the Department of Justice. It is not known if the application was successful or if Blanton faced the same denial as Kellogg's. The *American* did suggest that Kellogg and Blanton may have reconciled during their time in prison. As the paper reported, "it appears Kellogg is assisting Blanton in his efforts to secure clemency."[81]

Conclusion

The investigation into Blanton's and Kellogg's pension practices illustrates the extent to which spatial information was an essential component of the Pension Bureau's techniques to

[81] *Nashville American*, July 23, 1901. The motives behind Kellogg's support of Blanton's application for pardon are unclear. By the time Blanton appealed for clemency, Kellogg's application had already been denied.

surveil Black pensioners and police the boundaries of legitimate claims. In response to the vernacular archive of relationships and community knowledge wielded by Black individuals like Richard Blanton, the Pension Bureau developed systems to locate, identify, and catalog African American pension applicants. As was evident in the Nashville cases, the politics of space was central to the bureau's ability to police the practices of pension agents, sub-agents, and notaries public. Ultimately, six special examiners worked under the leadership of Albert Roome to investigate allegations of fraud among African Americans in the city. Roome and his examiners would not have been successful without access to vital information maintained by the clerks at the Pension Bureau headquarters in Washington, but they also needed the local knowledge of informants like Stephen Lyons. Culling the records at the bureau's headquarters, clerks copied hundreds of postal addresses to portable cards ("case slips") and shipped them to Roome and his investigators, who were told to audit African American claims first. Using the case slips as an index of Black pensioners in Nashville, Roome dispatched his investigative team to locate and identify those who had worked with Joseph Kellogg and Richard Blanton. Criminal charges against Blanton and Kellogg were ultimately filed through close coordination with the U.S. district attorney in Nashville.

The politics of space that enabled African Americans to mobilize communal relationships in efforts to secure Civil War pensions were mobilized by the Pension Bureau in a backlash against such claims. Richard Blanton connected poor African American residents of Black Bottom through vernacular methods of information-gathering. Lacking the authority to prepare legal documents or submit application materials on behalf of others, Blanton brought many clients to his partner, Joseph Kellogg, who notarized affidavits. Kellogg took advantage of the faith that Blanton and his clients placed in his services. The requirement that witnesses be

physically present when their affidavits were written presented a challenge to many Black applicants but an opportunity for Kellogg, who exploited the fissure created by space and forged affidavits to collect notary fees. Kellogg's actions spelled dire consequences for himself, Blanton, and hundreds of Black pension applicants whose claims were denied or substantially delayed.

As the Nashville cases and the practices of Richard Blanton show, distance mattered for Black claims-making. A full understanding of the strategies and stakes of African American struggles for pensions requires attention to the politics of place. Both the Pension Bureau and African American claimants developed information practices designed to address the challenges of gathering information across geographical space and time. For Black claimants, local space was generative. Blanton practiced a vernacular form of information-gathering that mobilized knowledge shared among people and dispersed across the neighborhood of Black Bottom. Blanton's practices were maintained by mutual trust among local people and were flexible enough to contain a variety of lived their experiences. As such, vernacular information-gathering created both opportunities and risks. For Melvina Patton, the name of a man who lived far away and whom she had not seen for decades could be more meaningful to her than the word of her next-door neighbor. For Richard Blanton, the politics of place meant using the lived environment—neighborhoods, public spaces, and cemeteries—as vital sources of information.

Distance was always a challenge to the Pension Bureau's ability to manage information. As the number of men and women eligible for pensions increased, the bureau expanded the size of its clerical force and overhauled its record-keeping practices at great expense in order to share information across a network of field offices and clerks that extended across the nation. The wealth of information maintained at the bureau's headquarters in Washington was at the

fingertips of functionaries like Roome, no matter where they were working. The Nashville cases also demonstrate that geographical information, particularly the ability to identify the location of individual pension applicants and recipients, was essential to the bureau's ability to investigate fraud. In order to identify and investigate suspect claimants and witnesses, bureau examiners had first to locate the individuals under scrutiny. As Roome's operations in Nashville illustrate, the Pension Bureau expended significant time, money, and clerical labor in order to record, maintain, and operationalize the information necessary to evaluate claims across distance.

Epilogue

The social and cultural forces that marginalized Black Bottom persisted well into the twentieth century. Like their nineteenth-century predecessors, campaigns to redevelop Black Bottom in the twentieth century proposed plans that would displace neighborhood residents. On October 9, 1994, the *Tennessean* published a story on plans to redevelop Black Bottom with the headline: "Planners See Visions of Vast Center of Tourism." Indeed, by the 1990s, the district had been significantly remade by urban renewal projects and bore little resemblance to the working-class Black neighborhood it had been in the late nineteenth century. In 1994, construction was once again underway. A massive sports arena was being built on the site of the old lumber yard situated between Broadway and Demonbreun along Fifth Avenue (formerly Summer Street). Two parking garages and a massive hotel were planned to occupy most of the remaining real estate along Demonbreun Street, a street that was once the heart of Black Bottom. The story noted that developers would soon break ground on a multi-block convention center where Pearl Public School and the house of Joseph Kellogg and Richard Blanton once sat. Clark Chapel had already been razed to make room for a seven-lane thoroughfare known now as Korean Veterans Boulevard.[1] The congregation of St. Paul's AME Church relocated and sold its original building on Franklin Street. Unlike most nineteenth-century structures in the neighborhood, the historic building escaped destruction.[2] Today, it is an entertainment venue known as the "Bell Tower."[3] Little exists of the vibrant Black neighborhood once located near the center of downtown Nashville.

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[1] *Tennessean*, October 9, 1994.
[2] Lois C. McDougald, *A Collection of Histories of Metro/Nashville's Afro-American Churches, 1832-1907* (Nashville: Published in Cooperation with the National Endowment for the Humanities, 1986), 118-120.
[3] "About the Venue," The Bell Tower, accessed July 2, 2023, https://www.thebelltower.com/about-us/.

Black Bottom was always more than what its detractors claimed it to be. On February 8, 1995, amid Black Bottom's redevelopment, William Daniel, an African American former resident of the neighborhood, spoke at the Afro-American Culture and History Conference at Tennessee State University. According to the *Tennessean,* Daniel had lived in Black Bottom from his birth in 1931 until he enlisted in the army in 1948. "Black Bottom was a wonderful place to grow up," he remembered. "It was a poor neighborhood, but I was used to it. It was where I learned all the skills I needed to make it in life." The *Tennessean* reported that Daniel spoke of Black Bottom fondly and "described it as a real community—with houses, churches, schools, and funeral homes." According to Daniel, a culture of mutual support had sustained the neighborhood through the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century. "If you were walking around looking hungry," he recalled, "people would invite you in and give you something to eat."[4] Daniel's reflections illustrate the benefits of claiming space—neighborhoods sustained relationships, relationships sustained life.

It is unknown whether the formative years Daniel spent as a youth in Black Bottom influenced his decision to pursue military service or his later employment as a claims specialist in the Tennessee Department of Veterans Affairs. What is certain is that he was not the first man from Black Bottom to do so. Daniel's career followed a long history of Black men from the neighborhood who used military service as an opportunity to bring federal resources back to their local communities. Daniel, who passed away in 2014, was remembered in his obituary as having "held 'office' at the Krystal's on Franklin Road where he discussed history with the 'breakfast club,' and aided Veterans who came by the office with free VA benefit information."[5] Like

[4] *Tennessean*, February 9, 1995.
[5] Obituary of William James Daniel, Patton Brothers Funeral Home, accessed July 2, 2023, https://www.pattonbrothers.net/obituary/2861129.

Richard Blanton before him, Daniel brought the resources of the state to the people. Together, their efforts represent a century of Black claims-making with roots in Black Bottom.

Place-making preceded claims-making. The networks of association that sustained Black claims for Civil War pensions in the late nineteenth century existed among people who lived in a physical world. Making Black Bottom a *place* that sustained Black claims-making involved creating physical spaces where communal relationships—those of kin, neighbors, comrades, and acquaintances—could be mobilized as collective resources. During the Civil War, enslaved African Americans claimed *space* at the geographical heart of Nashville and, in the process, created a *place*: Black Bottom, a neighborhood of Black institutions, labor, and leisure. Its Black residents invested in spaces of communal activity from churches to saloons, public schools to private porches. In so doing, they transformed the neighborhood into a space of mutuality in which residents shared both history and social connections that became the foundation for collective claims-making. The place claimed and created by Black veterans and their families during the Civil War sustained Black life, culture, and claims for Civil War pensions well into the twentieth century.

This dissertation has endeavored to recover Black Bottom from what cultural geographer Katherine McKittrick calls "geographic domination." Black Bottom—denigrated as a neighborhood of crime, vice, and disease by the nineteenth-century press and dismissed as a slum by later historians—was slated for elimination through urban renewal in the twentieth century. By using space and place as categories of historical analysis, the dissertation builds on McKittrick's argument that Black history is "worked out" in the physical world."[6] Literally and figuratively, the dissertation puts Black Bottom back on the map. Digital mapping layers the late

[6] Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xi ("worked out"), xii ("geographic domination").

nineteenth-century neighborhood over the real-world location of downtown Nashville and provides rich avenues for historical analysis. When combined with information from such traditional historical sources as federal census returns, city directories, and local newspapers, digital maps become tools for spatial analysis. The resulting layers are used to analyze the natural and built environments and the residential and labor patterns in the historical neighborhood. The maps are also works of digital reclamation that place the historic Black neighborhood back at the center of Nashville's urban core. It is far harder to dismiss Black Bottom as merely a vice district or urban slum when the rich ecology of Black social, religious, and educational activity is indelibly located in the physical world.

African Americans first claimed Black Bottom during the Civil War. Wartime freedom seekers set in motion events that transformed the war and ultimately remade the nation. The refugees from slavery who risked their lives to reach Union military lines understood freedom, in part, as a place. In Nashville, as elsewhere in the South, the conditions they found at Union encampments were often unsuitable for life. Nevertheless, they claimed Nashville as a space for the Union and for their own emancipation from bondage. Wartime refugees built a community in Black Bottom as Black military laborers constructed the city's fortifications. Through their labor, Black Bottom took shape as a place of freedom.

In making a neighborhood out of Black Bottom, African Americans encountered numerous obstacles. The streets flooded frequently, and municipal investment in improvements—raising roads above flood height, laying underground pipes for water and sewage, and draining cesspools—lagged behind that in the rest of the city. Despite these challenges, by the 1880s, Black residents had transformed the neighborhood into a center of Black life, culture, and leisure. It is no coincidence that two of the city's oldest Black churches

and the only public school for Black children in the urban core were located in Black Bottom. The neighborhood's residents built and sustained these institutions. They also patronized the neighborhood's saloons, dance halls, and gambling dens, making Black Bottom the premier location for secular leisure available to African Americans. Combining historical sources with digital mapping provides a glimpse into the neighborhood's diverse social, religious, and educational activities.

As Black Bottom matured into a predominantly Black working-class neighborhood, affluent white Nashvillians attempted to reclaim the space from its residents. White reformers fueled a backlash against Black Bottom that enlisted the aid of local newspapers and city officials. While African Americans were building cultural institutions such as churches, schools, and dance halls in Black Bottom, white reformers organized civic leagues to quarantine, police, or altogether displace the neighborhood's Black residents. Despite efforts to destroy the neighborhood, Black Bottom persisted as one of Nashville's hubs of Black working-class life.

The work of place-making sustained more than churches and saloons; it laid the foundation for collective claims-making. Black Bottom was a reservoir of local knowledge and social connections that were essential for African Americans who strove to prove eligibility for Civil War pensions. Decades after the war, Black veterans and their families struggled to obtain the entitlements they were due for wartime service. The legacy of slavery and three wartime years of changing federal emancipation policies left many Black applicants without the official documentation required by the Pension Bureau. Richard Blanton, a Black pension sub-agent, animated applications thought long dead by nourishing them with the collective knowledge of Black Bottom's social and geographical landscape. He did so through a process of vernacular information-gathering. Blanton walked the neighborhood and met Black applicants where they

were: on porches, in kitchens, at the railroad station, and on the street. Blanton knew that the information necessary to prove pension eligibility was dispersed among the people of Black Bottom. The work of gathering information required movement about the neighborhood. Reconstructing Blanton's movement through the physical space of Black Bottom illustrates the mechanics of on-the-ground claims-making.

Blanton worked to make Civil War pensions available to Black people and did so in the teeth of a federal bureaucracy whose information practices were at odds with Black people's needs. Where Blanton enabled Black pension applications, the Pension Bureau scrutinized them. In contrast to the highly local practices of Blanton, the bureau developed methods of information-gathering that relied on official documentation to process massive amounts of information efficiently across vast distances. Its bureaucratic information-gathering collapsed distinctions between individual experience and regional variation. Eventually, the bureau took aim at Blanton's information practices and the pension applications of Black Bottom residents that he had enabled. In 1899, the Pension Bureau initiated a criminal investigation that strategically leveraged spatial information to retrace Blanton's vernacular methods of information-gathering and comprehend the social networks of Black Bottom.

Place-making and claims-making were interconnected struggles for residents of Black Bottom. The social and geographical landscape of Black Bottom generated and sustained Black claims for Civil War pensions. Neither claims for place nor claims for federal entitlements were freely given. In the 1880s and 1890s, white residents of South Nashville organized to displace the residents of Black Bottom and remake urban space for their own benefit. Likewise, the information networks mobilized by Richard Blanton were targeted by investigators of the

Pension Bureau as potential sources of false and fraudulent applications. Nevertheless, Black Nashvillians waged a protracted struggle for belonging at the heart of the city.

Today, people who walk the streets of downtown Nashville may see little of the neighborhood that Black people had built in the late nineteenth century. The memory of Black Bottom, however, is not lost among Black Nashvillians. Along with presenting at academic conferences, William Daniel founded a historical tour company and gave tours of the area to groups from local colleges and visitors to the city.[7] Walking with tour groups, Daniel centered the history of African Americans in the history of Nashville. Like Daniel's tours, this dissertation recovers a historical place that no longer exists on the ground. In so doing, it illustrates that the politics of claiming place was central to Black claims-making in the late nineteenth century.

[7] Obituary of William James Daniel, Patton Brothers Funeral Home, accessed July 2, 2023, https://www.pattonbrothers.net/obituary/2861129.

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