THE URBAN GEOGRAPHY OF THEATRE IN A NEW SOUTH CITY: MEMPHIS, 1890-1920

by

STEPHEN K. HUFF

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2012

© 2012

Stephen K. Huff

All Rights Reserved

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the
dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Judith Milhous

Date Chair of Examining Committee

Jean Graham-Jones

Date Executive Officer

Marvin Carlson

Jean Graham-Jones

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

ABSTRACT

THE URBAN GEOGRAPHY OF THEATRE IN A NEW SOUTH CITY:
MEMPHIS, 1890-1920

by

Stephen K. Huff

Advisor: Professor Judith Milhous

This case study of theatres in Memphis during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reads the local history of theatre with and against larger narratives of national theatre history that emphasize the industrialization of U.S. theatre and its geographical centralization in New York City. Key questions include: What roles did the building and establishment of theatres play in the urban geography of period Memphis, and vice versa? And, how did the consolidation of the national theatre industry affect theatres in Memphis? A narrower geographic focus on a mid-sized U.S. city allows for a detailed investigation of several different types of theatres—including legitimate, vaudeville, and African American theatre—and their relationships to and contradictions with the bigger picture of U.S. theatre during the period, which would be more difficult to do with a larger city. It also provides for more thorough descriptions of the social and cultural contexts in which these theatres were created, particularly with regard to class and race.

The structure of the argument is guided by Henri Lefebvre's dialectical triad of perceived, conceived, and lived space. After laying out the plan of the dissertation in the first chapter, the second chapter maps out the city of Memphis, locating the places of performance within its urban landscape in order to reveal the spatial networks—or perceived spaces—

involved in theatre-going at the time. In developing the stories of the theatres themselves throughout the last three chapters, I have employed two specific, time-bound conceptions of space—"the New South city" and "the Road"—to discuss the establishment of local theatres and national touring circuits. In this way, I have attempted to show the connections and tensions between local and national events and developments. If I have succeeded, the reader will have a better idea of the relationship of theatre and urban space in Memphis during this period as it was directly, palpably lived.

This dissertation provides a complex picture of U.S. theatre in microcosm during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—one that can help to both broaden and challenge larger narratives on the subject.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have helped me to bring this project to fruition—most of all, my dissertation committee chair and mentor, Judith Milhous, who cheered and challenged, encouraged and confronted, motivated and cautioned, and generally served as my rigorous and faithful guide, editor, and teacher throughout this process. I am grateful to her in more ways than she will ever know. Jean Graham-Jones meticulously and carefully read and edited drafts of my work, and there are many nuances in my narrative that are due to her enthusiastic interest, ever-questioning nature, and attention to detail. Marvin Carlson, whose prolific body of work was part of what inspired me to pursue graduate study in the first place, provided suggestions that proved crucial to the structure of my argument and the completeness of my descriptions. The examples set by these three distinguished scholars continue to inspire me in my scholarship and teaching, and I am greatly appreciative of all their efforts on this project, as well as their mentorship and guidance throughout my time in the Ph.D. Program in Theatre.

Other Graduate Center professors who have contributed significantly to my doctoral training and to whom I am very grateful include Marc Dolan, Mira Felner, Daniel Gerould, Claudia Orenstein, David Savran, and Pamela Sheingorn. Assistant Program Officer Lynette Gibson has been a lifesaver on many occasions, and I thank her kindly for that.

I would like to extend a special thank you to David Mayer, whose work on nineteenth-century theatre has inspired me for several years. I befriended him at a recent Association for Theatre in Higher Education conference, and he has provided moral support, encouragement, and incredibly useful suggestions.

Curators and staff at several libraries have been very helpful and patient with my many requests. I would like to thank Edwin Frank and the staff in the Special Collections of the University of Memphis Libraries, as well as G. Wayne Dowdy and the staff at the Memphis Public Library & Information Center—especially Gina Cordell, who helped me to find and obtain images for this dissertation. Bill Short of the Paul Barret, Jr. Library at Rhodes College, and the staff of the Alyne Queener Massey Law Library at Vanderbilt University in Nashville also assisted me in my research, and I thank them for that.

My dissertation research was funded in part by a grant from the Martin S. Tackel American Research Fund, and I am very thankful to the award committee who considered my work deserving of support.

A great number of friends and colleagues have lent their support, their ears, and their ideas throughout this project: above all, Ana Martínez and Bertie Ferdman, who invited me to present a portion of this work as part of their panel on "Radical Urbanism and Performance" at ATHE. Other Graduate Center colleagues who have helped me, perhaps more than they know, include Kevin Byrne, Janice Capuana, Frank Episale, Gad Guterman, Bethany Holmstrom, Elisa Legon, Ed Lingan, Lindsay Livingston, Christopher Swift, Jenn Worth, and especially Linell Ajello and Naomi Stubbs. Memphis colleagues, friends, and mentors from the past and present who have provided encouragement, advice, and patient, friendly nods throughout this project include Julia "Cookie" Ewing, Stephen Hancock, Joanna Helming, Robert Hetherington, Jennifer Jared, David Jilg, Holly Lau, Marina Levina, Steve and Joanne Malin, Debora Nelson, and AnnMarie Saunders. I am particularly thankful for all these people, and I cherish having them in my life.

I would be nowhere without the love, support, and encouragement that my family has provided. I am always thankful for my mother, Lynne Lashley, my father and stepmother, Knox and Susan Huff, and my siblings, Charles Huff, Merideth Huff, and Lanette Miller. Finally, I am deeply grateful to my partner, Tom Dillehay, for his unbelievable patience and his undying support and love throughout the past twenty-five years, and especially for enduring the final stages of my doctoral work. It has been a long journey, and I am truly thankful that he has stood by me all the way.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures x

Introduction 1

Part I: Mapping the Terrain 8

Chapter One
The Scope of the Project 9

Chapter Two
The City and the Theatre: Places of Performance in Memphis 49

Part II: The Making of Memphis Theatres 99

Prologue
The "New South City" and "The Road" 100

Chapter Three
New Men, New Theatres, New South:
The Grand Opera House and the Lyceum Theatre 116

Chapter Four
From Buzzard Roost to Beale Street: African American Theatres 167

Chapter Five
"From Provincialism to the Wild Ways of a City": Transforming Memphis Theatres 215

Conclusions 255

Figures 269

Bibliography 298

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1 Map: Memphis, 1819 270
Fig. 2 Map: Annexations to Memphis, 1832-1876 271
Fig. 3 Map: Memphis, 1870 272
Fig. 4 Map: Annexations to Memphis, 1899-1919 273
Fig. 5 Newspaper advertisement for Yiddish theatre 274
Fig. 6 Map: Historic Memphis Places of Performance 275
Fig. 7 Map: North Memphis 276
Fig. 8 Map: Central Business District 277
Fig. 9 Newspaper advertisement: Luehrmann's "After Theater Lunches" 278
Fig. 10 Illustration: First Lyceum Theatre, Amateur Athletic Association Building 279
Fig. 11 Photo Postcard: Second Lyceum Theatre 280
Fig. 12 Photograph: Lyceum Theatre, with Tennessee Club across the street 281
Fig. 13 Photograph: Jefferson Theatre 282
Fig. 14 Map: South Memphis 283
Fig. 15 Photograph: Grand Opera House 284
Fig. 16 Photograph: Auditorium, 1890s 285
Fig. 17 Photograph: Bijou, after 1904 285
Fig. 18 Photograph: Church's Auditorium 286
Fig. 19 Photograph: Robert R. Church Memorial 287
Fig. 20 Photograph: Metropolitan Theatre 288
Fig. 21 Photograph: Venus Theatre 289
Fig. 22 Photograph: Daisy Theatre 290
Fig. 23 Map: On the Outskirts 291

LIST OF FIGURES (CONTINUED)

Fig. 24 Photograph: East End Park 292

Fig. 25 Editorial cartoon: "Memphis—'These Are My Children'" 293

Fig. 26 Map: Southern Railway 294

Fig. 27 Map: Illinois Central Railway 295

Fig. 28 Map: Missouri Pacific Railway 296

Fig. 29 Editorial cartoon: "Color Caste in the Theater" 297

INTRODUCTION

"Geography is destiny," or so the oft-quoted saying attributed to Napoleon goes. But in the contemporary world of globalization and virtual communities, this notion has been seriously challenged. So, why focus on local theatre history in an age of globalization, and why Memphis?

Considerations of place and space have held the attention of theatre and performance studies scholars for a good two decades now, with several conversations focusing on the relationship of theatre to public space, urban development, and civil society, as well as the real and imagined spaces and places created in and through performance.[1] Many of these discussions concern contemporary theatre practice in major urban centers, but some invite investigations of other places and times using the methods and theories that they employ. For example, in his book, *City Stages: Theatre and Urban Space in a Global City*, Michael McKinnie states that the application of a methodological approach similar to his but focused on a different place and time than Toronto since 1967 "could yield illuminating results that might offer the basis of a wider geography of theatre in urban space."[2]

Further, in response to some who have called for a more globalized approach to theatre studies, one that would focus on neglected performance cultures, Jo Robinson (who currently

---

[1] Such studies include Jen Harvie, *Theatre and the City* (New York: Palgrave, 2009); D.J. Hopkins, Shelley Orr, and Kim Solga, eds., *Performance and the City* (New York: Palgrave, 2009); Michael McKinnie, *City Stages: Theatre and Urban Space in a Global City* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); David Wiles, *A Short History of Western Performance Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Una Chaudhuri and Elinor Fuchs, eds., *Land/Scape/Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002); Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999); Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995); and Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989). See also Joanne Tompkins, ed., *Modern Drama* 46, no. 4 (2003) ("Geographies of the Theatre") and Susan Bennett, ed., *Theatre Journal* 53, no. 2 (2001) ("Theatre and the City").

[2] McKinnie, 135.

teaches at the University of Nottingham and whose research focuses on nineteenth-century theatre in that provincial UK city) has argued that "provincial performance history provides the researcher with an area of relative neglect, and a variety of cultural performances which test our current definitions of performance."[3] She suggests that while exploring the wide world for such neglected performance cultures provides much-needed expansion of theatre scholarship, there is also a need to investigate performances in the smaller places closer to home. Like Robinson, I am currently situated in a provincial city and researching its performance history, which has been relatively neglected, and some of which—in particular its African American variety theatre—has been kept separate from consideration because of certain definitions of theatre that would exclude examples such as performances that took place in the black theatres around town.

Robinson goes on to state that "an attempt to model a truly global perspective would require us to start from the local, from the individual object, but would then prompt us to look not at that individual object itself, but at the connections between it and other moments, other objects, other locals."[4] The idea of local theatre history as connected theoretically to a global perspective is, in a way, part of an attempt to recuperate the practice of local history and to contest the insularity and notions of "heritage preservation" with which it is often associated.

This dissertation takes up the challenges offered by scholars such as McKinnie and Robinson by offering a case study of theatre in a smaller city—Memphis, a city in the U.S. South. In doing so, it contributes to theatre scholarship by helping to broaden the geographical field.

---

[3] Jo Robinson, "Becoming More Provincial?: The Global and the Local in Theatre History," *New Theatre Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (August 2007): 238.

[4] Ibid.

So, with that said, why focus on theatre in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? Due to the centrality of New York City in the process of commercial theatre production in the U.S. during this period, a disconnection between performance and place seems to have developed in some theatre scholarship, which has had a tendency to imbue representations of nineteenth-century U.S. theatre with a kind of placelessness. This disconnection can be readily seen in Gerald Bordman's *American Theatre: A Chronicle of Comedy and Drama, 1869-1914*, which, despite its otherwise unquestionable usefulness, provides separate indices for people and plays—but no index at all for places.[5] There is no need for one: the place of performance for "American" theatre in this case is almost always understood to be New York. Felicia Hardison Londré has noticed this trend. In her recent book, *The Enchanted Years of the Stage: Kansas City at the Crossroads of American Theater, 1870-1930*, which offers a rich depiction of local theatre in that city, she remarks that as she conducted her research, she "came to realize how very 'New York-centric' is the published history of American theater. For most traditional historians of American dramatic art, if it didn't happen in Gotham, it was not worth mentioning."[6] In much scholarship on late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century U.S. theatre, some places do not seem to matter.

This problem in scholarship is surely connected with how theatre was actually produced during the period, which I will discuss further in Chapter One. However, it could also have something to do with the focus on traditional historicism in the field of early U.S. theatre studies—a practice that tends to favor time over space. Urban geographer Edward Soja has

---

[5] Gerald Bordman, *American Theatre: A Chronicle of Comedy and Drama, 1869-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[6] Felicia Hardison Londré, *The Enchanted Years of the Stage: Kansas City at the Crossroads of American Theater, 1870-1930* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 2.

written about the obsession with history to the exclusion of geography that pervades scholarship in general:

> So unbudgeably hegemonic has been this historicism of theoretical consciousness that it has tended to occlude a comparable critical sensibility to the spatiality of social life, a practical theoretical consciousness that sees the lifeworld of being creatively located not only in the making of history but also in the construction of human geographies, the social production of space and the restless formation and reformation of geographical landscapes: social being actively emplaced in space *and* time in an explicitly historical *and* geographical contextualization.[7]

In order to achieve the kind of explicit contextualization in space and time that Soja calls for, location and the social production of locality must be considered along with developments over time. This dissertation attempts to construct the kind of detailed context that Soja describes by focusing on the urban geography of a specific city and its relationship with theatrical performance over a certain period of time.

All of the foregoing is not meant to endorse the production of local theatre history at the expense of a more global view. The formation of urban spaces that are intended to facilitate theatrical performance is by and large a local process, but one that could not happen without wider influence. While I agree with Kim Solga that heeding urban geographers' call for a reconsideration of performance and the city is necessary, the idea of trying to understand this relationship "not from the top down, but from the ground up," as she states, is a bit troublesome, at least with regard to my project.[8] This approach may work very well when applied to well-known world cities; however, when it comes to lesser-known cities like Memphis, which are nowhere near as prominent in theatre studies as New York or Chicago—or even Atlanta, for that matter—it risks the danger of myopia.

---

[7] Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (New York: Verso, 1989), 10-11, his emphasis.

[8] Hopkins, et. al., 4.

Jean Graham-Jones has pointed out that "cultural production continues to be theoretically polarized as either dictated from above or percolating from below." In order to combat this polarization, she suggests focusing instead on "the relationship between the local and the global as neither oppositional nor exclusive but rather interactive and interpenetrative."[9] Although she is explaining "glocalization," a current label for conceptualizing this process of interaction and interpenetration with regard to contemporary globalization, the idea applies here, I think, to nineteenth-century developments in U.S. theatre, particularly when combined with human geographer Doreen Massey's idea of the global as simply the "geographical beyond" of a particular place.[10]

Rather than simply a "from the ground up" approach, this dissertation will attempt to provide a more dialectical focus on its objects of study. Specifically, I will make use of Henri Lefebvre's dialectics of spatial production throughout the narrative in my efforts to explain the connections and tensions between and within local and global drifts. Rather than going into the details of Lefebvre's concepts here, I will describe them and outline the theoretical framework in the "Theoretical Context" section of Chapter One.

With regard to its contribution to studies of the U.S. South, this project is in tandem with Gavin James Campbell's *Music and the Making of a New South*, where he investigates the ways in which Atlantans "crafted a musical culture at the turn of the twentieth century that gave voice to their notions of who they were and who they wished to be." As New York often stands in for the country as a whole in terms of theatre during this period, Atlanta often does the same in

---

[9] Jean Graham-Jones, "Editorial Comment: Theorizing Globalization through Theatre," *Theatre Journal* 57, no. 3 (2005): ix.

[10] Massey defines "global" as referring "not necessarily to the planetary scale, but to the geographical beyond, the world beyond the place itself" in "Places and Their Pasts," *History Workshop Journal* 39 (Spring 1995): 183.

scholarship about the New South—and rightly so, given the prominence of Atlanta newspaper editor Henry Grady in the formation of New South ideology (a term that I will begin to define in Chapter One). However, Campbell acknowledges that although "Atlanta's men of empire constantly talked about building *the* new South, they were really only fitfully able to fashion *a* new South."[11] An investigation of cultural institution-building in a different New South city like Memphis offers an alternative perspective on the subject.

As in Atlanta, many European American citizens in Memphis at this time imagined the South as separate from the rest of the nation. Middle and upper class advocates of New South ideology courted industrial investment from outside the region in order to share in the prosperity and progress of northern cities, while insisting upon the racial segregation of urban (and thereby theatrical) space within the region under the guise of maintaining peace and order between blacks and working-class whites. At the same time, many African American citizens in Memphis imagined themselves as part of a community that transcended such presumed regional boundaries. Black citizens struggled to participate in the services offered by the city and ultimately to create and maintain their own cultural and social institutions in the face of severe, often violent, opposition from whites. In many cases they somehow managed to thrive and make significant contributions not only to local culture, but also to U.S. culture at large. Like the white community, however, the black community in Memphis was not without its divisions and prejudices based on class. Moreover, as was true in many U.S. cities during this period, groups of people who, unlike most African Americans, immigrated to this country voluntarily—including Irish, Germans, and Italians, among others—found themselves caught in the middle of a system that divided human geography by a color line. The tensions among these communities,

---

[11] Gavin James Campbell, *Music and the Making of a New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 11.

as they cooperated and clashed with the globalizing forces of capitalism, manifested in the theatrical activities of period Memphis in ways that reveal the creation of social and cultural structures which permeate the city to this day.

With regard to the structure of the dissertation, Part One, "Mapping the Terrain," builds on what I have been discussing thus far and begins with a chapter that lays out the scope of the project, particularly with regard to the wider historical and theoretical contexts in which the study is situated. Next is a chapter that introduces the reader to the general history and geography of Memphis during the period and locates the theatres within its urban landscape. The descriptions of urban history and of particular sections of the city in Chapter Two, along with the illustrations provided, will serve as a foundation for a deeper exploration of how and why these theatres came to be located where they were, how they represented different communities spatially, and how they operated within the spheres of local, regional, and national theatre. This deeper exploration takes place in Part Two, "The Making of Memphis Theatres," which is divided into a prologue and three chapters that deal with particular groups of theatres. The prologue contextualizes two specific spatial concepts to which all of these theatres were related in some way: the "New South city" and "the Road." The first two chapters concern theatres that were associated with specific cultural groups in the city—namely the European American elite and the African American population in general. The last chapter focuses on how the relationship of the city and its theatres shifted as Memphis transformed into a more modern U.S. city in the years leading up to 1920.

PART I:
MAPPING THE TERRAIN

CHAPTER ONE

THE SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

Bearing in mind the parameters that I have sketched in the Introduction, let us ask how a specific location like Memphis fits into the larger narratives of U.S. theatre during this period—narratives which tend to focus exclusively on the geographical centralization of the theatre industry in New York.

Historical Context: U.S. Theatre, 1880-1920

The last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first two of the twentieth were a time of major transition in U.S. theatre. The 1870s had seen the demise of the local resident stock company throughout the country, as touring stars and combination companies—which traveled with all the necessary elements of production, including supporting cast and scenery—led audiences to demand more than a resident company could feasibly give with its nightly change of bill, simple scenery, yeoman actors, and standard repertoire. Advances in transportation, particularly the explosion of railroad development, put the final nail in the coffin of the resident company, as road companies could reach more stops, and people could gain easier access to cities and towns where better theatre might be offered. The allure and cachet of shows "got up" in New York—shows that had been smash hits on Broadway with star actors and spectacular sets—far outsold local stock company performances in the hinterlands, and theatre became big business.

In the manner of Gilded Age business, consolidation and incorporation were the major trends, as fewer and fewer companies grabbed larger and larger shares of their respective industries. At first, individual theatre managers (with empty theatres, sans resident companies)

traveled to New York during the summer in order to negotiate with individual producers to book a season of shows for their theatres. Dissatisfaction with this chaotic process led to the development of theatrical circuits and booking agencies, and finally to the monopolies of the Syndicate and the Shuberts. By the early twentieth century, most professional theatre in the country was dominated first by the former, and then by the latter. In many instances, the cycle of production and distribution controlled by these companies was complete, as they not only produced and routed theatrical performances but also owned or leased the theatres in which such performances took place.[1]

Benjamin McArthur has called these four decades a "golden age of American theatre as a national institution," and New York, rather than just being the best theatre town in the country, became the cultural arbiter of this institution.[2] Offering a different perspective, Mark Fearnow laments that

> the sheer multiplicity of theatrical producers before 1870 fostered variety and innovation in both writing and production, as well as a dialogue between theatre and community, the theatre being to some degree a showcase and forum for the community's working out its idea of itself. The industrialization of theatre and its centralization in New York City changed all that.[3]

Fearnow characterizes the commercial theatre of the time as a corporate behemoth in order to show that a clear break came about during the 1910s and 20s through the independent and art theatre movements.[4]

---

[1] For a general outline of these trends see John Frick, "A Changing Theatre: New York and Beyond," in *The Cambridge History of American Theatre, Vol. II: 1870-1945*, ed. Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 196-232.

[2] Benjamin McArthur, *Actors and American Culture, 1880-1920* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000), x.

[3] Mark Fearnow, "Theatre Groups and Their Playwrights," in Wilmeth and Bigsby, eds., 345.

[4] On the complexity of the battle between the art theatre movement and other forms of commercial theatre during the 1920s such as vaudeville, see David Savran's *Highbrow/Lowdown: Theater, Jazz, and the Making of the New Middle Class* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009).

This trend toward consolidation in the so-called "legitimate" theatre business also affected business operations in the most prominent form of popular theatre at the time—vaudeville. At this point, I should digress for a moment to describe what I mean here by "legitimate theatre" and "vaudeville." The phrase "legitimate theatre" was very much in currency during the period under investigation here, and it was primarily used to differentiate popular forms of entertainment such as vaudeville and motion pictures from the staging of plays deemed to possess literary value. As David Savran has noted, the term *legitimate* "represents not an unprejudiced descriptive but a value-laden metaphorical concept—one of the most loaded metaphors in the theatrical lexicon."[5] Not surprisingly, this concept has generated a good deal of discussion in theatre scholarship. For example, Lawrence Levine has argued that throughout the nineteenth century there was an attempt on the part of elites in the U.S. to separate "highbrow" and "lowbrow" entertainment in order to help them gain power over the processes of modernization.[6] By the end of the century, they had fashioned the production of what had been the widely popular genres of Shakespeare and opera into high culture, and had disavowed non-literary types of theatrical performance, such as variety theatre, as low culture. However, Savran uses Pierre Bourdieu's theories regarding the sociology of taste to examine theatrical legitimacy and remarks that "in certain respects, the ability to fashion a hierarchy (cultural or otherwise) and police its boundaries is far more important than the specific content of categories like highbrow and lowbrow."[7] I will return to Savran and elaborate more on the concept of theatrical legitimacy and its connections with "policing the boundaries" of urban space in the next chapter.

---

[5] Savran, 42.

[6] Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

[7] Savran, 47.

Throughout this dissertation, when I discuss vaudeville, I am referring to a form of variety theatre that developed in the U.S. during the late nineteenth century. Until the 1880s, variety theatre in the U.S. was, like the resident stock company of legitimate theatre, primarily a local phenomenon. A product of the nineteenth-century upsurge of urban life in the U.S., this form of entertainment often took place in concert halls and saloons that were owned and/or operated by independent entrepreneurs, and it was patronized by mostly working-class, male audiences drawn from the surrounding area. Ticket prices were well below those of legitimate theatres. Performers were often a mix of local talent and traveling specialty artists, and the material presented frequently related to people and places familiar to neighborhood audiences.[8]

The term "variety theatre" had connotations that often linked this genre with drinking, rowdy behavior, profanity, and—at times—display of the female body. In Memphis, especially during and after the Civil War occupation, there were several variety theatres catering to such tastes, where middle- and upper-class women considered "respectable" were not to be seen among the spectators. By 1869 the old Memphis Theatre, which had been converted from a church twenty years earlier and was the first theatre in the city to endure, had been renamed the Varieties and was one of seven establishments in the city offering variety theatre in this vein.[9]

Along with increasing prosperity and progress during the 1880s, however, change came to this theatrical field around the country. Variety managers began seeking out the patronage of women, whom they viewed, as David Nasaw has pointed out, not merely as additional paying

---

[8] For more on variety theatre in general, see, for example, Robert M. Lewis, ed., *From Traveling Show to Vaudeville: Theatrical Spectacle in America, 1830-1910* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); and Robert C. Toll, *On with the Show: The First Century of Show Business in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

[9] Eugene K. Bristow, "'Look Out for Saturday Night': A Social History of Professional Variety Theater in Memphis, Tennessee, 1859-1880" (Ph.D. diss., State University of Iowa, 1956), 169. A note on the spelling of "theatre": the spelling of names attached to the theatre buildings discussed in this dissertation as "theatre" or "theater" is relatively interchangeable in the various newspapers and directories in which they appear. For the sake of consistency, I have decided to standardize the spelling throughout as "theatre," except when directly quoted.

customers but also as "icons of decency."[10] The presence of women in the audience had the effect of increasing the respectability of the theatre and thereby its profits from middle-class customers. Although managers were making new innovations in several places, Tony Pastor is most often credited as being the first to transform variety theatre into the more family-oriented form of vaudeville by purposefully attracting a middle-class, mixed-gender audience. At his theatre in New York's Union Square, Pastor eliminated alcoholic beverages, smoking, the presence of prostitutes, and overtly risqué material, in addition to scheduling matinees and doling out door prizes, all in an effort to appeal to a more genteel clientele than had formerly patronized variety theatre. Also, managers everywhere began using the term "vaudeville" to differentiate their "clean" shows from the bawdy variety entertainment offered in the saloons.[11]

Robert W. Snyder has argued that vaudeville's major contribution to U.S. popular culture was, in part through its geographical centralization, to "erode the local orientation of nineteenth-century audiences, and knit them, despite their diversity, into a modern audience of national proportions."[12] I would argue that Snyder too easily dismisses locality and diversity in this remark in his rush to emphasize and equate modernity and nationalism. At the very least, his comment fails to take into account the differences between the separate European American and African American vaudeville circuits, with regard to performers, styles of performance, audiences, and business practices.

Andrew Erdman extends Snyder's argument to suggest that vaudeville was part and parcel with the U.S. project of mass industrialization, in which "a new community—a national

---

[10] Nasaw, 25.

[11] Nasaw, 26; Lewis, 315-16.

[12] Robert W. Snyder, "Vaudeville and the Transformation of Popular Culture," in *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World*, ed. William R. Taylor (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 133.

community defined by regularized, widespread consumption patterns—had replaced the old, local, irregular communities of the past."[13] Like Snyder, Erdman is at pains to account for audience diversity and local tastes in his characterization of vaudeville as a national institution. He leaves the fact that blacks were forced to sit in the balconies of mainstream vaudeville theatres to a footnote, and while he does concede that it may not have been entirely "possible to construct culture from the top down" due to local and regional variances in managers' and audiences' preferences, he rationalizes his nationalist theory by focusing on the makers of the product rather than its consumers.[14] Moreover, "big-time" vaudeville theatres such as those run by the Orpheum or Keith-Albee circuits were not the only ones out there during this period; smaller neighborhood vaudeville houses continued to offer locally oriented fare in a more intimate environment than the big houses—at least this was the case in Memphis. Because of the diversity of the form of vaudeville itself and its popularity across social divisions of class, race, and gender, perhaps it is more difficult for scholars to emphasize its nationalism than that of the legitimate theatre of the period.

Similar to Snyder and Erdman, but with regard to legitimate theatre, Gerald Bordman comments on the demise of southern theatre centers such as New Orleans and Charleston during the late nineteenth century; where once the light of "independent creativity" had shone, these cities were now "merely touring stops at best."[15] Certainly the coming of mass transportation and mass culture began to transform the sense of local culture in cities across the U.S. South, but they did not erase it entirely. In any case, according to these scholars (and despite some differing

[13] Andrew Erdman, *Blue Vaudeville: Sex, Morals, and the Mass Marketing of Amusement, 1895-1915* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., Inc., 2004), 17.

[14] Ibid., 169 n. 26; 18.

[15] Gerald Martin Bordman, *American Theatre: A Chronicle of Comedy and Drama, 1869-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 3.

viewpoints), when it came to theatre, most of what Bourdieu would call the cultural capital of the nation was consolidated in New York.[16]

The debate continues over the beneficial and detrimental effects of the monopolies on U.S. theatre, but I would argue that viewpoints such as those presented above tend to characterize the theatre of the period in a rather monolithic way, with New York as the center of absolutely everything U.S. This perspective has the effect of reinforcing the monopolist, globalizing tendencies of the corporate theatre of the time. While it is certainly true that the vast majority of theatre production and booking became centralized in New York, obviating the need and desire for most local theatrical production in smaller cities around the U.S., actual theatre buildings and audiences—in this era, at least—were always located in physical space. So, too, were certain aspects of theatre ownership and management, regardless of absentee landlordship, remote corporate governance, and the like. Someone was always there holding the fort, so to speak. Also, local theatre critics in smaller cities—while perhaps attempting to hew to the line of value standards set by critics from the larger cities—could not help but consider local interests in garnering attention for, heaping praise on, or laying blame to local theatre offerings. Though these people and buildings may of course be viewed as typical or representative of theatres, audiences, managers, and critics nationwide, they were indeed local entities and, as such, possessed agency in the local theatrical experience.

Arguments in contrast to those that stress the consolidation and nationalization of theatre during this period are few. Weldon B. Durham has argued effectively against the idea of an all-pervasive centralization of legitimate theatre during this era. He describes the revival of local resident stock companies that began in the last years of the nineteenth century and extended well

---

[16] See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randall Johnson (London: Polity Press, 1993).

into the early twentieth. These companies, like the Hopkins Stock Company in Memphis (though Durham does not mention this one), offered "popular-priced" (inexpensive) performances geared toward working class audiences. Such companies co-existed with touring combinations, giving the public what the combinations could not: "Broadway productions and their touring duplicates offered attractively packaged products, but little chance for the consumer to identify with the makers of the product."[17] Durham's focus on local stock companies reveals that well before the monopolies were broken in the name of art and independence, they were given a run for their money by the cheap date and the local matinee idol.

Contrasting Erdman's remark that in vaudeville "some concessions to locale and region had to be accommodated—and then incorporated into the overall business model," Robert M. Lewis has noted that despite this "vision of neat bureaucratic order imposed centrally," much still depended upon the local manager, whose "responsibilities were numerous and onerous."[18] Aside from brief departures such as these, however, most scholarship on both the legitimate and popular theatre of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is marked by a nationalist bent. I would argue that local histories and geographies of theatre can help to both complicate and flesh out these representations of U.S. theatre during this period. However, there are precautions to be taken when engaging in the study of a specific locality.

Recently, Felicia Hardison Londré has written squarely in the vein of local theatre history at this time, as I mentioned previously. Continuing her thought about the New York-centrism of theatre studies, she writes that "the story of 'the road' is remarkably rich, colorful and complex. It is a story that should be told repeatedly in all its regional variations. Here then is one piece—a

---

[17] Weldon B. Durham, "The Revival and Decline of the Stock Company Mode of Organization, 1886-1930," *Theatre History Studies* 6 (1986): 182.

[18] Erdman, 18; Lewis, 317.

key piece, I believe—in a huge mosaic. The local is indeed universal."[19] As I heed her call to write local histories of U.S. theatre, I am a bit troubled by the binary opposition Londré sets up here between New York and "the road." This model is, of course, not her creation, but her perpetuation of it seems to contradict the project of writing local histories as alternative histories. It is a commonplace in theatre scholarship of this era to speak of "the road" as that vast stretch of cities and towns laid out before the tired feet of the touring performer based in New York. A romantic image, it calls forth visions of travel, excitement, and adventure contrasted with fleabag hotels, bad food, and grueling work hours. As such, it is an effective image that fits with the theatre of a romantic era. For those advocates of the independent and art theatre movements that followed the decline of "the road" in the late 1910s and 20s, the idea might also conjure up notions of corporate greed, with much of the money made "out there" winding up in the pockets of New York fatcats who were operating, in essence, a theatrical empire. In this melodramatic formation (to borrow a phrase from Bruce McConachie), the Syndicate and the Shuberts are the villains, and local audiences across the U.S. their all-too-willing victims.[20]

At any rate, this diametric opposition of New York and "the road" risks the danger of undermining the intent of local history by subsuming all "other" localities into an amorphous periphery in deference to the metropolis of Gotham. Like the scholars mentioned above, whose views seem to mimic the trends toward incorporation and consolidation during the period without offering any evidence of local agency, Londré's opposition of New York and "the road" seems to echo not only the general corporate centralization but also the new U.S. imperialism of the time, which was made manifest in the Spanish-American War. Her final statement that "the

---

[19] Felicia Hardison Londré, *The Enchanted Years of the Stage: Kansas City at the Crossroads of American Theater, 1870-1930* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 2.

[20] Bruce McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations: American Theatre and Society, 1820-1870* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992).

local is indeed universal" seems to completely cancel out her complaint that historical scholarship on theatre is "New York-centric." Absent is any notion of tension between local and universal (or, in Doreen Massey's terms, global) forces. The local is indeed the global, but does it not stand to reason, then—especially in making a case for local history—that the global is also the local? Further, calling for "*the* story of the road" (my emphasis) to be told "repeatedly in all its regional variations" seems to assume that there is really only one narrative to be told, which is easily transferable to other locations with some minor differentiations. Michael McKinnie might refer to this notion as a "cognateness trap" or an "urban synecdochic fallacy…seeing [in his case] Toronto as representative of all city stages."[21] If the local is indeed the universal (with no acknowledgement of the inverse), and there really is only one story to tell with minor variations, then why bother with local history at all?

I am belaboring the point here: by no means does Londré let this particular formulation get in the way of her producing an excellent local history. In fact, earlier in her book (and, of course, in the title itself), she characterizes Kansas City as a "crossroads…a place where people and practices from all across the nation intersected."[22] This representation is a far cry from the "mere touring stop" that Bordman uses to describe Charleston and New Orleans, and grants at least some agency to the city upon which Londré centers her study. Also, her use of the mosaic metaphor in the paragraph quoted above, although it does not quite fit, is a better image for the synergistic relationship of part to whole and whole to part with regard to U.S. theatre during this time. Regardless of how homogeneous U.S. theatre might have seemed on a national level,

---

[21] Michael McKinnie, *City Stages: Theatre and Urban Space in a Global City* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 135.

[22] Londré, 1.

looking at its local manifestations sheds light on the variety of theatrical experiences and perspectives during this period.

The problem with Londré's study is one that is typical of many local histories: it has no cohesive, conscious theoretical framework. While she describes her history as "emblematic of a larger history of American theater," her premise remains, for the most part, unquestioned.[23] Joseph Anthony Amato warns local historians of the dangers of repudiating theory in his book *Rethinking Home: A Case for Writing Local History*. He notes that these historians' "concern for the particular can make them parochial" and that often their "love of the past can lead them to discount the present." Instead—and of particular interest to this dissertation—"they must doubt the reasoning that locks place and nation in a single progressive history."[24] Therefore, it should be part of the task of a local history of theatre to join contemporary theoretical discussions and make use of their formulations in an attempt to problematize master narratives of national theatre history. So, in order to avoid falling into the trap of parochialism and neglect of the present, I will lay out the theoretical framework for this dissertation in the following section.

Theoretical Context: Space and Place, Theatre and the City

As I noted earlier, the concepts of space and place have permeated the fields of theatre and performance studies for quite a while now. These fields are especially appropriate areas in which to have conversations about such concepts, since theatre and performance must literally "take place" somewhere. Moreover, the places and spaces in which theatre and performance happen—and those that they evoke—not only facilitate the production of many layers of meaning for performers and spectators alike but also reveal the cultural, social, political, and

---

[23] Ibid.

[24] Joseph Anthony Amato, *Rethinking Home: A Case for Writing Local History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 5, 7.

economic structures and tensions inherent in a particular community. The physical location of theatres and performance spaces within an urban landscape; the external form of a place of performance, whether edifice or open space; its internal structure and decoration, from stage to auditorium to backstage areas to "front of house" areas such as lobbies, lounges, and bars; and the imagined places conjured onstage through performance itself—all of these play a part in the experience of live theatre and performance, and all are shaped by social forces. This many-faceted relationship of theatre and performance to space and place has invited a wide variety of scholarly treatments on the subject, which employ methodologies from semiotics, phenomenology, sociology, ethnography, performance theory, poststructuralism, materialism, and human geography. Such a wide range of approaches has contributed to the highly contested nature of the terms "space" and "place" in theatre studies. What follows is an overview of some of these approaches.

Conversations on this subject within theatre studies began in the areas of semiotics and phenomenology. Until just over twenty years ago, theatre scholars, when discussing physical theatre spaces, tended to be primarily concerned with stage space alone. Marvin Carlson's *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* was the first study to go beyond this narrow view in order to include consideration of the full interiors, exteriors, and locations of theatre spaces. In this seminal work, focused primarily on western European theatres, Carlson categorizes theatre buildings and performance spaces based on their architecture and location. Using Roland Barthes's notion of the "urban text," he reads the meanings of their placement within urban settings over a broad expanse of history. He also delves into discussion of interior structure and decoration, concluding that "the physical surroundings of performance never act as a totally neutral filter or frame," but instead "have always, sometimes blatantly, sometimes

subtly, contributed to the reception of the performance."[25] In many ways, this dissertation is inspired by Carlson's statement that consideration of the urban locations of theatrical performance show

> not only how such surroundings reflect the social and cultural concerns and suppositions of their creators and their audiences, but even more important, how they may serve to stimulate or to reinforce within audiences certain ideas of what theatre represents within their society and how the performances it is offering are to be interpreted and integrated into the rest of their social and cultural life.[26]

Later, in his book *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*, Carlson returned to the subject of theatre space, this time using a more phenomenological approach. Here he describes the "ghosting" effect that occurs when theatre spaces (and even their surrounding neighborhoods) operate as carriers of the memories of previous performances that happened there, or of former uses of the space, as in the cases of converted theatres and site-specific performances.[27] In both these books, Carlson argues for the non-neutrality of the physical environments in which performance takes place.

In the vein of dramatic criticism, Una Chaudhuri broke new ground by theorizing a geography of modern drama in her book, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama*. In it, she acknowledges that her methods derive from semiotics; however, other theories inform her work as well. For example, Chaudhuri brings the arguments of human geographer Edward Soja—and through him, Foucault's notion of "heterotopias"—to bear upon the study of drama and theatre. She focuses primarily on modern drama since Ibsen, using the term "geopathology" to characterize place as the central problematic of modern drama and "platiality" to refer to "the

---

[25] Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1989), 206.

[26] Ibid., 2.

[27] Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 131-64.

signifying power and political potential of *specific places*," particularly with reference to what she calls the "discourse of home" in U.S. drama. Chaudhuri contends that a geography of theatre and drama might be "capable of replacing—or at least significantly supplementing—its familiar 'history,'" echoing a common theme of contemporary discussions in critical and social theory: the shift from time to space as a guiding principle.[28]

Chaudhuri's ideas about a geography of theatre and drama are particularly relevant to certain goals of this dissertation, and so I quote her at length here:

> The formulation of a "postmodern critical geography" to counter and complement the rigid historicism of twentieth-century thought is a vast and vital project, of which one of the crucial goals is the recovery of *place*. It is in this area that the figure of America functions as a hinge, for it both *reproduces* and *displaces* the dominant theoretical bias against space. Through its alliance with the principles of progress and homogeneity, the figure of America first signified a kind of ultimate placelessness, a guarantee of the absolute *un*meaning of place as a component of human experience. But the very success of this figuration—what one might call the hyperbole of American utopianism—proved to be its undoing. In the late twentieth century the figure of America has begun to be required, increasingly, to make good its utopian claims, and the principle of placelessness is confronted by the multivoiced demand for new *placements*. The movement known generally as multiculturalism is in fact a call for America to be reimagined; not, this time, as a utopia, but as what Foucault would call a "heterotopia," a place capable of containing within it many different, even incompatible places.[29]

If new "placements" are required as part of the formulation of a critical geography of theatre, the production of local theatre histories seems to offer one way to challenge the placelessness of "American utopianism." As I have argued above, place does matter with regard to theatre production and consumption. Moreover, this "multivoiced demand," though it began to be heard loudest in the late twentieth century, was not exactly silent in the time and place of my investigation. Reminders of a painful past in some plays produced in the North but set in the

---

[28] Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), xi-xii, 5, her emphasis.

[29] Ibid., 5.

South rubbed up against some southern white audience members' ideas about the region's own "platiality." Further, depictions of African Americans in nostalgic Old South plantation settings, while popular with white audiences around the country, did not sit well with some black audience members—especially those who were aware of the shifts away from such stereotypes that some African American performers were beginning to make during the 1890s.

Chaudhuri later edited, with Elinor Fuchs, a collection of essays entitled *Land/Scape/Theater*. Eschewing the concept of "space" as not specific enough and "place" as too specific, the editors take "landscape" as their primary metaphor to name "the modern theater's new spatial paradigm," since it is "more grounded and available to visual experience than space, but more environmental and constitutive of the imaginative order than place."[30] Again the main focus here is modern and contemporary drama; however, the essay by Edward Ziter, "Staging the Geographic Imagination: Imperial Melodrama and the Domestication of the Exotic," is relevant to this dissertation. In it, Ziter examines "theatrical orientalism characterized by the representation of geographic context and its translation into three-dimensional stage environments." Such a process, which "domesticated regions long associated with excess and transgression," seems not unlike some of the plays set in the southern U.S. that were produced during this period.[31]

These plays, such as Augustus Thomas's *Alabama* (1891), often alluded in some way to post-Civil War reconciliation between the U.S. North and South (often to the detriment of African American advancement) and depicted romantic southern landscapes on stage. Stage depictions of southern landscapes were nothing new by the late nineteenth century; what differed

---

[30] Una Chaudhuri and Elinor Fuchs, eds., *Land/Scape/Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 2-3.

[31] Edward Ziter, "Staging the Geographic Imagination: Imperial Melodrama and the Domestication of the Exotic," in Chaudhuri and Fuchs, 189.

in these later manifestations of the South on stage was a simultaneous emphasis on regional "othering" and national reintegration inherent in many of them, which was very much in line with New South ideology, discussed below. One southern critic remarked that Thomas was the first to "successfully write a Southern play," and, nearly twenty years later, Memphis drama critic Hugh Higbee Huhn commented that with this play, Thomas had done "more to bring about a satisfactory understanding between the people of the North and South than all the lectures delivered from the platform or the sermons from the pulpit."[32] Chaudhuri's and Ziter's ideas are useful in helping to explain these and other critical reactions to such plays that were shown in Memphis theatres during the period.

In an attempt to synthesize all of the various aspects and functions of space in theatrical performance and dramatic text, Gay McAuley, in her *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre*, states that her theoretical framework and methods "derive…from semiotics, phenomenology, ethnography, and sociology."[33] She differentiates her work from previous studies by remarking that the conceptual framework for her study is "neither 'building-centered' nor 'text-centered' but 'performance-centered,'" and indeed much of her evidence comes from performances and rehearsals that she actually witnessed. In her chapter on physical spaces, McAuley makes use of the work of Henri Lefebvre (the common denominator in most of these studies, and indeed in discussions about space all across the disciplines), particularly his notion that "(Social) space is a (social) product."[34] In other words, space is not merely a container but is constantly being produced and reproduced by social beings and their relationships; there can be

---

[32] *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 27 Oct 1893, quoting the *Nashville American*; *Commercial Appeal*, 22 January 1911.

[33] Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 16-17.

[34] McAuley, 10; Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 26.

no "empty space." McAuley also relies in this chapter on phenomenologist Edward S. Casey, expanding on his idea that "a building condenses a culture in one place," and emphasizing the importance of the body in relation to space and place, especially in terms of the comparison of scale between the human body and the buildings in which performance takes place.[35] Although her emphasis in this particular chapter is on the phenomenological, a major portion of the theoretical framework of McAuley's book relies primarily on the semiology of Anne Ubersfeld.

In opposition to this mode of criticism, David Wiles remarks in his *A Short History of Western Performance Space* that semiotics "fails to challenge the Cartesian theatrical dichotomy: the split between stage and auditorium, between the performance as object and the spectator as disembodied subject. Lefebvre's phenomenological critique of semiotics invites us to start elsewhere."[36] Wiles's remarks echo Lefebvre's criticism of Barthes's prioritization of textuality and his failure to account for the body and power relations in discussions of "reading" space. Rather than being read, space is experienced, lived. In fact, Wiles offers a more detailed articulation of the importance of Lefebvre's work and its relevance for theatre and performance than previous studies. Like Chaudhuri, he emphasizes Foucault's place at the beginning of postmodern philosophical discussions of space, relating Foucault's connection of space and power to that of theatre and power. Whereas most studies in this area tend to focus on modern and contemporary theatre, Wiles—like Carlson—takes into account a broad expanse of history, noting that one of the precepts of his book is that "the best way to understand the present is to

---

[35] Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 32.

[36] David Wiles, *A Short History of Western Performance Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11.

look backwards."[37] I share this notion with him, and indeed it is a conviction under which this dissertation is written.

Recently, theatre and performance scholarship on space and place has made a decided shift toward urban studies and the connections between theatrical performance and the city. Two such studies are a collection of essays edited by D.J. Hopkins, Shelley Orr, and Kim Solga entitled *Performance and the City*, and Jen Harvie's *Theatre and the City*.[38] Hopkins, Orr, and Solga stress the importance of using the idea of performance itself to intervene in theoretical conversations about theatre and urban space—conversations they see as largely co-opted by the prevalence of "text" as a guiding principle. They, too, reference Lefebvre's criticisms of Barthes's "urban text," particularly Lefebvre's warning that "to underestimate, ignore, or diminish space amounts to the overestimation of texts, written matter, and writing systems, along with the readable and the visible, to the point of assigning to these a monopoly on intelligibility."[39] They argue for a methodology that understands the cultural practices of textuality and performativity as linked and working together to "shape the body of phenomenal, intellectual, psychic, and social encounters that frame a subject's experience of the city"—a methodology that accounts for "the city as a space of tension and negotiation framed in countless ways by formal and informal works of performance."[40] Harvie espouses hybrid strategies of analysis as well. She advocates using a combination of cultural materialism and performative

---

[37] Ibid., 4.

[38] D.J. Hopkins, Shelley Orr, and Kim Solga, eds., *Performance and the City* (New York: Palgrave, 2009); Jen Harvie, *Theatre and the City* (New York: Palgrave, 2009).

[39] Lefebvre, 62.

[40] Hopkins, et. al., 4-6.

analysis to both reveal structures of oppression and offer the hope of social change through performative agency.[41]

Of all the recent work on theatre and the city, I find McKinnie's *City Stages* to be some of the most illuminating and helpful. He readily acknowledges the contested nature of the terms "space" and "place," and cites David Harvey's definition of "place" as "referring to certain manifestations of space in time," as well as Michel de Certeau's contradictory notion that "space refers to the moment where a more fluid and elusive place becomes arrested." While he agrees with both theorists that the production of space is tied to social and historical processes, he chooses to employ Harvey's "framing of space as something that can only be known through the forms it takes over time. Those forms include 'place' in a broad sense—as a socio-spatial product created in difference—and, more precisely, the specific shapes that places assume."[42] Throughout this dissertation, I will, like McKinnie, endeavor to instill the terms "space" and "place" with the specific material forms that produce them socially and historically.

Although he focuses on Canada's largest city—Toronto—in the late twentieth century, McKinnie's work serves as an excellent model for both local theatre history and the analysis of the relationship between theatre and the city.[43] In his study, he espouses what he calls an

> urban geography of theatre [which] encourages the critic to observe the lessons of materialist geography in order to avoid the implication that these places are merely locations where theatre happens to occur…space is not simply the pre-existing context for theatre practice…but a series of places through which theatrical and spatial forms are mutually constituted.[44]

---

[41] Harvie, 72-75.

[42] McKinnie, 4-5.

[43] Another important scholar who has written about theatre in Toronto from a materialist perspective is Ric Knowles, who was McKinnie's teacher. See Knowles's *Reading the Material Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[44] McKinnie, 13.

The title of this dissertation is inspired by McKinnie's formation here, and I follow him in my attempt to analyze the urban geography of theatre in Memphis during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and to reconstruct the communities created in and through theatre and urban space in this city. I am interested in discovering, as he does for Toronto, if "the forms that urban negotiation…assumed…make it possible to speak of theatre as having contributed to the distinct urban geography" of Memphis.[45]

McKinnie's approach is avowedly materialist, but he also acknowledges that spatializing theatre history sometimes involves "bringing together diverse empirical and theoretical methods to explore links between practices that are often not imagined to be related" such as "the relationships between political economy and programming, real estate and performance ideology, or urban development and theatrical legitimacy."[46] This acknowledgement aligns him with several of the scholars I have been discussing here, but McKinnie remarks that while theatre scholars have cited urban geographers like Soja, Massey, and Harvey, they have been reluctant to deal in depth with the "strong streak of political economy" that informs these geographers' analyses, avoiding quantitative analysis in favor of more "conceptually reflective material."[47] Indeed, aside from Harvie, it seems that many theatre scholars working in this vein are reluctant to label their research strategies as materialist, even if such strategies may share some similarities to McKinnie's. But again I want to stress that his work, even with its primary focus on political economy, does not reduce everything to economics. This becomes apparent in his characterization of the case study theatres he uses in *City Stages*:

> Some places encountered are not surprising, because they take a shape that accords with vernacular, physical manifestations of space: parcels of land, built

---

[45] Ibid., 6.
[46] Ibid., 16.
[47] Ibid., 15.

> form like buildings and architectural features, and the networks of structures and areas that constitute what geographers call the built environment. Other places are created through familiar ideological constructions of physical space that enable capitalist economic transactions, such as private property and real estate. Still more places are defined, at least in part, through imagination, representation, ontology, and urban and civic ideology. These places may be more difficult to grasp initially, but have been no less consequential for theatre in Toronto.[48]

Although he does not directly reference Lefebvre here, McKinnie's schema in this paragraph—built form, ideological constructions that enable capitalist transactions, and places defined in less physical ways—echoes, in my mind, Lefebvre's dialectical triad of perceived, conceived, and lived space.

As mentioned above, Lefebvre's work—particularly *The Production of Space*—has had a great deal of influence on contemporary discussions about space across a wide range of disciplines. Along with Lefebvre's assertion that space is socially produced, his spatial triad serves to link many of these discussions. Lefebvre theorized that, like Marx's notion of the commodity, space is produced by social processes rather than being a "thing in itself," an empty void to be filled. In his view, merely reading urban space as a text has a tendency to emphasize the "thingness" of built form, leaving out not only the contradictory processes and social relations contributing to the production of space, but also the imaginative and symbolic interpretations that human beings create in their daily encounters with urban space. According to geographer Andrew Merrifield, Lefebvre's dialectical triad was an attempt to use Marxist dialectics in order to devise a unitary theory of the production of space as a social process—one that would avoid the "fragmentation and conceptual separation" inherent to Cartesian thinking, which Lefebvre "rightly saw…as serving distinctively ideological purposes."[49]

---

[48] Ibid., 5.

[49] Andrew Merrifield, "Place and Space: A Lefebvrian Reconciliation," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series 18, no. 4 (1993): 523.

As one aspect of this dialectic, “perceived space” has to do with spatial practice, with the linkage of various places into urban networks. According to Lefebvre, spatial practice “is revealed through the deciphering of its space.” In other words, reading the built form and networks of a city sheds light on its social practices. But the analysis of urban space should not stop here. With regard to conceived space, Lefebvre states that “conceptions of space tend…towards a system of verbal (and therefore intellectually worked out) signs.” Whereas perceived space attains a certain cohesiveness through social practice—the comings and goings (or entrances and exits, to invoke a theatrical metaphor)—of everyday life, conceived space is “tied to the relations of production and to the ‘order’ which those relations impose.” As a result, such representations of space are “the dominant space in any society (or mode of production).” Although Lefebvre does not explicitly refer to power or capital in this particular iteration of his theory, the imposition of order and the dominance over the mode of production that he references here seem to implicate them in the conceptualization of space. In other words, representations of space are configured into systems of verbal signs by people (for example, “planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers, and social engineers”) who have the power to influence or actually put into action processes of production, undergirded by capital, which serve to make such representations manifest.[50]

However, despite their dominance, such conceived spaces are not altogether static or absolute; rather they are contradicted regularly through the spatial practices of everyday life. Whereas conceived space has to do with spatial representations, lived space is representational space. This space is “directly lived through its associated images and symbols” and “overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects.” As I understand it in terms of the dialectical

[50] Lefebvre, 33, 38-39.

process, lived space can be thought of as a synthesis of perceived and conceived space, of practice and theory, of the physical and the mental. The comings and goings of everyday life (perceived spaces) and the everyday interpretation of conceived and perceived spaces (lived space) are all a part of this dialectical process that is forever moving, forever changing.[51]

These aspects of Lefebvre's spatial dialectic inform the structure of this dissertation in the following manner. The next chapter is an attempt to decipher some of the spatial practices of period Memphis—particularly those associated with theatre—by mapping out the city in space and time. I will review the urban landscape of Memphis in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and discover the places of performance therein, revealing the spaces of theatre and the city as they might have been perceived by citizens of the time. The second part of the dissertation focuses on specific theatres as they relate to the conceived spaces of the "New South city" and "the Road." I will first elucidate what I mean by each of these representations of space by placing them in historical and geographical context, and then I will show how the formation and maintenance of these various theatres functioned within local and global processes. The overall goal of the dissertation is a synthesis of the lived experience of theatre and urban space in this particular place and time.

Of course, contemporary theoretical discussions of space and place have not influenced theatre studies alone. James Connolly has written of their effect on scholarship of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, the historical period being studied in this dissertation. Using a theatrical metaphor, interestingly enough, he remarks that scholars in his field are beginning "to emphasize that urban spaces are social creations rather than merely stages on which the drama of human action plays out." While I would argue fiercely against his oversimplification of

---

[51] Ibid., 39. See also Merrifield, and Rob Shields, *Lefebvre, Love and Struggle: Spatial Dialectics* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 141-86.

theatrical performance here, this dissertation participates in what he notes is a "process that tells us much about key concerns of American historiography, including the formation of gender, class, racial, and ethnic identities and the struggles for power among various social groups."[52] In southern studies, conversations about urban space have influenced work such as Thomas W. Hanchett's *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* and David Goldfield's *Region, Race, and Cities: Interpreting the Urban South*.[53] Recently, the concept of place has been used to frame discussions about a contemporary "post-South."[54]

The interdisciplinarity of the explosion of concern about the socially constructed nature of space opens doors for this dissertation to participate in several discourses. However, while drawing on studies in these other fields, one of my primary goals is to intervene in my own field of theatre studies in a couple of ways. First, scholarship of U.S. theatre during the period under investigation here has generally not availed itself of the recent spate of theories on space and place, much less that of urban geography.[55] Also, studies of the relationship of theatre to space, place, and urban geography have shown a tendency to be focused primarily on contemporary rather than historical theatrical practices. In this study, I attempt to bring these strands of theatre scholarship together and contribute to both in the process.

---

[52] James Connolly, "Bringing the City Back in: Space and Place in the Urban History of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 1, no. 3 (2002): 259.

[53] Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998); David Goldfield, *Region, Race, and Cities: Interpreting the Urban South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997).

[54] See, for example, Martyn Bone, *The Postsouthern Sense of Place* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).

[55] One major exception is Joseph Roach's discussion of race, place (his concept of "behavioral vortex"), and performance in New Orleans during this period in *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), especially Chapter 5.

Finally, a note about theatre and nationalism. As I mentioned above, I want to problematize master narratives of U.S. theatre history of the time which tend to be characterized by a cultural nationalism centered in New York. This goal is another feature through which my study parallels McKinnie's. McKinnie mentions that his book is more about the relationship of theatre to the state than to the nation, whereas much Canadian theatre history tends to focus on nationalism. As is often the case with the history of U.S. theatre during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a strong sense of nationalism during the period about which McKinnie is writing is often used as a rationalization for the nationalist viewpoint in Canadian theatre historiography about that period. Instead, he opts to "account for the demands made on theatre practice that are specifically urban and specific to Toronto," rather than using nationalism to explain its theatre. However, he warns against "employing an ill-defined 'regionalism' or 'localism.'"[56] Heeding this caution, in the next section I will briefly define what I mean by using the regionally inflected term "New South city" to refer to Memphis.

Defining the New South City

In the prologue to Part II, I will discuss the spatial concept of the "New South city" in more depth, but I believe a preliminary definition is necessary going forward. As transitional as the years from 1880 to 1920 were for the theatre, so were they for the United States as a nation. Charting the same territory as the scholars of nineteenth-century U.S. theatre previously mentioned, but providing additional social and cultural background, John Frick writes of the "bewildering kaleidoscope of events and developments" transpiring in American culture during this period and cites "the rise of the New South" as one of these developments.[57] Defining what

[56] McKinnie, 6.
[57] Frick, 196.

is meant by the "New South" is not simple. Indeed, just trying to define "the South" can be tricky at best.

Contemporary considerations of southern theatre are few, especially now that many argue that the South has lost most of the regional characteristics that distinguish it from the rest of the country. One recent and intriguing discussion is J. Caleb Boyd's dissertation, "Southernness, not Otherness: The Community of the American South in New Southern Gothic Drama," in which he eschews the notion of the South as bounded by concrete cartographical boundaries or as a "homogeneous cultural community, encompassing all members under strict and immutable characteristics." Instead, "the South is clearly a product of many conflicting cultural interactions, political maneuvers, performative re-imaginings and literary narratives. It is a mindset, a perception of difference, either real or imagined, from the mainstream culture and history of the rest of the nation."[58] I want to extend Boyd's argument to characterize what I mean here by the "New South."

The phrase "New South" has been used in myriad different ways since the end of the Civil War to imagine a revived South, both connected to and separate from its own history (the "Old South") and the rest of the nation. The use of "New South" was first popularized in the 1870s and 80s by public figures such as Henry W. Grady, editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, as a rallying cry for white southerners to embrace a northern ideal of industrial progress in an effort to rebuild southern society and provide prosperity for all—white and black. One of the primary projects of this New South ideology was the development of showcase cities to attract northern manufacturers. While giving lip service to the problem of race relations in the region (and insisting on segregation as the key to peaceful relations), this cry heralded the dawn of a new age

---

[58] J. Caleb Boyd, "Southernness, not Otherness: The Community of the American South in New Southern Gothic Drama" (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 2004), 15-16.

while attempting to maintain a connection to the ideals of honor and nobility inherited from the Old South. During the period discussed in this dissertation, the "New South creed," as it has been called by historian Paul Gaston, was co-opted by the Democratic Party and "quickly became the credo of an oppressive ruling elite that was content to exploit the impoverished southern masses."[59] Politically, the region became the "Solid South"; economically, it remained far behind the rest of the country as it struggled with modernization; and, socially, its structures and tensions drove many to flee and many others to remain steadfast in pride or with defiance. This society was, of course, not without its discontents, with urban blacks among them, who found many ways to resist dominance, including support of the Republican Party and the formation of their own social, civic, and cultural groups and institutions.

Widespread use of the phrase "New South" has had a tendency to promote a kind of historical non-specificity as to its time span. It has been used most famously by historian C. Vann Woodward to describe the period from 1877 to 1913, but some have also used it to refer to the period from after World War II until the Civil Rights Era, or indeed until the present.[60] James C. Cobb, prominent sociologist of the South, claims that there were actually two "New Souths." The second, which came to be after World War II, was short-lived because "its radically reformed racial, political, and economic institutions would pave the way for its rapid absorption into the mainstream of American life." The first, however,

> was built both to last and to stand on its own; its architects promised reintegration into the national economy without the sacrifice of the region's racial, cultural, or political continuity or autonomy. In effect, the first New South was to be "new,"

---

[59] Paul Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York: Knopf, 1970); the quote is from Randolph D. Werner, "The New South Creed and the Limits of Radicalism: Augusta, Georgia, before the 1890s," *Journal of Southern History* 67 (2001): 573-74.

[60] C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951).

> observed W.J. Cash, only in "that it would be so rich and powerful that it might rest serene in its ancient positions, forever impregnable."[61]

Characterizations of this first New South such as Woodward's, Cobb's, and Cash's tend to concentrate on the power and dominance of white southerners, primarily viewing blacks as silent victims. For several years now, scholarship on African American urban history, such as that of Kenneth W. Goings and Raymond A. Mohl, has turned away from previous concerns with "the degree to which whites regulated and controlled black life" in order to focus on an "'agency model,' demonstrating the extent to which African Americans in slavery and freedom shaped and controlled their own destinies."[62] Without downplaying the atrocities inflicted on southern blacks during the Jim Crow era, I want to argue that the use of the historico-regional label "New South"—despite its racist connotations—must also include the agency of southern African Americans and their contributions to this cultural formation.[63] So, in referring to period Memphis as a "New South city" in this dissertation, I mean to characterize the city as participating in both the mindset of Cobb's "first New South"—and also its conflicts and oppositions.

Scholars in southern studies have done much work to illuminate and interrogate economic development, race relations, populism, progressivism, and a number of other issues during this period. Some of the issues that concern these scholars intersect with the study of

---

[61] James C. Cobb, "From the First New South to the Second," in *The American South in the 20th Century*, ed. Craig S. Pascoe, Karen Trahan Leathem, and Andy Ambrose (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), 2. He quotes Wilbur J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Knopf, 1941), 184.

[62] Kenneth W. Goings and Raymond A. Mohl, "Toward a New African American Urban History," *Journal of Urban History* 21, no. 3 (March 1995): 283.

[63] "Jim Crow," in this context, refers to laws enacted from after the Civil War onward that mandated the racial segregation of public facilities and generally restricted the civil rights of African Americans. The perpetuation of these laws gained ground with the 1896 Supreme Court decision in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which upheld the constitutionality of the doctrine of "separate but equal." Such laws were not confined to the former Confederate states; however, their potency was most strongly felt in the south between the late nineteenth century and World War II, particularly in terms of the systematic disfranchisement of African Americans.

theatre as a burgeoning industry and a cultural touchstone during the period. This dissertation will be concerned with the relationship of theatre to three of these issues: urbanization, attitudes toward "progress" and capitalist enterprise, and the complexity of race and class relations.

Memphis Now and Then: an Overview

These days, when people think of Memphis, they tend to think of the blues, Elvis Presley, Beale Street, barbecue, or the ducks that parade through the lobby of the Peabody Hotel—where, as the saying goes, the Mississippi Delta begins.[64] Others think of underground music, cotton, or the Mississippi River. For some, the mention of Memphis might conjure up images from Craig Brewer's locally filmed *Hustle & Flow* (2005) and *Black Snake Moan* (2006), or Jim Jarmusch's *Mystery Train* (1989). For many, Memphis still carries the tragic stigma of being the place where Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated.

For some reason, there has been an uptick of high-profile stage references to Memphis recently. Memphis-born playwright Katori Hall's critically acclaimed play *The Mountaintop*, set in King's room in the Lorraine Motel the night before his death, recently appeared on Broadway. In addition, as I write this, her play *Hurt Village*, set in a North Memphis housing project, is slated for production off-Broadway at the Signature Theatre in February 2012. Two Tony Award-winning musicals set in Memphis are currently playing on Broadway. One is simply titled *Memphis*, which—with its central love affair between a white radio DJ and a black singer during the 1950s—deals with two intertwined issues that are very close to the city's heart: music and race. The other, *Million Dollar Quartet*, focuses on a jam session in 1956 at Memphis's Sun

---

[64] The oft-quoted saying that the "Mississippi Delta begins in the lobby of the Peabody Hotel in Memphis and ends on Catfish Row in Vicksburg" has its origin in David Cohn, *God Shakes Creation* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1938), 14.

Studio, where legends Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Carl Perkins gathered to play and created music history in the process.

Indeed, the image of the city of Memphis in the national schema has much to do with the history of U.S. popular music and its roots in southern African American culture. Unlike fellow Tennessean city Nashville, with the glitz and glamour of its country music industry, Memphis is the gritty home of gutbucket blues and the birthplace of rock and roll. Indeed, over the last couple of decades, the city has capitalized on its connections to the history of the blues, revising the once-famous image of Beale Street as the lively Main Street of Black America into an all-American blues playground in order to promote the growth of its tourism industry.

When people think of Memphis, they do not necessarily think of theatre. It is not a town known for its theatrical activity, like Chicago, Seattle, or Atlanta. But theatre happens in this town—it means and has meant something to its citizens; it has contributed to developments in music; and it has reflected local, regional, and national trends throughout its long history in this river city. Over the past hundred years, theatre-building and theatrical activity have generally moved eastward from the downtown area, following the pattern of white migration into midtown and the suburbs. After King's assassination in 1968, this migration accelerated, and the downtown area suffered from neglect, blight, and the tragedy of severely botched "urban renewal" projects, from which Beale Street received the most devastating blow. The continued separation of branches of the Memphis City and Shelby County government bears the imprint of racist history: spatial arrangements such as the side-by-side but separate housing of city and

county school boards psychically reinforce the separation of the majority black inner city and the majority white outlying county.[65]

The dual migration of theatre and white audiences has had the effect of keeping theatre in Memphis fairly segregated. This continued separation is not, of course, because of some sort of racist program to make it so—and a fair amount of African American theatre does happen within the predominantly white theatres in town. Moreover, Memphis gained a prominent new theatre devoted to African American drama and performance in 2006, when the Hattiloo Theatre opened in a location between downtown and midtown. The Orpheum, the only remaining downtown theatre from the period under study where plays are presented, brings in relatively diverse crowds. Productions such as the latest Tyler Perry play tend to draw majority black audiences, and musicals like *Wicked* attract majority white audiences. However, audience demographics in many of the city's theatres on any given night do not generally reflect the diversity of the city itself.

Patterns of racial separation in the theatre and the city have a long history going back to the end of the Civil War, when the population of Memphis changed rapidly and drastically with the influx of newly emancipated slaves. By the early 1890s, such patterns were beginning to be more firmly regulated and connected to notions of social and industrial progress. As a city of the New South, the business elite of Memphis had much to gain by latching onto the idea of progress. The city's geographic location in the center of the United States and its proximity to the Mississippi River made it an ideal center for distribution and trade.[66]

---

[65] The Memphis City and Shelby County School Systems are currently undergoing a consolidation, rife with political complications, that must be completed by 2013. The effects of this merger, if it indeed happens, will certainly challenge the bifurcated view of the city and the county.

[66] For general history of Memphis, see Beverly G. Bond and Janann Sherman, *Memphis in Black & White* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2003); John E. Harkins, *Metropolis of the American Nile: Memphis and Shelby County* (Memphis, TN: West Tennessee Historical Society, 1982); Paul R. Coppock, Helen M. Coppock, and Charles W.

Officially, however, Memphis was not a city in 1890. Having lost a significant number of its population to yellow fever epidemics—through both death and flight—and burdened with enormous municipal debt, the city had had its charter revoked in 1879, whereby it became the taxing district of Shelby County—essentially a ward of the state of Tennessee. Memphis had lost its identity as a city and would not regain its charter until 1893. However, business did begin to thrive during the 1880s, culminating in the opening of the Great Bridge at Memphis, spanning the Mississippi, in 1892. By the turn of the century, the city of Memphis had made its debut on the global stage, with the largest hardwood market, the second largest lumber market, and the third largest inland cotton market in the world. Developments in business and industry in turn drove, and were driven by, development of the city itself. Embarrassed by Memphis's reputation as a hotbed of filth and disease, the city's leaders campaigned for major developments in waste management, roads, and other improvements in the 1880s. Local architectural treasures such as the Federal Building and the Cossitt Library began to dot the skyline, along with new theatres.

Since the end of the Civil War, a significant portion of the population of Memphis had been African American, and until the 1890s, blacks could be found among the city's—and then the taxing district's—governing bodies. However, in an ironic parallel to the political solidification of the South during this era, progress and the rebirth of the city seemed to all but leave African Americans behind. Those who did not leave to search for an easier life in the

---

Crawford, *Paul R. Coppock's Mid-South*, 4 vols. (Memphis: West Tennessee Historical Society, 1983-95); and Robert Alan Sigafoos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street: A Business History of Memphis* (Memphis: Memphis State University, 1979). Studies focused specifically on the period of this dissertation include Lynette Boney Wrenn, *Crisis and Commission Government in Memphis: Elite Rule in a Gilded Age City* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998); William D. Miller, *Memphis During the Progressive Era, 1900-1917* (Memphis: Memphis State University Press; Madison, WI: American History Research Center, 1957); Shields McIlwaine, *Memphis Down in Dixie* (New York: Dutton and Company, 1948); Gerald Mortimer Capers, *The Biography of a River Town: Memphis, Its Heroic Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939); Judge J.P. Young, *Standard History of Memphis, Tennessee* (Knoxville, TN: H.W. Crew & Co., 1912); and J.M. Keating and O.F. Vedder, *History of the City of Memphis, Tennessee*, 2 vols. (Syracuse, NY: D. Mason & Co., 1888).

North fought a hard battle to develop and retain their own social and cultural achievements—not least of which could be found in the theatres of Beale Street.

Ever since its early days as a rough river town in the 1820s and 30s, Memphis had hosted all sorts of theatrical offerings. By the late 1880s, however, in tandem with the development and revival of the city, prominent businessmen began to take an interest in building theatres that would prove worthy of their new fortunes. William D. Bethell, the president of the taxing district (and de facto mayor of Memphis), was a major investor in the new Grand Opera House. In September 1890, within one week of each other, this theatre and its rival, the Lyceum Theatre, opened their doors, inviting the best legitimate productions from the national stage to the regional circuit once known among booking agents as the "Shadow of Death."[67] Despite individual protests from time to time, African American theatre-goers remained seated in the balconies of these theatres. They took in shows there but probably wished at times for something geared more specifically to their interests. Robert R. Church, a Memphis businessman and the first black millionaire in the South, gave it to them when he opened Church's Auditorium in 1901.

Throughout the three decades covered here, many changes occurred in Memphis theatre that echoed the larger national trends of incorporation and homogenization, but that also reflected local motivations and desires. Many theatres eventually came under the domination of one of the several national corporations and combinations that controlled the various segments of the theatre industry at the time. But local reactions were not all passive acceptances of what was offered up to the city. Theatre critic Hugh Higbee Huhn, frustrated with Memphis having missed

---

[67] Kenneth T. Rainey, "Footlights and Sidelights: The Last Years of the Memphis Theater (Leubrie's Theater)," *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 41 (1987): 70.

performances by Sarah Bernhardt and Minnie Fiske because of the "theatre war" between the Syndicate and Shubert houses in 1910, wrote defensively,

> With a city population we are entitled to city shows, and are willing to pay city prices for them. Memphis is no longer in the timid, experimental age. We have metropolitan ideas. We welcome metropolitan stars. Therefore bring the attractions, and we will bring on the golden dividends that make the theatre what it is today.[68]

Another incident of local protest, in a much more political vein, occurred in 1914. One of the theatres scheduled a performance of *The Leopard's Spots* (1902) by Thomas Dixon, author of *The Clansman* (1905). The earlier play contained racist portrayals of African Americans, so the Colored Men's Civic League condemned it as racially inflammatory and persuaded the mayor to ban the performance. Here was a case of the complex racial politics of the New South: the League won its case, but one reason for this was that the Democratic political machine of Mayor E.H. Crump needed the black vote to keep the party in power.[69]

Perhaps the most interesting local developments happened in the black theatres around Memphis, such as Church's Auditorium, Tick's Tivoli, the Savoy, and the Metropolitan. It was here that an African American variety theatre culture developed which would help give rise to the blues as the century turned. It was also here that some of the most creative agency with regard to theatre production in the city occurred during this period.

Justification and Sources

This dissertation differs from its predecessors and contributes to scholarship in several ways. As discussed above, it is a case study which reads the local theatre history of Memphis with and against master narratives that characterize U.S. theatre during this period as a national

---

[68] *Commercial Appeal*, 24 July 1910.

[69] G. Wayne Dowdy, *Mayor Crump Don't Like It: Machine Politics in Memphis* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), 19-20; *Memphis Scimitar*, 9 April 1914.

institution. As a corollary, it will, quite simply, also fill a gap in the local theatre history of Memphis. Other than the master's theses covering the history of the Lyceum Theatre (cited below), no detailed general study of theatre in Memphis during this period exists. This dissertation also combines discussion of both European American and African American theatre—something no other study of theatre in this location at this time has done. In their landmark study, *A History of African American Theatre*, Errol Hill and James Hatch note that "black theatre history ha[s] never been integrated into American theatre history," and this dissertation seeks to be one step—if a small one—in the direction of correcting this historiographical problem.[70] Finally, with regard to theoretical framework, this project connects local theatre history to contemporary theoretical discussions of theatre and urban space.

Three previous dissertations have chronicled the development of theatre in Memphis from the settlement of the city until 1880. Charles Ritter has documented the early years to 1859; Seldon Faulkner has looked at the city's most prominent and enduring legitimate theatre, the New Memphis; and Eugene Bristow has investigated variety theatre in the city during this earlier period.[71] In an article published in the *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers*, Kenneth Rainey summarizes the last decade of the New Memphis Theatre's existence before it was destroyed by fire in 1891.[72] Further, three master's theses focus specifically on the Lyceum Theatre, covering its entire life span from 1890 to 1935 in chronicle fashion.[73] Surprisingly, no

---

[70] Errol G. Hill and James V. Hatch, *A History of African American Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 482.

[71] Charles C. Ritter, "The Theatre in Memphis, Tennessee, from its Beginning to 1859" (Ph.D. diss., State University of Iowa, 1956); Seldon Faulkner, "The New Memphis Theater of Memphis, Tennessee, from 1859 to 1880" (Ph.D. diss., State University of Iowa, 1957); and Bristow.

[72] Rainey, 62-73.

[73] Carolyn Powell, "The Lyceum Theater of Memphis, 1890-1900" (master's thesis, University of Mississippi, 1951); James Wesley Ouzts, "History of the Lyceum Theatre, Memphis, Tennessee, 1900-1910" (master's thesis, University of Mississippi, 1963); and Gordon Theodore Batson, "The Theatrical History of the Lyceum Theatre of Memphis, 1910-1935" (master's thesis, University of Mississippi, 1971).

such chronicle or other scholarly work exists for the Grand Opera House.[74] Given the time of their writing, it is not surprising that none of these authors attempts in any way to link his or her investigation of local theatre history to contemporary theoretical discussion. Moreover, not only is there a definite bias against "non-legitimate" theatre throughout these works, but there is also practically no mention of African American performers, critics, or audiences.

Fortunately, music historians Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff have brought to light some of the events in turn-of-the-century African American variety theatre in Memphis, and their work provides a very useful introduction to the subject.[75] Much of their evidence is found in the important African American weekly newspaper of the time, the *Indianapolis Freeman*. Whereas Abbott and Seroff's focus is primarily on the development of black popular music, mine is on Memphis in particular; so, I have been happy to discover that for a brief but crucial period right around the century mark, general news in Memphis took up a fairly significant amount of space in this periodical, often appearing on the front page. Society happenings were discussed, along with reports of discrimination and persecution of blacks in the city. Unfortunately, there are apparently no extant copies of two African American Memphis newspapers—the *Bluff City News* and the *Colored Citizen*—published continuously from 1900 to 1920, which somewhat obscures the picture of black theatre in the city during this period.

---

[74] This theatre became the Orpheum in 1907, burned in 1923, was rebuilt in 1928, became a movie theatre and was renamed the Malco from 1940 to 1976 (during which time it fell into dilapidation), reopened in 1977 as the Orpheum to touring performances, underwent a major renovation in 1984, and now once again serves as the city's home to touring Broadway shows. Although the actual theatre building is not the 1890 original, it occupies the oldest continuously used theatrical site in Memphis. Pat Halloran, President and CEO of the Orpheum, has published a beautiful promotional book, *The Orpheum! Where Broadway Meets Beale* (Memphis: Lithograph, 1997), but no detailed history of the theatre exists. The Orpheum's continuous and varied existence would seem to merit such a focused study; however, the present one will leave that task to another time or another scholar in order to concentrate on illustrating the larger picture of theatre in Memphis during a particular period.

[75] Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, *Ragged but Right: Black Traveling Shows, "Coon Songs," and the Dark Pathway to Blues and Jazz* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2007); *Out of Sight: The Rise of African American Popular Music, 1889-1895* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2002); and "'They Cert'ly Sound Good to Me': Sheet Music, Southern Vaudeville, and the Commercial Ascendancy of the Blues," *American Music* 14, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 402-54.

With regard to other newspapers, given the difference in my approach to some of my predecessors, it has been necessary to retrace their steps to a degree by revisiting some of the papers in order to pick up things that they might have missed in their focus on specific, mainstream theatres. The master's theses that cover the history of the Lyceum Theatre all provide detailed indexes and helpful tables documenting the performances at this theatre, but, as mentioned above, no such coverage has been attempted for other theatres in Memphis during this time. Although a detailed chronicle is not my goal, I have referred to the local papers in order to get a sense of what other theatres were offering and how managements and local theatrical trends changed throughout the period.

The scrapbook collections in the Memphis and Shelby County Room at the Memphis Public Library & Information Center contain the Minute Book of the Grand Opera House, which covers the years from 1888 to 1892, the period of its organization and first two seasons. These collections also contain a book of original box office statements for every night's performance at this theatre from 1894 to 1896, which provides a very clear snapshot of those particular seasons. Londré's use of theatre critic David Austin Latchaw's work served her well for her study of theatre in Kansas City, and likewise I have made use of the collection of early-twentieth-century Memphis theatre critic Hugh Higbee Huhn's papers to aid in my study. The Special Collections of the University of Memphis Libraries contain a collection of the papers of Robert R. Church and family, which has also been very useful. Finally, I have availed myself of period maps from both of these libraries in order to help locate places of performance in the urban landscape.

Outline of the Project

Chapter Two, "The City and the Theatre: Places of Performance in Memphis," discusses the changing layout of the city of Memphis and its relationship to theatres and theatrical activity

throughout the period. As noted above, I use Lefebvre's notion of perceived space to study the spatial practices of the time and place. Starting with a brief discussion of the city before 1890, I move on to discuss the locations and, where evidence is available, the architecture of theatres and performance spaces in several Memphis districts from 1890 to 1920 in more detail. I begin in 1890 because the theatrical environment changed significantly in this year with the opening of the Grand Opera House and the Lyceum within one week of each other, in different quarters of the city.

During this thirty-year period, theatres of several different types and sizes opened and closed in various parts of the city, as well as in the suburbs. Specific questions in this chapter include: where were the places of theatrical performance located, and why were they located there? How did the neighborhoods surrounding the theatres and performance spaces affect the make-up of their audiences? Keeping in mind the constantly shifting nature of socially produced space, what effect might the presence of the various performance spaces have had on the landscape of the city—specifically with regard to class and race? Chapter Two will conclude Part I: Mapping the Terrain.

As I have stated, Part II: The Making of Memphis Theatres, is divided into a prologue and three chapters. Here, the idea of conceived space becomes useful to examine the local transactions undergirding the building and establishment of theatres, as well as the management of theatrical touring and local theatre production. The prologue explains in detail two representations of space that relate to establishment and management, the "New South city" and "the Road."

Then, each of the three chapters focuses on a particular group of theatres in Memphis and how their building and management was connected to urban development, civil society, and the

incorporation of U.S. theatre. Established and built by corporations made up of the city's white business elite—most of them staunch supporters of the New South creed—the Grand Opera House and the Lyceum Theatre also marked the dawning of a new phase in the capitalist nature of theatrical enterprise in Memphis. These developments are explored in Chapter Three, "New Men, New Theatres, New South: The Grand Opera House and the Lyceum Theatre."

This particular model of theatre-building was not the only one, however. Chapter Four, "From Buzzard Roost to Beale Street: African American Theatres," focuses on theatres catering to the Memphis black community. Robert R. Church, of the African American business elite, opened Church's Auditorium as an alternative for African Americans used to sitting in the "buzzard roost" of the white theatres. But there were also several other black theatres that sprang up in Memphis around the turn of the century which did not particularly concern themselves with the kind of "respectability" associated with Church's theatre. During this period, a small group of Italian American businessmen began to corner the market on African American entertainment and at one point established a black vaudeville circuit based in Memphis, creating both opportunity and racial tension in the process.

The last chapter in this section, "'From Provincialism to the Wild Ways of a City': Transforming Memphis Theatres," looks at theatres that in many ways embodied the evolution of Memphis into a modern city and the anxieties surrounding this transformation. It begins with the conversion of large mule and streetcar barns into theatres for various and contradictory cultural purposes. The Auditorium at Main and Linden (not to be confused with Church's Auditorium) was founded under religious convictions but became a theatre through economic necessity. The New Garden Theatre was opened by notorious gangster John Persica and, along with the Memphi, a related theatrical venture, became a symbol of crime and corruption in the city. This

chapter also investigates the ways in which locally established theatrical venues changed as they became increasingly controlled by outside forces. The Auditorium became the Bijou Theatre. "Big time" vaudeville came to town, and the Grand Opera House became the Orpheum Theatre. The Jefferson Theatre, established as a local theatre squarely opposed to New York-based corporatism, was taken over and renamed the Lyric. As road shows began to decline in number and the vaudeville and movie combination began to dominate, all of these theatres were eventually eclipsed by the advent of Marcus Loew and the "big small time."

In all three of these chapters, I ask: Who was involved in the funding, establishment, and management of Memphis theatres, and what were their purposes? How might the theatre have been used as a symbol of social advancement, progress, power, and racial and class solidarity? How did the consolidation of theatre offerings under the national monopolies affect the theatre business in Memphis? And, most importantly, how did theatre contribute to the urban geography of Memphis?

CHAPTER TWO

THE CITY AND THE THEATRE: PLACES OF PERFORMANCE IN MEMPHIS

Cities are created by societies that shape urban space into built environments and networks that serve their specific social, cultural, political, and economic needs. Frequently prevalent as nodal points in these urban spatial networks are places of theatrical performance. Theatre scholars have theorized the relationship of the city to its places of performance, and these scholars have provided many examples of specific theatres in specific cities around the world. Recently, studies of this nature that provide a singular focus on a particular city have begun to appear. I have cited above McKinnie's *City Stages* as an excellent example of a study that accomplishes such a goal for Toronto. Other exemplary work includes Jen Harvie's *Theatre and the City*, which focuses on London, as well as the several essays in *Performance and the City*, edited by D.J. Hopkins, Shelley Orr, and Kim Solga. Again, the majority of these studies focus on major world cities. An earlier example of this approach is Mary C. Henderson's *The City and the Theatre*, in which she shows how the theatre of New York City "mirrored all of the city's changes, developments, refinements, and periodic adjustments."[1] Henderson limits her study to the commercial theatres of New York, following their northward trajectory on Broadway as the commercial heartland of the city moved up the island of Manhattan. But whereas her focus is geographical, it is actually chronology that determines the organization of her book.

The purpose of this chapter is similar to Henderson's book in that it is intended to introduce the reader to the urban history and geography of Memphis and to locate the places of

---

[1] Mary C. Henderson, *The City and the Theatre* (New York: Back Stage Books, 2004), 13.

performance within its urban landscape. However, after an initial historical overview of the urbanization of Memphis from its beginnings up through the period under study, the organization of the chapter will be governed by geography rather than chronology, as it explores the relationships of these theatres with their immediate surroundings. This investigation of the socially produced spaces of the city and the theatre will focus primarily on geography, demographics, and architecture, and will serve to set the scene for the following chapters, where I will analyze other aspects of the relationship of theatre and urban space in the New South city of Memphis.

Urban History of Memphis, 1819-1920

Memphis is a river city that during the nineteenth century began to turn away from its river and become a railroad city.[2] Unlike other river cities such as London, Memphis—limited by both physical and political geography—was never able to stretch itself across the river.[3] Today, although the downtown area is under major renovation and revitalization with regard to businesses and residences, many of the city's cultural institutions—theatres in particular—are dispersed across its eastern reaches, not downtown. According to Eugene Johnson and Robert Russell, "a river city that cannot grow on both sides of its river must either remain small or grow in another direction. Memphis' success as a city doomed its relation to its river."[4] For the first forty years of its existence, Memphis primarily grew north and south along the bluff—hence its

---

[2] For a list of sources on the history of Memphis, see note 66 in the previous chapter.

[3] West Memphis, Arkansas, is today considered part of the Memphis metropolitan area statistically. However, the city of West Memphis developed much later than Memphis, and the width of the river and the floodplain on the banks opposite the Memphis bluff have kept the two urban areas separate geographically. This has also had the effect of keeping them from being culturally and socially connected in the manner of, say, Kansas City, Missouri, and Kansas City, Kansas.

[4] Eugene J. Johnson and Robert D. Russell, *Memphis: An Architectural Guide* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 8.

title of "Bluff City." But at a certain point near the turn of the twentieth century, the city turned its eyes eastward and has not stopped moving in that direction since.

Before its initial urban development, the area where the heart of downtown Memphis is located—atop a high bluff overlooking the Mississippi River—had been used as a hunting ground and a trading site by Native American Mississippians and Chickasaws, and as a military fort by the French and then the Spanish. By the 1790s, the Spanish had withdrawn, and the land that would become Memphis, under use once more by Chickasaws, had been claimed by speculators and sold to the founders of the city, who included future president Andrew Jackson among their number. Tennessee was granted statehood in 1796, and the push was on to claim more Chickasaw lands for white settlers. In what urban historian Robert Sigafoos has called "one of the all-time real estate rapes of the American Indian,"[5] Jackson coerced the Chickasaws into selling their lands between the Tennessee and Mississippi Rivers, which became the western district of Tennessee in 1819. That same year, the town of Memphis was surveyed and mapped out as a rectangle parallel to the Mississippi River on the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff, which is illustrated in Figure 1. The following year, Shelby County, within which Memphis lies, was established in the southwest corner of the state. The town was incorporated and official boundaries were established in 1826, with the river on the west, the intersection of the Wolf River and the Bayou Gayoso on the north, Second Street on the east, and Union Street on the south.

Several public squares were interspersed throughout the original city plan, including three half-squares and one full square, each named for the specific public activity it was intended to facilitate. The half-squares included, from north to south: Auction Square, basically a widening

---

[5] Robert Alan Sigafoos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street: A Business History of Memphis* (Memphis: Memphis State University, 1979), 4.

of the intersection of Auction and Main Streets; Market Square, off Second between Market and Winchester Streets; and Exchange Square, bounded by Exchange and Poplar Streets, which opened out onto the public promenade. The full square, Court Square, was located between Main and Second near the southern end of town. Fronting the river was a public boat landing that stretched from the north end of town to Jackson Street (about one-third the length of the city), and a public promenade that began at this point and continued all the way down to Union. The street nearest the river (now Front Street) was called Chickasaw Street up to Jackson, and Mississippi Row along the promenade.

The goal of the founders of Memphis was to profit from its strategic geographic location on the Mississippi River between St. Louis and New Orleans. Founder James Winchester suggested the name of Memphis because, according to Beverly Bond and Janann Sherman, he "considered the Mississippi River the American Nile and hoped Memphis on the Mississippi would become a center for trade and culture just as Memphis on the Nile had been."[6] The founders assumed that settlers would flock to the new town seeking opportunities in trade and commerce. In its first decade as a city, however, Memphis did not prove very successful. Early on, nearby rival towns siphoned off potential population as well as political and commercial power. Nevertheless, annexations to the city in 1832 and 1842 pushed its eastern limits to the edge of the Bayou Gayoso. This is depicted in the map in Figure 2, "Annexations to Memphis, 1832-1876." For this map and the one in Figure 4, "Annexations to Memphis, 1899-1919," I have color-coded sections of the city that were annexed at different times.

One of the rival towns was a community just south of Union Street called South Memphis. It was here in about 1840 that wealthy real estate entrepreneur Robertson Topp

---

[6] Beverly G. Bond and Janann Sherman, *Memphis in Black & White* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2003), 22.

established an upper-class residential area, built a boat landing, and named the town's main thoroughfare Beale Street. By the end of the decade, Memphis and South Memphis would merge, effectively doubling the city's frontage on the river. At the same time, the eastern spread continued, as the city limits were extended well beyond the natural boundary of the Bayou.

Throughout the 1840s and 50s, as was the case in many other cities around the U.S., the population of Memphis was increased by a large influx of German and Irish immigrants. Seeking opportunity and, in the case of the Irish, escape from famine, they came to the U.S. and brought new cultural and social dimensions to existing urban areas throughout the country. Many landed in New Orleans, and since railroads had not yet overtaken the waterways with regard to transportation, a portion came upriver and settled in Memphis. The Irish tended to congregate in pockets of North and South Memphis, whereas the Germans were more scattered throughout the city. Both groups would become significant forces in urban culture and city politics.

Immigration, the coming of railroads, and, above all, cotton made Memphis the fastest-growing city in the U.S. in the 1850s. During this decade, the city began to tout itself as the largest inland cotton market in the world. For better or worse, its reliance on this single commodity was to become inexorably linked with its economic destiny. Of course, the reliance on cotton meant a reliance on slaves, and during this decade the city also became the largest slave market in the mid-South. Front Street, which came to be known as "Cotton Row," was lined with cotton warehouses, and the riverfront was perpetually covered with thousands of bales of the stuff just off the boat and waiting to be carried up the bluff by slaves.

The geographical position of Memphis did eventually become a drawing card in terms of commerce and trade, and many important buildings, such as the Gayoso House, one of the finest

hotels in the South with its Greek Revival façade, were purposefully constructed to face the river and decorate the city. Rather than just a barrier to be crossed in the trek westward, the river was the lifeblood of the city, and the view of the urban landscape from its banks was seen as an important means of attracting visitors and traders. However, things were just beginning to change.

The Memphis and Charleston Railroad, connecting the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River by modern transport for the first time, was completed in 1857. Barrels of water from both the Mississippi and the Atlantic were carried in opposite directions along the railroad and each deposited into the other body of water as a symbolic gesture of humanity's power over nature. The station for this railroad was the first one of significance in the city, and it came at the beginning of a boom in urban architecture for Memphis. According to Johnson and Russell, about 1,400 buildings were erected in the city in 1859.[7] In addition to this astonishing rate of construction, during the 1850s the city began to campaign for the privilege of becoming a principal stop on the proposed transcontinental railroad. Located near the frontier at this point in time, Memphis was thought of as both a western and a southern city. Had the city succeeded in its effort to win the railroad, its future might have been quite different, but sectional tensions and the start of the Civil War quashed its plans.

By 1860, Memphis, with a population of 22,623, had outpaced Nashville, the state capital, in urban growth and was home to more than twice the population of its future rival Atlanta. To put things into perspective, however, older southern cities such as Mobile, Charleston, and Richmond were still larger, and New Orleans—the South's largest city by a wide margin—was nearly eight times the size of Memphis at this time. Consideration of northern

---

[7] Johnson and Russell, 4.

cities gives even more perspective with regard to the great divide between sections of the U.S. in terms of urban population growth: Philadelphia was about twenty-five times the size of Memphis in 1860, and New York was nearly forty.[8]

Fortunately, Memphis escaped the destructive fate of other southern cities during the Civil War. Prior to the firing on Fort Sumter, most Memphians—in fact, most Tennesseans—were opposed to secession. Eventually the state joined the Confederacy, but Memphis was captured just one year later in June, 1862. Nashville had fallen to the Union several months earlier, the first Confederate state capital to do so. Unlike Atlanta and Richmond, however, Memphis emerged relatively unscathed after four years of occupation. Figure 3 shows a view of the riverfront and the city as it appeared in 1870.

The most drastic change to the city caused by the Civil War was in terms of its population. During the war, whites fled and blacks flocked to the city by the thousands. As Bond and Sherman have reported, by 1865 the African American population had quadrupled to about thirty-nine percent of the total.[9] This burgeoning new black community immediately began establishing schools, churches, and businesses in different parts of the city. Before the war, both free and enslaved African Americans were interspersed throughout the city. Newcomers, the majority of whom were newly freed slaves, tended to congregate in the same neighborhoods as Irish immigrants, and tensions began to rise between these two groups. The disastrous result was a violent three-day rampage in 1866, in which forty-six blacks and two whites were killed, and over a hundred African American establishments, mostly in South

---

[8] Population sizes are taken from Campbell Gibson, "Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790-1990" (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 1998), table 9 (1860), http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab09.txt, accessed 24 January 2012.

[9] Bond and Sherman, 58.

Memphis neighborhoods, were torched. This major race riot provided a very uneasy beginning for Reconstruction-era life in Memphis.

Unfortunately, the next decade would prove extremely difficult for the city, putting its very survival in the balance. A yellow fever epidemic in 1873 took some 2,000 lives, and another one in 1878 almost decimated the population of the city: many thousands fled, and more than 5,000 died. By 1870, the population of Memphis had grown to more than 40,000; however, at the peak of the epidemic in September 1878, it had been reduced to under 20,000. Seventy percent of that number were African Americans, many of whom had no other place to go.[10]

Of course, Memphis was not alone when it came to epidemics. New Orleans had had more than its share and lost many more thousands of people. Other cities, too, throughout the U.S., had been plagued by disease at one time or another. But for some reason Memphis developed a national reputation as a hotbed of filth after its bouts with yellow fever. The fraught situation was preceded and compounded by a major municipal debt crisis, which eventually resulted in the repeal of the city's charter.

In January of 1879, Memphis ceased to enjoy the legitimate privilege of calling itself a city. The buildings still stood, the streets still cut their criss-crossed pattern from the river eastward, and it was still the unofficial capital of the Mississippi Delta. But public investments gone wrong, bankruptcy, pervasive filth, and rampant disease had all but driven Memphis out of existence. A significant portion of its population had either fled or died. What remained was a county taxing district, charter-less, under the authority of the state—a last-ditch effort to buy time to pay the debts, clean up the muck, and rebuild the city from its own metaphorical ashes.

---

[10] Sigafoos, 56; Gibson, table 10 (1870), http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab10.txt, accessed 24 January 2012; Bond and Sherman, 63.

In an age of feverish gilded-city-building all across the United States, when urban centers of the South like Atlanta and Birmingham were just beginning to fully awaken from the aftermath of the Civil War, it was as if Memphis stood at the edge of an abyss, and what had seemed like promise in the years before the war was all but gone.

Still, there had been some expansion of the city limits during this debacle of a decade. Back during the boom of the 1850s, the Greenlaw brothers, William and J. Oliver, real estate developers, had begun a subdivision just to the north of the original city plan called the Greenlaw Addition. The brothers had also planned to build an opera house in the city center just before the war broke out, but their plans were delayed until after it ended. The Greenlaw Opera House was completed in 1866, and in 1870 the Greenlaw Addition was annexed to the city. Six years later, several blocks to the south were annexed. These two additions, to the north and south of the city, became the Ninth and Tenth Wards, respectively.

For twenty years following the repeal of the charter, the city limits of Memphis remained fixed, but this is no indication of the pace of urban development that was happening during those years. While Atlanta and Birmingham were building up to their prominence as the industrial behemoths of the South, Memphis was holding its own. By 1893, the city had recuperated sufficiently for its charter to be restored. Cotton was still king, and despite the New South rhetoric of the time that extolled the progress and potential of industrialization in Memphis, manufacturing never really took a strong hold. But the banking, insurance, wholesale grocery, and hardwood industries—along with cotton—undergirded a new business elite who oversaw a building boom that was to last into the early twentieth century.

As a result, the architectural profile of the city began to change drastically. Two years after the charter was restored, Memphis had its first “skyscraper,” the Continental Bank

Building, an eleven-story, steel-frame structure in the heart of the central business district around Main Street and Madison Avenue. Other new edifices that lent their distinctive façades to the urban landscape during this period included numerous office buildings, churches and a synagogue, department stores, hotels and restaurants, and, of course, theatres. The Memphis Cotton Exchange done in Palladian style (1885), the "Mooresque" Tennessee Club (1890), and the Romanesque Cossitt Library (1893) were particularly striking additions and reflected the eclecticism of nineteenth-century architecture in U.S. cities generally. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the imposing classical revival courthouse and police and fire stations gave a new gravitas to the city, and the new Exchange Building on Second Street, which replaced the Cotton Exchange mentioned above, became "the first major office building that deliberately turned its back on the river."[11] Unlike many of the structures built before the railroads took over the lion's share of transportation, the side of the Exchange Building facing the river had none of the elaborate detail of the fronts facing city streets. Memphis was decidedly growing away from the river.

Not to be outdone, the wealthy elite of the city continued to renovate and build their mansions in the city's two "silk-stocking" districts—along Adams Avenue to the north and Beale to the south. The most baroque of these belonged to Napoleon Hill, the "merchant prince of Memphis," and was situated on Third Street at Madison Avenue, a gaudy symbol of Gilded Age robber-barony near the heart of the city's business district. In describing New York City during this period, Henderson compares the Fifth Avenue mansions of the day to the private box at the opera in terms of how they symbolized the owner's social status.[12] This analogy could certainly be made with regard to Hill as well. As one of the founders of the Grand Opera House in

---

[11] Johnson and Russell, 73.
[12] Henderson, 114.

Memphis, he had a private box in that theatre so that he could simultaneously survey the stage and be in full view of the audience. His residence, ornately constructed and located on a conspicuous corner in the city, served a similar purpose.

With regard to transportation, Memphis had had mule-drawn streetcars since just after the Civil War, but in 1891 the streetcars began to be electrified, and soon after a trolley system was introduced which extended service to outlying suburbs and recreational areas. The most significant development in this arena, however, was the opening of the Great Mississippi River Bridge in 1892. This span, at the time the longest in the nation and third longest in the world, was greeted with a fanfare similar to that which had welcomed the completion of the Memphis and Charleston railroad thirty-five years earlier. The first bridge to cross the river below St. Louis, it brought increased railroad traffic and seemed to indicate that a new era of prosperity was at hand.

The population of Memphis continued to swell during the 1880s and 90s, but instead of coming from foreign countries, most of these new citizens—black and white—came from the surrounding countryside in a wave of internal migration. As Louis Kyriakoudes has shown, this pattern of relocation was happening all over the South at the time, as "migration of population from the southern farms and hamlets to the region's growing cities…transformed both the rural and urban South."[13] Such a dramatic population shift changed the character and culture of many cities, including Memphis, and led to clashes between rural and urban values and worldviews, often resulting in violence.

A series of lynchings in the 1890s again brought national shame to the city's reputation, beginning with the People's Grocery incident in 1892. Three black businessmen, the proprietors

---

[13] Louis M. Kyriakoudes, *The Social Origins of the Urban South: Race, Gender, and Migration in Nashville and Middle Tennessee, 1890–1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 2.

of a store called the People's Grocery in South Memphis, had been attacked by a white mob because their business competed with a nearby grocery owned by whites. They defended themselves, shooting a few of their attackers in the process. As a result, they were arrested and taken to jail, from where they were dragged by another white mob, taken outside the city, and lynched. This particular tragedy and its aftermath incited Ida B. Wells—who was living in Memphis at the time and publishing the *Free Speech and Headlight*, an African American newspaper, in the basement of Beale Street Baptist Church—to leave the city and begin an anti-lynching campaign that encouraged African Americans to move to safer and more accepting locations.[14] Many responded by doing so, but many others stayed and held fast to what they had accomplished and built in Memphis.

Despite these tragic events and ongoing racial tensions in the city, urbanization continued. In a move echoing the consolidation of New York's five boroughs in 1898, Memphis prepared for the new century by making its largest annexation of county territory up to that time. The twelve square miles claimed in 1899, shown in Figure 4, included suburban communities that had sprung up as a result of the increasing reach of the streetcar system, as well as suburban recreation areas such as East End Park, a "pleasure resort" that had been opened by the railway company itself ten years earlier. During the early years of the twentieth century, East End Park was to become a major summer entertainment venue.

As had been planned, the annexation served to increase the urban population of Memphis to over 100,000, pushing it ahead of Nashville and even Atlanta in the 1900 census. When the results came in, the *Memphis Evening Scimitar* proclaimed boldly (if rather prematurely) that Memphis was now the "Biggest City in the South—Excepting New Orleans—All Others

---

[14] For more on this incident and Wells's response, see Paula J. Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), especially Chapter 6, "City of the Three Murdered Men," 156-87.

Outclassed."[15] In this age of courting northern investment, rivalries among southern cities were fierce, and size mattered. It was to be short-lived, but the city celebrated its victory in numbers. Despite further annexations for similar purposes in 1909 and 1919, both Atlanta and Birmingham would surpass Memphis in the 1910 census and remain ahead in 1920.

Regarding the ethnicity of the population of Memphis, some histories report that around 1900 it was just about half black and half white.[16] While this statement rightly emphasizes the significance of the black population in Memphis, it oversimplifies what was a fairly eclectic ethnic mix, especially in North Memphis and around the Beale Street area, of African and European Americans with first- and second-generation Irish, Germans (Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish), French, Italians, Greeks, and Chinese. In fact, by 1910, the proportion of foreign-born citizens and their children in Memphis remained at fourteen percent, only a six percent drop from 1890.[17] While this is nowhere near the proportion of the immigrant population in cities like New York at the time, it was high for the South.

Although this dissertation is primarily concerned with theatre associated with the English-speaking black and white majority of the population, I should pause for a moment here just to say a word or two about the theatre of other ethnicities in Memphis. The theatrical tastes of the Irish, the largest immigrant group in the city, were actually apparent in many of the programming choices of the major theatres, where Irish comedies, dramas, and musicals were very popular throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. As far as I have been able to tell, these performances were probably all in English, as were many of the Italian, German, and French operas presented in the city. With regard to theatrical performances in other

---

[15] *Evening Scimitar*, 27 Sept 1900.

[16] See, for example, Bond and Sherman, 74; and Sigafoos, 98.

[17] Lynette Boney Wrenn, *Crisis and Commission Government in Memphis: Elite Rule in a Gilded Age City* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 10-11.

languages, evidence in English appears to be sparse. Germans in the city actively promoted German culture, and there were several German newspapers in the city during this period, as well as cultural organizations. Locally produced German-language theatre probably took place, but verification would require further investigation in a language with which I am not familiar. Yiddish theatre was certainly performed in Memphis, at least from time to time. This is evidenced by a theatre ad printed in Hebrew in the *Commercial Appeal* in 1905, which is shown in Figure 5, as well as citations of performances by several Yiddish companies at the Lyceum Theatre between 1911 and 1916 (including Fannie Reinhart, billed as the "Yiddish Sarah Bernhardt").[18] Whether or not there were local groups performing plays in Yiddish is uncertain but quite possible. Italians were very much involved in the African American theatre scene in Memphis, as I will discuss in Chapter Four. Given this proclivity, it is also possible that theatre in Italian took place at some point under the guise of one of the Italian cultural organizations in the city. Besides performances by Sarah Bernhardt, French Memphians may have supported theatre on some level through their local cultural organizations as well. I have found no evidence of theatre performed in Greek, and Chinese people, though present, were probably too few in numbers to organize performances in their own languages.

Along with its increased population, Memphis began the twentieth century with a dramatically new size and shape. Newer, taller, and more architecturally distinctive buildings had been going up in the downtown area during the last decade and a half of the nineteenth century, and the city had embraced a large portion of its suburbs. Sigafoos remarks that at the

---

[18] Gordon Theodore Batson, "The Theatrical History of the Lyceum Theatre of Memphis, 1910-1935" (master's thesis, University of Mississippi, 1971), 102.

turn of the twentieth century, "Memphis began to look like a city physically, and began to enjoy the amenities which many citizens assumed to be part of the life in important cities."[19]

One area of amenities where the city was lacking in comparison to its competitors was that of public parks, but this was soon remedied. The 342-acre Overton Park near the northeast corner of the city and 445-acre Riverside Park to the southwest were established in 1901. Upon the advice of landscape architect John C. Olmsted (famed park designer Frederick Law Olmsted's stepson), a parkway system was devised that connected the two parks and provided a green belt surrounding the city. In addition to the parks, the Tri-State Fairgrounds, formerly a horse-racing track, were annexed in 1917. Throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century, suburban subdivision development also continued apace.

The years from 1890 until World War I were, of course, a time of increasing segregation in the South, when Jim Crow laws were passed to ensure the separation of whites and blacks. Even with its large population of African Americans, Memphis was not immune to this legislation of spatial practice. When Lymus Wallace's term in city government ended in 1890, he became the last African American to serve on the city council for seventy-four years.[20] Streetcars were legally segregated in 1905 despite protests by African Americans and the railroad companies themselves (due to the costs involved in altering their facilities rather than social conscience), and eventually other public facilities followed suit. Segregation by custom already had a long history in the city, and racially segregated seating in theatres had been common at least since the end of the Civil War.[21] Contrary to other southern cities like Atlanta and Richmond, however, the city of Memphis did not attempt to legislate racial zoning in its

---

[19] Sigafoos, 100.

[20] Bond and Sherman, 65.

[21] Christopher Caplinger, "Conflict and Community: Racial Segregation in a New South City, 1860-1914" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 2003), 104.

urban planning, relying instead on "natural" racial zoning to occur in residential areas.[22] Still, aside from neighborhoods that were specifically African American such as Orange Mound and Binghampton, racial patterns of settlement tended to be patchwork in nature during this period. Ethnic groups that were more accepted by the white community, such as German and Irish descendants of earlier waves of immigration, tended to live in closer proximity to whites; whereas Italians, Jews, Greeks, and Chinese tended to take up residence near black neighborhoods such as North and South Memphis.

Beale Street itself exhibited this kind of patchwork pattern. At the street's western end, the river landing, the bluff, and Front Street were dominated by warehouses and shipping businesses where the labor force was (still) black and management was white; from the site of the Grand Opera House at Main Street up to Third were mostly white-owned businesses with some black businesses mixed in starting at Second; the next several blocks past Third were the part of Beale that became known as the "Main Street of Negro America,"[23] where black doctors, lawyers, businessmen, and storekeepers worked and lived, and where many of the black theatres were located; just east of here for a block or so was the wealthy white community developed beginning in the 1840s, with its stately mansions; and at the end of the street was another patch of black residents, just around the corner from the African American LeMoyne Normal Institute.

So, within the general urban landscape I have just sketched, where were the places of theatrical performance located? How might the neighborhoods surrounding the theatres and performance spaces have affected the make-up of their audiences? What was the relationship of these theatres to the surrounding built environment? And what effect might the presence of these

[22] Christopher Silver and John V. Moeser, *The Separate City: Black Communities in the Urban South, 1940-1968* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 31.

[23] The reference to Beale as the "Main Street of Negro America" comes from George Washington Lee, *Beale Street: Where the Blues Began* (New York: R.O. Ballou, 1934), 13.

various performance spaces have had on the urban landscape of the city? To provide some answers to these questions, for the remainder of this chapter I will look at various sections of the city—North Memphis, the central business district, South Memphis, and the outlying areas—and discover the places of performance within them. I will start in the northern section of the city because it was the first to be developed, and then I will work my way down. The map in Figure 6 pinpoints the locations of theatres throughout the city. This particular map is comprehensive; I have tried to include each and every theatre mentioned in this dissertation. The following maps, in Figures 7, 8, 14, and 23, are details of the larger map which are associated with the various sections of the city discussed below. For these maps, I have only included the theatres mentioned in the following sections of this chapter. Although the primary focus for the remainder of the chaper will be the theatres that existed during the period of time under investigation in this dissertation, there will be some discussion of theatres that existed outside the period in order to indicate how these various neighborhoods and their relationship to the theatres within them changed over time.

<u>North Memphis (Figure 7)</u>

Today, as you approach the north end of downtown Memphis from Arkansas by crossing the Mississippi River on the Hernando DeSoto Bridge, the Pyramid Arena is visually prominent in the current skyline. A 20,000-seat facility built on the banks of the river in 1991 for entertainment and sports events, the Pyramid's shape and mass create a striking beginning point to the architectural profile of the city, which extends south along the bluff, lined with the requisite modern skyscrapers. Plans for a unique structure that would house a major auditorium and highlight the city's association with its ancient namesake on the Nile had been hatched as early as the 1890s. In the 1970s, city planners again proposed a pyramidic arena, citing the

success of the St. Louis Arch as a monumental landmark, but were rebuffed. The building that eventually came to fruition sat empty and abandoned from 2004 until just recently: new development of the arena is currently underway.[24] For a significant portion of its existence, however, the Pyramid was a symbol of the relative ambivalence for this particular area of downtown on the part of the city as a whole. North Memphis has generally been overshadowed by developments—especially in entertainment—toward the south near Beale Street.

North Memphis has long been stigmatized by its association with poor communities. It was dubbed "Pinch" in the early years of the city due to the "pinch gut" or emaciated appearance of residents who lived in shacks near the undesirable area where the Wolf River and the Bayou Gayoso met. The Irish immigrants who flooded into North Memphis reclaimed the nickname and exploited it for political advantage, using the plight of the downtrodden to unite the First Ward into a bloc voting power that was one of the most influential in the city before the Civil War.[25] Later in the nineteenth century, the ethnic makeup of the neighborhood had changed to include African Americans, Jews, and Italians, but the socioeconomic base was still poor for the most part—a result of uneven development in favor of the more affluent, white population to the south and, increasingly, to the east.

Before the central business district was developed further to the south, however, the North Memphis area was the heart of the original town. Wealthy citizens lived up near Auction Square, and Commerce Street was the main thoroughfare. In this area, on the corner of Jackson and Chickasaw (Front) Streets, one short block north of Commerce, where the boat landing met

---

[24] As of this writing, the Pyramid has been purchased and is under development by Bass Pro Shops. Under a public-private partnership, this company plans to turn the building and grounds into a multi-million-dollar "destination store" and outdoor sporting playground, complete with a hotel and giant fishing aquariums. How this change will affect the neighborhood remains to be seen.

[25] On the Irish in Memphis, see David T. Gleeson, *The Irish in the South, 1815-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), and Darrel B. Uselton, "Irish Immigration and Settlement in Memphis, Tennessee: 1820s-1860s," *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 50 (1996): 115-29.

the promenade, the first recorded theatrical performances in Memphis took place: from May 23 to June 3, 1829, famed theatrical pioneer Sol Smith and his company played in a "room, fitted up for the occasion" in the home of Captain Emmanuel Young, a prominent local citizen.[26] I want to linger on the beginnings of theatre in Memphis for a moment in order to contextualize, not only in a temporal sense but also geographically, this strategic starting point for theatrical performance in the city.

Charles Ritter, who has chronicled the theatre in Memphis from its beginnings up to 1859, states that Smith's performances inspired the formation of a Thespian Society.[27] However, it seems that Ritter made some assumptions that led him to errors in both the history and geography of these first theatrical performances—and thus in the spatial practices of early Memphis. According to early historians of Memphis, a Thespian Society was formed by local citizens who then requested Smith and his company to come to the city, rather than the other way around.[28] The following year, they converted a portion of Young's warehouse, next to his residence, and used it for their own performances and for Smith when he returned.

Some time later the Society moved up the street a bit, to a building where they shared space with Methodist and Presbyterian congregations.[29] Ritter characterizes this combination as strange bedfellows, but he also states erroneously that Young's warehouse was the building that the Thespians shared with the religious groups and implies that the theatre group's move was due

---

[26] Solomon Smith, *Theatrical Management in the West and South for Thirty Years* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1868), 57.

[27] Charles C. Ritter, "The Theatre in Memphis, Tennessee, from Its Beginning to 1859," (Ph.D. diss., State University of Iowa, 1956), 12.

[28] James D. Davis, *The History of the City of Memphis* (Memphis: Hite, Crumpton & Kelly, 1873), 237; J.M. Keating and O.F. Vedder, *History of the City of Memphis, Tennessee*, 2 vols. (Syracuse, NY: D. Mason & Co., 1888), 1:175; Judge J.P. Young, *Standard History of Memphis, Tennessee* (Knoxville, TN: H.W. Crew & Co., 1912), 470. Ritter appears not to have been aware of Davis's book.

[29] Davis, 235-36; Thomas P. Young, "First Dramatic Performance in Memphis," *Memphis Appeal* 12 May 1872, quoted in Ritter, 12.

to this mismatched arrangement. Contrary to this assertion, however, James D. Davis, the first historian of Memphis, whose brother had been a member of the Thespians, describes the actual location of their second home up the street from Young's warehouse and remarks that "it seemed that they got along more amicably than the religionists did among themselves."[30]

Further, the second building that the Thespians inhabited was across the street from the Bell Tavern, a well-known drinking establishment and one of the first landmarks of early Memphis. Ritter, in order to separate the practices of vice, religion, and theatre into discrete geographic spheres, asserts that this section of the street was called "Blue Ruin" (a nineteenth-century nickname for gin) and that the amateur theatre group ceased operation after two seasons because of the proximity of their performance space to such activities as drinking, gambling, and prostitution. While it appears to be true that Smith did not return to Memphis after 1831 because of unprofitable houses, this is no indication that interest in theatre or performances on the part of the amateur group ceased to exist. Moreover, sources seem to indicate that what came to be referred to as "Blue Ruin" was actually the first home of the theatre group—the original location in Young's warehouse at the corner of Jackson and Chickasaw, rather than the building across the street from the Bell Tavern.[31]

My point here is not merely to quibble over the details of Ritter's errors. The problem with Ritter's history of the beginnings of theatre in Memphis is his misinterpretation of spatial practice, which is brought about by assumptions he has made that privilege global trends over local practices, without considering the interplay and interpenetration of the two.[32] The first of

---

[30] Davis, 236.

[31] Keating and Vedder, 1:213 and 2:302; James Roper, "The Earliest Pictures of Memphis: Charles Lesueur's Drawings, 1828-1830," *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 25, no. 5 (1971): 24-25.

[32] See page 5 above and Jean Graham-Jones, "Editorial Comment: Theorizing Globalization through Theatre," *Theatre Journal* 57, no. 3 (2005): ix.

these assumptions is connected to the longstanding historiographical narrative of the early-nineteenth-century star system (the precursor to combinations), in which touring stars descended on benighted towns, bringing culture to the wastelands. There is no question that touring professionals were indeed much sought after in the hinterlands, and that in all likelihood their performances greatly outshone the vast majority of untrained amateurs and local professionals supporting them. However, without the existence of countless Thespian societies and small resident stock companies in cities and towns throughout the country, stars might have had very few places to play at this particular point in history. The presence of a Thespian society in a provincial city or town was an indication of that community's simultaneous desire to promote the art and practice of theatre within their midst and to unite them with a wider culture of theatrical performance by attracting outside visitors like Smith.

Moreover, in Memphis, a town of mere hundreds at this early stage, the Thespian Society was situated geographically at the very heart of the city and included among its members some of the city's most prominent citizens. These included not only two of Emmanuel Young's sons, but also Marcus Winchester, the first mayor of the city and son of one of its original founders.[33] In addition to his position as mayor, Winchester ran the post office and the main store at the corner of Jackson and Chickasaw, right across the street from Young's warehouse. Its association with Winchester, along with its proximity to the public promenade and Commerce Street, made this location of "one of the finest intersections in town."[34] Symbolically, this location also carried the distinction (if rather dubious) of being at the nominal intersection of the

---

[33] Ritter quotes Thomas P. Young as indicating that the Society's members included "M.B. Winchester" (12), but makes no comment on this statement. He also makes no mention of Young's fond remembrance of Winchester's portrayal of Young Marlow in Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*. See Thomas P. Young, "First Dramatic Performance."

[34] James Roper, "Paddy Meagher, Tom Huling, and the Bell Tavern," *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 31, no. 5 (1977): 18.

negotiating parties (Jackson and the Chickasaws) that made the foundation of the city of Memphis possible. With regard to the national theatre scene at this point in time, Memphis was a tiny, insignificant outpost on the vast reaches of the periphery; however, within the city itself, the incipient notions of a theatre—albeit without a purpose-built structure—were located at the very center of its urban space. Without this kind of centrally located desire in the periphery, the metropolitan center, in terms of theatre at least, might not exist.

Reaching farther afield in this more abstract sense, even the presence of a "Thespian" society in a particular location serves to connect it in some way to an imagined geography of theatre centered in ancient Greece and bridged across the idea of the "western world" at large. The connection to London holds here, too: according to Davis, Smith stayed in town for a bit after his second visit to Memphis in 1831, reorganizing the Thespian Society and renaming it the Garrick Club.[35] In addition, Young, in his newspaper remembrance years later, recalled with fondness Winchester's portrayal of Young Marlow in Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*. As with many other U.S. cities and towns at this time, the geography of theatre was very much centered in London.

The second assumption that Ritter makes, about the distinct separation of different types of social activities within urban space at this point in the city's history, leads him into slippery territory. The idea that theatre and religion did not mix during this early period was one that certainly pertained in parts of the Northeast, but not necessarily in the South. Moreover, when the Thespian group moved a couple of blocks up the street, they were still situated near the center of the city, across the street from the famous Bell Tavern. Although it gained a bad

[35] Davis, 237. The Garrick Club in London was not formed until August 1831, and Davis was writing more than forty years after the fact; so, I tread into this area with some skepticism. Still, that his brother was involved with the Society encourages me to give him the benefit of the doubt.

reputation in later years, at this point it was a prominent site where legend had it that the likes of Davy Crockett and Sam Houston had reveled. In these early days, the use of urban space in Memphis was not so defined into separate spheres as it would be later. Indeed, saloons would for quite some time remain a standard feature of the urban geography of Memphis, a "wide open" river town with a reputation for drinking and gambling that lasted well into the early twentieth century.

Apparently because of the potential to provide alternatives to such activities, the *Memphis Enquirer* welcomed the advent of investment in theatre from outside the city in 1837.[36] In that year, the managers of the Nashville Theatre came to Memphis and converted a building on Market Street near Adams Avenue into a theatre. It was subsequently used by other managers, until the City Theatre opened in 1842. The geographic position of the theatre on Market Street (see Figure 8) is an indication of the southward drift of the city center. It seems that sometime during the 1830s, the ever-changing river shifted its course away from the northern part of the city, causing the waterfront, and thus the landing area and the bustle of the city, to start its gradual move south towards Court Square.[37] The sporadic nature of theatre production in Memphis during this period would seem to indicate that so-called legitimate theatre had a difficult time gaining a foothold in this city. It was, for that matter, still a frontier city. When theatre finally did begin to become a more permanent fixture, the gravitational center of legitimacy had already begun to shift.

Rivers are unstable by nature, and if cities, too, are "ever-changing geographical, architectural, political, and social structures," so are the performances that happen within them,

---

[36] Ritter, 23.

[37] Roper, "Earliest Pictures," 13, 16; Smith, 57.

as Jen Harvie reminds us in *Theatre and the City*.[38] Today North Memphis is quite different than it was during the early nineteenth century. Since the early twentieth century this area, combined with the former Greenlaw Addition to its immediate north, has been one of the epicenters of working-class African American culture in Memphis. At the turn of the twenty-first century, performers from this area—along with those in African American neighborhoods in South Memphis such as Orange Mound—helped to spawn "Dirty South" hip hop, and North Memphis is touted as the birthplace of crunk, one of its subgenres.[39] In 2006, the North Memphis group Three 6 Mafia won an Academy Award for their song, "It's Hard Out Here for a Pimp," from the film *Hustle & Flow*, which was shot on location in Memphis.[40]

A little over a century before, around the same time that Church's Auditorium was opening on Beale Street, one of the first black vaudeville venues that helped to launch the blues was opening in North Memphis: the Rialto. Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff have researched what they call "a deep African American vaudeville theater tradition in Memphis" during this time, and they have revealed that Beale Street was not the only place in the city where this tradition of performance was undergoing artistic ferment.[41] Up until the early 1910s at least, performers and theatre operators were often involved in both areas of the city. When the Rialto opened in 1901, it marked the beginning of a spate of African American theatrical activity near the intersection of North Main and Market Streets. J. Ed Green, a famous name in black vaudeville, managed a stock company here, which I will discuss in Chapter Four. Although the

---

[38] Jen Harvie, *Theatre and the City* (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 6.

[39] See Matt Miller, "Dirty Decade: Rap Music and the U.S. South, 1997-2007," *Southern Spaces*, 10 June 2008, http://southernspaces.org/2008/dirty-decade-rap-music-and-us-south-1997-2007, accessed 24 January 2012.

[40] Paul Beauregard (as DJ Paul), Jordan Houston (as Juicy J), and Frayser Boy, "It's Hard Out Here for a Pimp," *Hustle & Flow: Music from and Inspired by the Motion Picture*, Atlantic, 2005; *Hustle & Flow*, 16 mm, 116 min., Paramount Pictures, Los Angeles, 2005.

[41] Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, "'They Cert'ly Sound Good to Me': Sheet Music, Southern Vaudeville, and the Commercial Ascendancy of the Blues," *American Music* 14, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 426.

Rialto was short-lived, by 1909 three other theatres were operating in the area: the Royal, the Gem, and the Amuse U.

In terms of demographics, at this time North Memphis was a mix of African Americans, Jews, and Italians. The latter two ran many of the businesses that lined North Main, but it appears that custom and trade were not nearly as segregated as they became further south. At the four theatres mentioned above, performers were all African Americans, as were several of the managers.

Archival sources—or the lack thereof—provide some interesting problems and revealing lacunae with regard to these theatres. Unfortunately no photographs appear to exist that might give some clue as to their architectural contribution to the urban landscape. They were in all likelihood small façade theatres of the kind that Carlson describes, built to blend in with the existing streetscape, as most of the theatres in Memphis were at this time.[42] City directories of the period are very useful, but they can also compound the difficulty of speculating how some theatres might have appeared, especially with regard to the more marginal theatres in North Memphis and around the Beale Street area. Several factors create confusion for the historian but also serve to indicate the unstable definition of theatre during this period and to reveal the imbrication of power within the creation and preservation of such documents as newspapers and directories.

For one thing, the primary newspaper source for information about African American entertainment in Memphis during this period is not one of the city's mainstream papers, the *Commercial Appeal* or the *Evening Scimitar*, but rather the *Indianapolis Freeman*, an African American weekly based in that city. Advertisements for black entertainment venues in the

---

[42] Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1989), 98-127.

mainstream Memphis papers of the time are extremely rare, and full reviews of productions in black theatres are non-existent. Also, there are apparently no extant copies of two African American Memphis newspapers that were being published at the time, *The Colored Citizen* and the *Bluff City News*. The lack of acknowledgement of African American culture in Memphis during this period, in terms of both coverage and preservation, obscures the view of this vibrant African American theatre culture at the turn of the twentieth century.

City directories of the time, with their particular means of categorization, provide a revealing view, not only of the human geography of the city, but also of the power structure undergirding the publication of such documents. In addition to listings of residents and businesses by name, streets are listed by number, along with the name of the person or business located at that number. This configuration gives some idea of the makeup of each street with regard to the mix of commercial and residential structures. Further, people of color and businesses associated with them are marked by an asterisk or a "c" in parentheses, as if to reinforce the spatial practice of segregation from the page.

The separation of businesses into categories is also illuminating with regard to the contemporary definition of theatre. From the advent of movie theatres (basically nickelodeons) in Memphis around 1906, until 1910, all theatres, regardless of whether they presented live entertainment, moving pictures, or some combination of the two, are listed under "Theatres" in the Memphis directories. When theatres began to be separated into "Theatres" and "Motion Pictures," a few are listed under both. All four of the establishments in North Memphis mentioned above were advertised in the *Indianapolis Freeman* as theatres soliciting live acts, but, for example, the Amuse U is listed in the city directory only as a movie theatre. If, as it appears, the Amuse U started out life as such, perhaps its façade was a bit more ornamented than

the others, but this is pure speculation. The Royal does not appear under "Theatres," but does appear in the street listings as the Royal Theatre. Interestingly, of the four, the Gem is the only one listed under "Theatres." It was also the only one of these North Memphis theatres that was both owned and operated by African Americans.

The Rialto presents a different case: advertised in the *Freeman* as having an address at 96 Front Street, this theatre does not ever appear in the Memphis city directory.[43] Instead, in the section that lists locations by street numbers, only the name of James Kinnane appears. Kinnane is then listed by name as the proprietor of a saloon at 96 Front Street. The *Freeman* also makes reference to "Manager Kinan" of the Rialto.[44] The reason for this discrepancy may be that the Rialto was only a short-lived holding place for the theatre company that was to appear at Church's Auditorium for its grand opening in 1901. This development will also be discussed in Chapter Four.

Further, even though musical comedies, "ragtime operas," and other types of plays were performed in these places, some performances that took place in the black vaudeville houses of Memphis, like vaudeville acts in general, were of a more portable nature (i.e., solo and duo acts) that could also be (and were) seen in other locations such as saloons and movie theatres. Though many of these performances took place inside buildings that were called theatres, the distinction of what constituted theatrical performance in the vaudeville house, movie theatre, and saloon was in the process of being worked out during the early twentieth century. Confusion on the part of directory editors resulting from this transience and fluidity may have led to some of the gaps in recording the locations of African American theatres. However, there seem to have been at least some editorial decisions being made regarding the legitimacy of such theatres.

---

[43] The first advertisement for the Rialto appears in the *Indianapolis Freeman* on 4 May 1901.
[44] *Indianapolis Freeman* 31 Aug 1901.

By about 1911, African American theatrical activity had moved for the most part to the area around Beale Street, and I have not been able to discover the fate of the buildings that housed these North Memphis theatres.

Central Business District (Figure 8)

As the center of affluent white commerce and trade shifted and consolidated during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, so did the center of legitimate theatre in Memphis. Both Henderson and McKinnie describe how theatres in New York and Toronto associated themselves with particular portions of the built environment of the city in order to achieve theatrical legitimacy. Neither, however, explicitly defines what s/he means by "legitimate theatre."

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the notion of legitimacy was used at times to differentiate popular forms of entertainment such as vaudeville and motion pictures from the staging of plays deemed to possess literary value, but even more so, according to David Savran, to connote "the ability to fashion a hierarchy…and police its boundaries."[45] Like Savran, Mark Hodin uses Bourdieu's theories regarding the sociology of taste to examine theatrical legitimacy. Hodin contends that "market pressure compelled legitimate theatre's advocates…to articulate the value of literary practice in explicitly social terms, as a privilege realized through mobility rather than removal."[46] The mobility to which Hodin refers indicates the arbitrary power of choice such advocates had in dictating what would be deemed legitimate ("policing the boundaries," in Savran's terms), rather than the mere recognition of supposedly objective intrinsic value

---

[45] David Savran, *Highbrow/Lowdown: Theater, Jazz, and the Making of the New Middle Class* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 47.

[46] Mark Hodin, "The Disavowal of Ethnicity: Legitimate Theatre and the Social Construction of Literary Value in Turn-of-the-Century America," *Theatre Journal* 52, no. 2 (May 2000): 212. Following quotation from the same place.

contained in literary artifacts or the complete disavowal of what they would normally consider low culture. This strategic power allowed elites to locate "cultural legitimacy in unmarked identity, promising to restore for the dominant classes a threatened social order by confirming the dominion of 'white' authority in an 'ethnic' commercial landscape."

As Hodin demonstrates, one of the ways in which this power of choice was executed during this period is evidenced in the coverage of multiple types of performance by newly fashioned, literary-oriented theatre critics who strategically positioned themselves as victims of "an opposing commercial audience."[47] Although Hodin's examples focus on the misrepresentation of Jews in the theatre industry by theatre critics like William Winter and James Metcalfe, and it is New York that stands for his idea of "Turn-of-the-Century America," his argument does apply to Memphis as well, where encroachingly popular African American performances related to ragtime and the blues threatened to undermine the power of white legitimacy if they were not kept separate, relegated to the category of low culture, and contained in the geographic margins of the city. Hugh Higbee Huhn, the William Winter of Memphis during this period, put his power of choice in geographical terms: "Today ragtime is acknowledged to be an outrage against aural decency. If you must hear it go to a college town or the tenderloin."[48] The "tenderloin" district, fictionalized by William Faulkner in novels like *Sanctuary*, was to Memphis what Storyville was to New Orleans during this period.[49] Known for its brothels and gambling dens located along and just below Gayoso Street, it was a kind of border area where white male dominance persisted (despite the presence of several well-known female proprietors, black and white, who are unflinchingly listed as Madams in the city directory

---

[47] Ibid., 214-15.
[48] *Commercial Appeal*, 19 June 1910.
[49] William Faulkner, *Sanctuary* (1931; New York: Vintage, 1993).

for 1900), but racial and class categories were often transgressed. Savran sums up the notion of theatrical legitimacy promulgated by Huhn and others of the period thus: "If…the legitimate theater is lawfully begotten, pure, artistic (i.e., beyond price), and Anglo-Saxon, its illegitimate cousin must be spurious, improper, indigenous, a commodity to be bought and sold, and if not 'negro,' then at least of questionable Anglo-Saxon heritage."[50]

Hodin and Savran use terms such as "boundaries," "landscape," and "mobility" but do not specifically connect legitimacy with the concept of place. However, certain places of performance do become associated with legitimacy in this sense, based on their relationship to a combination of the particular genres of performance that they present, nearby urban places, and the classes of people that attend them, among other things. Harvie has noted that as theatre becomes legitimate, it is "allowed to move into a more central position in the urban landscape, reciprocally allowing the city and its ruling authorities to enhance their civic narrative as also being legitimate and good." However, this process of legitimation is undergirded by the capitalist marketization of culture.[51] In the next chapter, I will begin to examine more fully the effects of the nationwide trends of consolidation and incorporation on the relationship between theatrical legitimacy and urban development in Memphis during this period, especially in connection with New South rhetoric. In this section I simply want to lay the groundwork by showing how legitimate theatre in Memphis followed the commercial center of the city.

Unlike the island of Manhattan, in nineteenth-century Memphis the center of mainstream business moved toward the south. The core of the central business district eventually settled near Court Square, the southernmost of the town squares from the original plan of Memphis, close to the intersection of Main Street and Madison Avenue. Around the turn of the twentieth century,

---

[50] Savran, 43.
[51] Harvie, 27.

the block of Madison between Main and Front came to be referred to as "Bankers' Row" or "the Wall Street of Memphis," and other businesses congregated around this nexus of capitalism.

Before then, however, the business district was physically spread out in an area roughly bounded by Poplar in the north and Beale in the south, and from Front to Third Streets west to east. It was in this general area that the building boom of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries took place. For the purposes of this discussion, however, I am limiting the southern edge of this area to Union Avenue, the original boundary between Memphis and South Memphis, since the area just below Union was a different environment than that around Court Square.

Despite the efforts of interested citizens, theatre struggled to gain permanency in Memphis during the early years of the city. A couple of concert halls were built in the 1840s: one on Second Street in 1843; the other, Hightower Hall, on Front Street in South Memphis, in 1847. There was also a theatre on Main Street with the generic name of the City Theatre. John S. Potter, an impresario who had opened theatres in cities throughout the western U.S., converted what had been a horse stable and opened this theatre in 1842. For five years the City Theatre served as the leading stage in Memphis, if a bit redolent of its former inhabitants, before it was reduced to rubble by flames. In addition, a building on Second Street between Jefferson and Adams was being used as a theatre during the mid-1840s. Odd Fellows' Hall was built in 1851 on Court Square, but after the Civil War it was rarely used for entertainment events.

Throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, the waterfront also served as a site for performances. This period was the heyday of showboat troupes that plied their trade along the Mississippi from St. Louis and other points north, down to New Orleans and back. For almost a century, from the 1830s until the 1920s, showboats traveled the river, and they would

often drop anchor at Memphis, as Edna Ferber mentions in her novel *Show Boat*.[52] Perhaps because of their migratory nature and reliance on good weather, they did not advertise in the local newspapers, and thus the local press did not pay much attention to their activities or grant them any kind of legitimacy. Still, the geographical area of the waterfront must be considered as part of the spatial network that embraced theatrical activities within the city.

A showboat manager ended up opening the first theatre with any real staying power in Memphis. Thomas Lennox had found himself stranded in the city, forced to sell his floating theatre to pay off debts and find a new one on land in order to feed his family. He converted a Universalist church on Washington Street between Front and Main, which at the time was located in an up-and-coming commercial area, and opened it as the 600-seat Memphis Theatre in 1849.

The simple act of naming a theatre after the city in which it is located would seem to be a legitimating move of sorts, and this was the first of two theatres to be so named. The first Memphis Theatre was eventually eclipsed by the larger, more elegant, and purpose-built New Memphis Theatre a decade later. By the end of the Civil War, the New Memphis had long surpassed the old Memphis in terms of legitimacy, and the latter had become a variety theatre with an active wineroom and a brothel in the rear of the building. It would remain a variety and vaudeville house in several different incarnations throughout the rest of the century. Perhaps the relative obscurity that it achieved accounts for its longevity: before the current Orpheum Theatre (built in 1928), the old Memphis was the building used for the longest period of time as a theatre, only ceasing operation as such in 1894. The Federal Building has stood on this site since 1963

[52] Edna Ferber, *Show Boat* (1926; New York: G.K. Hall and Co., 1981).

as part of the Civic Center Plaza, one of the first of several urban renewal projects in Memphis that eventually destroyed many of the city's historic buildings.

The New Memphis started out life in 1857 as Crisp's Gaiety Theatre, which seated 1,500 and was the first purpose-built theatre in the city. Managed by William H. Crisp, it was modeled on a theatre of the same name in New Orleans and became a new link in his touring circuit between that city and Nashville. The theatre was built by a Dramatic Association headed by local attorney James Wickersham, in order to fulfill the desire of the antebellum elite of this rising "Charleston of the West" to have a playhouse worthy of their burgeoning city. On the stage of the New Memphis would be seen many of the national stars of the era: Charlotte Cushman, John and Louisa Lane Drew, Adah Isaacs Menken, and many others.

As well-to-do citizens had already begun to establish their upscale neighborhoods in the northeast (Adams Avenue) and south (Beale) of the city in this boom decade, slogging through the perpetually muddy, virtually unpaved streets in a carriage all the way northwest to the Memphis Theatre had become too much of a chore. The new theatre was a shorter trip for them, and it was closer to newer forms of transportation as well. Located just two blocks west of the brand new Memphis and Charleston Railroad terminal on Jefferson, the choice of site for the New Memphis was a revealing nod toward the gradual shift of travelers across the region—theatre-goers and theatre professionals included—from the waterways to the iron tracks. Still, there was enough trade by both in 1875 for the manager to make arrangements with railroads and river packets for excursion fares that included admission fees.[53]

When Crisp lost his lease two seasons after the theatre first opened, Wickersham changed the name from the Gaiety to the New Memphis as if to proclaim its centrality to the city and

---

[53] Seldon Faulkner, "The New Memphis Theatre of Memphis, Tennessee, from 1859 to 1880" (Ph.D. diss., State University of Iowa, 1957), 160-61.

herald its association with a new age, in addition to simply differentiating it from the old Memphis Theatre. In 1890 it too was eclipsed, however—this time by the opening of the Grand Opera House and the Lyceum Theatre. For one final season the New Memphis was the place for "popular priced" theatre, and then it burned to the ground. The *Memphis Appeal-Avalanche* reported that although the site of the Memphis, which had by that time dropped the distinction of "New," was a valuable piece of ground, the theatre would most likely not be rebuilt because it was no longer a good location for a playhouse.[54]

Increasingly in Memphis during this period—as in many cities around the U.S.—a night out at the theatre meant socializing at one of many clubs, restaurants, and saloons, which became part of the spatial network associated with theatre-going, for those who could afford it. The best saloons were ordinarily connected to hotels, and there were several of these within easy reach of the theatres at the time. Gaston's Hotel in Court Square, next door to the city's first skyscraper, was a favorite haunt, as was Luehrmann's on Madison just south of Main, which—like the Waldorf or Delmonico's in New York—was noted for its "after theatre lunches." A newspaper advertisement for Luehrmann's, visually reinforcing such patterns of consumption, as well as racial hierarchies, is pictured in Figure 9. This social tradition of a having a small meal quite late in the evening after attending a theatrical performance became very fashionable during the period. Further, theatres espousing a certain level of legitimacy at this particular point in time often contained their own restaurants, cafés, lounges, and shops within the same building, in addition to sharing space with the city's elite social clubs.

The Lyceum, which would eventually become the "carriage trade" theatre in the middle of the central business district, started out life in a different part of the city in direct association

---

[54] *Appeal-Avalanche*, 18 Sept 1891.

with one of these clubs. Opening just a week after the Grand Opera House, which was built by wealthy older white men who controlled much of the city, the Lyceum was unique in that it was included as part of a five-story building constructed to house the Amateur Athletic Association, an elite club for young white men, pictured in Figure 10. The ground floor consisted of the 1,300-seat theatre, along with a drug store and a barber shop. Other floors housed a reading room, dining room, library, parlor, billiard room, rooms for dressing and sleeping, and a gymnasium/ballroom.[55]

This first incarnation of the Lyceum seems to have had some of the traits of a kind of theatre space referred to by Carlson as a "jewel in the casket."[56] The building that housed the club and the theatre was located on Union Avenue at Third Street, just north of the tenderloin district. Although it was open to the general public and not quite hidden away in the building, news reports often referred to the "daintiness" and "prettiness" of the theatre, and its presence in the home of a private men's club, with easy access to covert pleasures, seems to have given it the air of a court theatre of sorts.

When the Lyceum burned down in 1893, just three seasons into its lifespan, manager John Mahoney decided to raise the funds to reincarnate the theatre in its own building. However, he and his backers chose not to rebuild on the same site but rather to move the theatre closer to Court Square. The new location was nearer to the developing centrality of Main and Madison, and right across the street from the Tennessee Club, an exclusive social organization for white businessmen with a new building of unique architecture. The new Lyceum and the Tennessee club are pictured in Figures 11 and 12. This new theatre was still a multi-purpose urban building, with office space on the floors above (some of which was used by the Nineteenth

---

[55] "A Brilliant Opening," *Appeal-Avalanche*, 22 January 1891.
[56] Carlson, 38-60.

Century Club, an elite white women's organization), a café, and even a Turkish bath. The move to break with the young men's club and associate the theatre indirectly with more mature social clubs and an increasingly respectable neighborhood solidified the Lyceum's trajectory to becoming the premiere legitimate theatre for Memphis, especially after programming at the Grand Opera House was changed to include vaudeville at the turn of the century. By the time this change happened, the Lyceum had been taken over by the Syndicate. It became a movie theatre in 1920 and was demolished fifteen years later.

As if in answer to the corporate takeover of the city's major theatres, the *Commercial Appeal* announced the opening of the Jefferson Theatre (pictured in Figure 13) in 1908 by emphasizing that the theatre was "built with Memphis money, by Memphis men, on designs of a Memphis architect, and it will be a home theater in every respect."[57] It would seem that the idea of this theatre as a home-grown product was meant to underscore its legitimacy in local terms against the workings of the corporate theatre industry.

The Jefferson, too, was associated with a social club. The Rex Club, a Jewish men's organization, occupied the two upper floors of the building.[58] The top floor of the building was a ballroom, and the second floor housed lounging rooms, billiard rooms, a library, and baths. The theatre itself had its own club and restaurant in the basement. It was built on Madison Avenue past Fourth Street, placing it to the east of the central business district. The newspaper announcement of the Jefferson's opening also advertised the fact that the theatre was situated right on the East End line of the streetcar system, making it easier for those who lived in the

---

[57] "Jefferson Opens Tomorrow Night," *Commercial Appeal*, 15 November 1908.

[58] Throughout this period, Memphis had a relatively sizeable Jewish population for a southern city, and several Jewish men were prominent in the city's business arena. For more on Jews in Memphis, see Selma S. Lewis, *A Biblical People in the Bible Belt: The Jewish Community of Memphis, Tennessee, 1840s-1960s* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998).

suburbs to come to the theatre.[59] This move toward the east away from the city center, along with the concern for suburban playgoers, was a sign of things to come in terms of cultural organizations within the expanding urban space of Memphis.

Hopes for the Jefferson as a resident stock company owned, built, and operated by Memphians did not last long, however, and the theatre soon joined the national circuits. In 1910, a battle in the "theatre war" between the Syndicate and the Shuberts erupted in Memphis. Huhn, ever mindful of legitimacy, tried to put a positive spin on things, commenting that as a result of the conflict the city would end up with two first-class theatres instead of one (the Lyceum and the Jefferson).[60] The Syndicate eventually secured the lease on the Jefferson, and afterwards the theatre was renamed the Lyric. Like the Lyceum, it ultimately became a movie house, and it burned in 1941.[61]

Audiences at the New Memphis, the Lyceum, and the Jefferson were predominantly European American. African Americans did attend these theatres but had to sit in an upper balcony or gallery regardless of their social class, as African Americans all around the U.S.—not just in the South—were forced to do at this time. I have seen no indication that European immigrant groups were treated in a similar manner. At least twice at the New Memphis Theatre, individual members of the African American middle and upper classes of Memphis raised a protest against such practices. In 1875, just after the passage of the Civil Rights Act—which was ostensibly to ensure access for all people to public accommodations and facilities such as restaurants, trains, and theatres—three African American men attempted to sit in the dress circle

---

[59] "Jefferson Opens."

[60] *Commercial Appeal*, 5 June 1910.

[61] The frequent destruction of theatres by fire in Memphis will be touched on from time to time throughout this dissertation, since some of the fires seem to have occurred—coincidentally or not—around the same times as changes in management.

of the New Memphis in order to test the enforcement of the new law. They were stopped from doing so, and one man was pushed down a flight of stairs.[62] Six years later, African American socialite Julia Britton Hooks, the "Angel of Beale Street," sat in the same dress circle and refused to leave until she was arrested, carried out, and fined.[63]

There do not appear to have been any reports of similar protests at the Lyceum or the Jefferson in the local press throughout the period under study here. Perhaps it was because of the clear association of the first protest with the new Civil Rights Act (which was eventually repealed in 1883) and Hooks's position in society as an aristocrat of color that these stories were covered in the local press at all. The lack of extant African American Memphis newspapers again obscures the view, but in any case it was inevitable, given such treatment and the ever-increasing dominance of elite white authority in the central part of the city, that blacks would seek to create their own places of performance elsewhere.

South Memphis (Figure 14)

Perhaps more than any other geographical feature of downtown Memphis, Beale Street serves to identify the city to the world at large today. From the Orpheum Theatre on the corner of Beale and Main with its touring Broadway musicals; down the main strip lined with bars and the bandstand in Handy Park offering live music; past the Old and New Daisy Theatres on the 300 block, the heart of African American entertainment in Memphis for the first half of the twentieth century; and abutted by the FedEx Forum, the city's new mega-arena for sports and

---

[62] Caplinger, 106-7; *Memphis Appeal*, 2-5 March 1875. In his study of the New Memphis, Seldon Faulkner makes no mention of this, only that audience composition changed and "nuisances" increased during the 1874-75 season (158-59).

[63] *Memphis Daily Appeal*, 13 and 16 March 1881; Roberta Church and Ronald Walter, *Nineteenth-Century Memphis Families of Color, 1850-1900* (Memphis: Church-Walter, 1987), 35, 43; Selma S. Lewis and Marjean Kremer, *Angel of Beale Street: A Biography of Julia Ann Hooks* (Memphis: St. Lukes, 1986), 234-35.

entertainment events—Beale Street is now, without a doubt, the city's downtown entertainment district.

Since it was practically destroyed by urban renewal projects just after King's assassination in 1968, the consolidation of downtown entertainment in the Beale Street area is a fairly recent development. For the past twenty-five years or so, the city powers have capitalized on the heritage of the street as the birthplace of the blues while controlling and patrolling it as a nightlife center and haven of tourist consumption. Rather than the "Main Street of Negro America" it once was called by George Washington Lee, a prominent resident in the area from the early twentieth century until his death in 1976, Beale is now the main tourist strip of downtown Memphis.[64] Ironically, this tourist mecca borders on one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city, where some residents in the immediate area are still dealing with the aftereffects of their displacement more than forty years ago. Using Memphis as an example of a neoliberal city engaged in the process of reconstituting urban spaces for consumption, Michael L. Silk has remarked that "the transformations on Beale Street can be interpreted as part of the dislocation and marginalization of certain populations from the active constitution of heritage."[65]

The forced cohesion of Beale Street as an entertainment district, along with its promotion in global marketing strategies, rests heavily on the calculated use of cultural heritage to support this capitalist venture through public-private partnerships. Like other cities whose economies rely on tourism, Memphis engages in a fair amount of "place image"-building with regard to Beale Street. Wanda Rushing, in her book, *Memphis and the Paradox of Place: Globalization in the American South*, has also noted this trend, stating that "promoters of new business

---

[64] Lee, 13.

[65] Michael L. Silk, "Come Downtown & Play," *Leisure Studies* 26, no. 3 (July 2007): 267. See also Michael L. Silk and David L. Andrews, "Managing Memphis: Governance and Regulation in Sterile Spaces of Play," *Social Identities* 14, no. 3 (May 2008): 395-414.

ventures on Beale Street position themselves and their enterprises, both globally and locally, by using a *symbolic economy of authenticity*."[66] This sanitized fabrication of authenticity presents a particular place image to the world at large that belies the actual complexity of the neighborhood as it developed over time. As I have stated above, Beale Street during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was characterized by its patchwork nature in terms of race and class. But given its presence as a main thoroughfare and the fact that a streetcar line ran all the way down the street, the patches were bound to bleed into one another on some level at some point. The proximity and admixture of black and white, legitimate and illegitimate, urban and rural, native and foreign-born, upper, middle, and lower class, and those operating inside and outside the law, made this area of downtown Memphis an alternative urban geography to the centralizing commercial and cultural forces of authority to the north during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Beale Street was first developed in the 1840s, when the area was still part of the town of South Memphis. Robertson Topp built the Gayoso Hotel on Front Street, and his own mansion, which "perhaps more than any other ever built in Tennessee displayed the influence of fashionable New York Grecian design," on the east end of Beale.[67] Other wealthy citizens followed suit, and this end of the street became an upper-class residential enclave. Although most residents of the area were European Americans, some middle- and upper-class African Americans, including millionaire Robert R. Church, later settled nearby. Several members of the

[66] Wanda Rushing, *Memphis and the Paradox of Place: Globalization in the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2009), 145, her emphasis.

[67] James Patrick, *Architecture in Tennessee, 1768-1897* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 125. From 1880 to 1910, Topp's mansion served as the home of the Higbee School, a prestigious school for white girls.

board of directors who built the Grand Opera House at the other end of Beale lived in this neighborhood.

During the 1870s, events occurred that confirmed the presence of the black community here. From the advent of Emancipation on, middle- and lower-class African Americans continued to move into the neighborhood just south of Beale. In 1871 two major African American institutions were established in the area. Beale Street Baptist Church, the oldest black congregation in the city, was built just east of DeSoto Street, and LeMoyne Normal and Commercial School, a black college, was built a couple of blocks southeast of the elite residences. During the yellow fever epidemics at the end of the decade, Robert Church bought up a large amount of the property abandoned by whites in the area surrounding the church and began renting to black professionals and shopkeepers, so that by the 1880s this part of Beale was well on its way to becoming a bastion of African American culture and business.

Throughout the next couple of decades, Italians, Jews, Greeks, and Chinese came to live and work in the neighborhood, opening businesses and bringing their own cultures to the mix of Beale Street. As the neighborhood developed, and the area between Third Street and the beginning of the elite residences developed its reputation for the "sportin' life" and innovation in music, it drew many rural newcomers seeking the pleasures of the city into its midst as well.

Before the opening of the Grand Opera House in 1890, there does not appear to have been much sustained theatrical activity in this area of the city. Hightower Hall was built in 1847, just two years before the merger of Memphis and South Memphis. Topp at one point discussed building a brand new theatre in South Memphis before the town merger, but it never came to fruition. Eugene Bristow describes a black variety theatre that was operating on DeSoto Street,

just south of Beale, in 1871, but the mention is brief.[68] The only other theatre of consequence in this area before the 1890s was the Greenlaw Opera House, which opened in 1866 on the southwest corner of Second and Union Avenue. This theatre competed with the New Memphis for the legitimate trade for a few seasons but then turned primarily to a variety house and public meeting space before it burned down in 1883.[69] While attending LeMoyne, Ida B. Wells helped start an amateur theatre organization at the college in 1887.[70]

As with the theatres discussed above in the sections on North Memphis and the central business district, in the following chapters I will expand on the establishment of theatres in the Beale Street area and their relationship with urban development. In what precedes and follows I am attempting to build a sort of mental map of the locations of these theatres within the urban landscape—the perceived spaces of theatre in the city.

The building of the Grand Opera House at Main and Beale was an effort to bring legitimate theatre to this part of the city. At the time of its opening, Beale Street was the very southern end of the business district in Memphis. In fact, it was noted that "Main Street virtually ceased at Beale."[71] The Gayoso Hotel provided an anchor of elitism just around the corner, but the site of the theatre itself was being used as a coalyard when the board of directors purchased it. At least one board member, William Randolph, who lived at the rich end of Beale, had reason to believe that the area would grow. Randolph had owned a corner across the street from the site

---

[68] Eugene K. Bristow, "'Look Out for Saturday Night': A Social History of Professional Variety Theatre in Memphis, Tennessee, 1859-1880" (Ph.D. diss., State University of Iowa, 1956), 104-5. This theatre merits further investigation but is outside the primary temporal scope of this dissertation.

[69] Keating and Vedder, 2:303. The fire was apparently significant enough to be covered in national news; see "Flames in Memphis," *New York Times*, 9 Oct 1883.

[70] Miriam DeCosta-Willis, "Ida B. Wells' Diary: A Narrative of the Black Community of Memphis in the 1880s," *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 45 (1991): 44.

[71] *Commercial Appeal*, 22 August 1909, from an article recalling conditions in the city around 1900, quoted in William D. Miller, *Memphis During the Progressive Era, 1900-1917* (Memphis: Memphis State University Press; Madison, WI: American History Research Center, 1957), 16.

of the Grand Opera House since 1880 and built the Randolph Building, the tallest office building in the city, on this corner just a year after the theatre opened.[72] Four years later, in 1895, it was eclipsed by the building of the city's first skyscraper in Court Square, and the writing was on the wall with regard to the centralization of business in Memphis.

After they purchased the lot, three of the directors of the Grand Opera House embarked on a trip to Nashville, Chicago, and St. Louis, in order to scope out theatres and consult with architects in those cities. The resulting 2,200-seat theatre (pictured in Figure 15) was of a large façade type with neo-Romanesque features, an architectural propensity that it shared with several buildings in Memphis constructed around the same time. Like the Lyceum Theatre, the Grand Opera House was associated with an exclusive social club, the Chickasaw Club, which occupied the upper floors of the building. Apparently, there must have been some construction issues in the building, because the board elected to hire someone to "examine privately the Opera House as to the defects complained of in the building."[73] Seventy-five years later, a former Memphis resident remembered that "it was a belief among Memphians that the Grand Opera House was of faulty construction and had been 'condemned' before the building was completed. Some people were afraid to enter it."[74] This building retained the title of Grand Opera House until 1907 when it joined the national vaudeville circuit and was renamed the Orpheum. "High-class vaudeville" was on offer here until the building burned to the ground in 1923.

Just one block below the Grand Opera House, at Main Street and Linden Avenue, was the Auditorium, which was the "ten-twent'-thirt'" house of Memphis. These kinds of theatres

---

[72] Paul R. Coppock, Helen M. Coppock, and Charles W. Crawford, *Paul R. Coppock's Mid-South*, *Volume II: 1971-1975* (Memphis: West Tennessee Historical Society, 1992), 362-63.

[73] Grand Opera House Company Minute Book, 6 October 1890, Memphis and Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library & Information Center.

[74] *Commercial Appeal*, 24 Jan 1965.

offered cheap entertainment to the masses all across the U.S., with the highest ticket price at thirty cents. Whereas the Grand Opera House and the Lyceum competed for the carriage trade, the Auditorium catered to the streetcar trade. After streetcars were electrified in 1891, the barn that had previously housed the mules and horses which pulled horsecars through the streets was converted for use as a tabernacle by evangelist Sam Jones and then as a hall for prize fights. A few years later it opened as a theatre with, aptly enough, Dion Boucicault's *The Streets of New York*. It would appear that this theatre offered more seating for African American patrons than the city's other theatres. The *Commercial Appeal* noted that except for the ground floor, the entire south half of the building was reserved for blacks. However, the paper was quick to point out that this part of the house was "divided by a partition from the remainder" and that there was in addition "an entrance exclusively for colored people."[75] In 1904, the Auditorium was overhauled and re-opened as the Bijou but still offered theatrical entertainment at popular prices. Figures 16 and 17 show the building before and after its renovation and renaming. It burned in 1911, forcing its audiences to move on to several movie theatres that began appearing all up and down Main Street at the time.[76]

As mentioned above, blacks who attended most of the theatres in Memphis around the turn of the twentieth century were relegated to sitting in the gallery, or the "buzzard roost" as it was often called in the black press. So that African Americans could have a performance space to call their own, Robert Church opened his Park and Auditorium (pictured in Figure 18) next to Beale Street Baptist Church in 1901.[77] Like the Grand Opera House, it seated 2,200. This

[75] *Commercial Appeal*, 22 Sept 1896.

[76] Coppock, et. al., 73-75.

[77] Some sources report that Church's Auditorium opened in 1899. However, an article in the *Freeman* on 2 February 1901 indicates that the auditorium was not yet finished at that time. It is not listed in the city directory until 1901. There is an article about Church and the auditorium in a publication called *North and South*, but this was

facility served several needs of the black community. It was a full city block of green space for strolling and relaxation where white policemen were not allowed. In addition, Church's Auditorium served as a venue for touring performers from the national African American theatre scene, political rallies (Theodore Roosevelt came here in 1902), and other local events. A few years later Church opened a bank across the street, and in 1912 W.C. Handy, the "father of the blues," opened his music publishing company on the floor above the bank. The auditorium was torn down and rebuilt around 1930, and then demolished during urban renewal in the 1970s. It is ironic in the extreme that with all of the current commercial development just to the west of its location, the site of Church's Auditorium, a major landmark in the history of the area, now contains only a fading monument with a skeletal concrete frame where the building once stood (pictured in Figure 19).

Several other establishments on this part of Beale also offered entertainment with exclusively African American performers. As with the theatres in North Memphis, city directories confuse the subject, especially since there seems to have been a decision among the editors of the directory around 1913 to lump any theatre that showed movies at any time in with theatres that showed them exclusively under "Motion Pictures." Again the *Indianapolis Freeman* provides some clarification. Some entertainment venues were saloons, like the famous Pee Wee's, where Handy reportedly wrote one of the first published blues songs, the "Memphis Blues." Others were referred to as theatres and advertised as such in the *Freeman*. Alfred "Tick" Houston, an African American, operated an establishment on DeSoto (Fourth) Street that he opened in 1901 and variously called Tick's Tivoli Music Hall and Tick's Big Vaudeville.

---

not published until December 1901. I have found no other primary source to indicate that the theatre opened before 1901. It could be that Church bought the land in 1899, and the auditorium was finished in 1901.

Around 1909, the Pekin, named after the black theatre in Chicago that had become famous by that time, opened on Fourth Street north of Gayoso.

Eventually the 300 block of Beale Street, just west of Church's Park and Auditorium, became the heart of black theatrical entertainment in the city. Most of the theatres in this area were run by Italians, and most showed movies in addition to presenting live entertainment. The Barrasso family, who operated the Amuse U Theatre in North Memphis, took over Tick's when it folded and reopened the theatre as the Savoy. Before his sudden and premature death, Fred Barrasso started one of the first black vaudeville circuits in the South. In 1913, his brother Anselmo opened the Metropolitan Theatre, which is pictured in Figure 20. According to the *Freeman*, the Metropolitan was one of the most widely known African American theatres in the South.[78] Around 1920 this theatre must have burned or been torn down and replaced with a new theatre called the Venus at the same address (pictured in Figure 21). Anselmo Barrasso took charge of the Venus in 1921, and he would go on to establish the Palace Theatre just a few doors down, where from the 1920s to the 1950s amateur nights launched major blues talents such as B.B. King, and Thursday nights provided "midnight rambles" for whites-only audiences to see what was happening in the black theatres. Apart from these special nights during the above-mentioned decades, whites were not welcome in the black establishments on Beale.

Just north of Beale near the tenderloin district were two theatres that were run by gangsters, the Garden and the Memphi. Both either started out as or were associated with saloons and do not appear as "theatres" in the city directories until around 1904, although their proprietors are listed at the addresses of the theatres for several years prior. The Memphi was located on Second Street just south of Gayoso and was connected to the Turf Saloon, the "nerve

---

[78] *Indianapolis Freeman*, 27 December 1913.

center" of the Fourth Ward, run by Mike Haggarty and Bud Degg. Like many saloon owners throughout the country during this period, Haggarty and Degg played a significant role in politics, and their connections with both city government and organized crime were indicative of a city rife with corruption as the flip side of increasing prosperity and power for the upper classes. According to William D. Miller, these two men were lieutenants to John Persica, who had a franchise on all gambling south of Madison Avenue.[79] Persica also owned and operated the Garden Theatre on Hernando (Third) Street just north of Gayoso. The kind of entertainment on offer at these theatres was eclectic: a contemporary periodical refers to the Garden as a "dance hall and saloon" that hosted prize fights, movies, and "indecent vaudeville turns."[80]

Sadly, none of these theatres in the southern part of downtown Memphis remain. The only one still standing from the period is the Daisy, a movie theatre built in 1914 across the street from the Metropolitan (pictured in Figure 22).

On the Outskirts (Figure 23)

Like many other cities around the U.S., Memphis began to experience the incipient inklings of suburban sprawl around the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as streetcar systems reached further outside the city and made commuting possible. As the city's annexations proceeded, ads began appearing in the *Commercial Appeal* by the scores, trumpeting the advantages of living outside the city in one of the many developing suburban subdivisions to the east. At the same time that eastern suburbs were starting to draw the affluent white population out of the downtown core—the beginnings of "white flight"—the black population was beginning to spread out toward the south of the city. In tandem with the spread of the urban

---

[79] William D. Miller, 95.

[80] Silas Bent, "Prohibition in the City of Memphis," *Mixer and Server* 19, no. 1 (15 January 1910): 28.

population into the suburbs, amusement parks began to appear in order to provide recreation, particularly in the summer, for citizens wanting to escape the increasingly stifling atmosphere of the city.

The most prominent of these was East End Park, a fifty-acre pleasure resort developed by the city's streetcar company and opened in 1889. Throughout the 1890s, it offered games, rides, concessions, a man-made lake, and a 1,300-seat pavilion hosting summer seasons of opera, plays, and vaudeville (pictured in Figure 24). When the park was updated and reopened in 1904, city authorities touted it as "the most fashionable summer amusement park in the South," and praised it as a demonstration of urban progress: "Memphis has been placed on an equal footing with New York, Chicago, and St. Louis….Memphis has grown to be a city."[81] More spectacular theatricals, such as a re-enactment of a Spanish-American War naval battle and a representation of the destruction of Pompeii, took place on and around the lake. East End Park was advertised and promoted as the "White City" of Memphis in imitation of the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, where the "White City" portion of the fair presented in its architecture a model of an ideal city and celebrated the accomplishments of white civilization in contrast to barbaric and child-like representations of the non-white world on the Midway.[82] For Memphis, the image of the White City evoked a separate, racialized urban New South space, legitimated by reference to a successful, industrial northern city. In 1913, the entertainment venue at East End Park was closed due to prohibition laws, and the pavilion burned in 1923.

Other amusement parks outside the downtown area included the Fairyland Park Theatre, the Tri-State Fairgrounds, and Dixie Park. Apparently, business out east grew so much by the

---

[81] "East End Park Is Dedicated," *Commercial Appeal*, 23 May 1904.

[82] Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 67.

early 1900s that another amusement park was opened just to the north of East End, next to Overton Park. Although it was very short-lived, the 2,000-seat theatre at Fairyland Park also provided summer theatricals for urbanites fleeing the city, until it burned in 1908. The Tri-State Fairgrounds had been a horse-racing park from 1884 until the early 1900s, but then was purchased by the city in 1912. Vaudeville acts on open-air portable stages could be seen here in the summer, and the Tri-State Fair occasionally offered spectacles such as *Armageddon*, a "Grand Spectacular Pantomime for the benefit of the Red Cross," which appeared here in 1917.[83] African Americans seeking similar amusements to the ones offered in the eastern amusement parks found them when Dixie Park opened on South Parkway (one of the city's green belts) in the early 1900s. W.C. Handy and his band played here, as did black troupes such as Billy Kersands and the Dandy Dixie Minstrels.

* * *

The urban geography of theatre in Memphis during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries exhibited many similarities to that of cities all over the U.S. at the time. In this age of nationalism, centralization, and consolidation, local trends echoed more global ones, such as the alignment of legitimate performances with the urban commercial center, the geographical marginalization of "illegitimate" performances, and the increasing suburbanization of seasonal performances. Naming conventions for theatres also reiterated national trends or imitated larger cities. Theatres named after the city itself gave way to ones with more generic titles such as Grand Opera House and Lyceum. The designation of East End Park as the "White City" of Memphis was a direct imitation of Chicago, as was the Pekin Theatre near Beale Street.

---

[83] Program for *Armageddon*, Theatre folders, Memphis and Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library & Information Center.

Such naming conventions capitalized on a perceived connection with a culture outside the local sphere. And, of course, local theatres often found themselves locked into the orbits of national and transnational conglomerates like the Syndicate, the Shuberts, and the Orpheum circuit.

At the same time, local interests were served by the establishment of theatres in tandem with urban development. The purpose of this chapter has been to survey the various locations of theatre within the urban landscape of Memphis and to provide a foundation for a deeper exploration of how and why these places of performance came to be where they were—how global and local forces worked together to contribute to the urban geography of theatre in Memphis. It is to this exploration that we now turn.

PART II:
THE MAKING OF MEMPHIS THEATRES

PROLOGUE: THE NEW SOUTH CITY AND THE ROAD

The presence of a permanent theatre within the urban landscape of any city is the result of many different processes. At the heart of these processes is a desire for recurring theatrical performances in the midst of a community, and for a relatively stabilized space for such performances to take place within the existing networks of spatial practice in the city. But a desire for performance is only the beginning. The material processes of production involved in the building, ownership, and management of theatres are manifold. Such processes include the conceptualization of urban space by planners and developers, the financial transactions involved in bringing these conceptions to fruition within the built environment of the city, and—particularly in the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—the incorporation of local theatres into regional, national, and transnational capitalist networks.

In the previous chapter, the primary goal was to map out the places of performance within the urban landscape of Memphis during this period in an effort to decipher the perceived space—or spatial practice—of the city and the theatre in a particular place and time. Continuing this case study of Memphis in an endeavor to help broaden the geography of U.S. theatre and to bring critical theory to bear on local theatre history, the main purpose of the following chapters is to investigate the relationship of theatre building, ownership, and management to conceived spaces—or representations of space—in Memphis and the post-Reconstruction South.

The chapters that follow deal with particular groups of Memphis theatres during this period and how they relate to two specific, time-bound spatial representations—the "New South

city" and "the Road"—and the conflicts and contradictions that, together with these conceived spaces, made up some of the everyday practices of theatre in the city. For each group, I will analyze the processes whereby these theatres were (a) established and owned with regard to Memphis's status as a New South city, and (b) linked through leasing and management with theatres in other cities on the Road. I will also explore how activities centered around theatrical performance in the city worked with and against these dominant spatial formations. First, however, I will provide more thorough definitions of these conceptions of space by situating them within the context of the period.

The New South City: Industrialization, Urbanization, and Racialization

During the years just before the Civil War, Memphis had been perceived (and, to a certain extent, conceived by its leaders) as a western city with southern characteristics—the "Charleston of the West," according to some. By 1890, however, it was well on its way to becoming a New South city. The latter half of the nineteenth century marked a general identity shift in the southern and western regions of the U.S., as the South strove to re-invent itself in the aftermath of the war, and the West came to embody what some saw as defining aspects of the "American" spirit.

After the U.S. census of 1890, there was a new perception of the nation as a continental whole stretching from coast to coast. The frontier had been closed, thanks to staunch determination and—though of course it was not characterized as such at the time—genocide. Since for most of the nineteenth century the U.S. had been at least partly defined by the idea of the frontier, its disappearance was a critical point in the nation's history. In his classic study of the Gilded Age U.S., Alan Trachtenberg discusses Frederick Jackson Turner's "Frontier Thesis" speech at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. He remarks on the appropriateness of the

setting: "Columbus had inaugurated the westward route; now the 1890 census disclosed that a distinct 'frontier line' no longer existed."[1] In light of this change, Turner called for a new narration of the nation's progress—one that would describe the inevitable progress of westward movement and unification, and would also champion the hardy individualism of the white pioneer of the West. However, as Trachtenberg points out, Turner's thesis was "as much an invention of cultural belief as a genuine historical fact: an invention of America 'connected and unified' in the imagination if nowhere else."[2] Like all such cultural myths that rely on an idealized version of the past, this one also involved a certain level of denial, or forgetting. The erasure of Native Americans, as well as continuing disparities and tensions among regions, became subsumed in the narration of westward progress and national unity.

For well over a decade prior to Turner's speech, another cultural myth involving the regional geography of the U.S. had been in the making. As early as 1874, Atlanta journalist Henry Grady had advocated industrialization as a means of recuperation for the South in an editorial entitled "The New South." For the next fifteen years until his death, Grady preached the gospel of southern industry and regional renewal, so that by the time Turner was theorizing the pioneer spirit of the West, the rhetoric of the New South creed was firmly in place. This regional conception incorporated urbanization and the racializing policies of white supremacy, in addition to industrialization, as core principles.[3]

---

[1] Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982, 2007), 11 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

[2] Ibid., 17.

[3] Two landmark studies on the New South are C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), and Paul Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York: Knopf, 1970). For further general background and analysis concerning the New South see, among others, Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Blaine A. Brownell and David R. Goldfield, *The City in Southern History: The Growth of Urban Civilization in the South* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1977); James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Don Harrison Doyle, *New*

As with the rest of the U.S. during this period, industrialization meant urbanization, and although the South remained overwhelmingly rural in comparison to the rest of the country, the southern city was the locus of the region's revival. Atlanta, the birthplace of the New South creed, was the self-proclaimed and tacitly acknowledged capital city of the New South. However, the very idea of centralization was anathema to the Confederate sensibility of state sovereignty that had been forged in the South before the Civil War. Moreover, southern cities before and after the war had stronger trading relationships with cities outside the region than with each other. Although there was some sense of unity embodied in the concept of the New South as a cultural myth of region, fierce city rivalries were maintained in the pursuit of northern investment. This one-upmanship is graphically illustrated by the reaction in the press to the announcement that Memphis had surpassed the populations of Atlanta and Nashville in the 1900 census, which appears in Figure 25.

Thus, white elites in southern cities like Memphis could feel a sense of solidarity with those in other southern cities, while simultaneously competing to move ahead and attract northern industry through the processes of boosterism and city-building. Geographical conceptions inherent to the New South creed also allowed white southerners a certain level of ambivalence, to perceive the region as participating in the narration of a unified nation while at the same time maintaining their ties to older regional ways, not the least of which involved the principle of white supremacy. But whereas spatial representations of the New South provided some flexibility with regard to the relationship of urban networks and the confluence of regional and national geographies, the color line was—in theory at least—absolute.

Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); David R. Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon, 1998); and Howard Rabinowitz, *The First New South, 1865-1920* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1992).

In *The New South*, a culmination of Grady's philosophy published just after his death, the prophet of the movement repeatedly insists upon the superiority of whites, claiming that they should "have clear and unmistakable control of public affairs" and that "whites and blacks must walk separate paths in the South."[4] The insistence on the color line, conceived and made manifest in urban space through the legislation and enforcement of racial segregation, came to figure in the perception of the New South during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a corollary to—and increasingly more than—the embracing of industrial capitalism and urbanization. In order to attract new industry to the region, city boosters promoted visions of a cheap, docile labor force, as poor blacks were kept subservient through segregation and uneven development, and poor whites were placated by a sense of racial solidarity provided by the idea of white supremacy. As the genocide of Native Americans was inherent to the myth of westward progress, the dehumanization of African Americans was inherent to the myth of southern rebirth. The denial of both was key to narrations of national unity and post-war regional reconciliation.

Of course, the imposition of industrial, urban, and racial order intrinsic to the New South creed, though the dominant mode in the region, was not in fact absolute, nor was it placidly accepted by everyone. As Don Harrison Doyle states in his book, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, "the very persistence and zeal of the New South propaganda effort tells us that not everyone in the audience shared the faith."[5] A multi-faceted resistance to white supremacy on the part of all levels of black society was only the most obvious crack in the armor. Such resistance could run the gamut from publicly organized protests to private, daily acts of self-preservation and affirmation. Some mixed-race people, especially those who "passed" as white, challenged through their very appearance the arbitrary separation of black and white. Both white

---

[4] Henry W. Grady, *The New South* (New York: Robert Bonner's Sons, 1890), 239, 244, and *passim*.
[5] Doyle, 19.

and black agrarians, though separately, revolted against the inequities brought about by the new urban hegemony over agricultural production in the hinterland.

The idea of white supremacy also cut wide swaths across class and gender categories, a trend that did not go unnoticed by others of the New South creed's discontents: upper- and middle-class blacks used to receiving slightly better treatment in the past on the basis of their socioeconomic status; unionists attempting to bring black and white laborers together; and progressive reformers (often upper-class women, both white and black) who sought (again, separately), through religious and social organizations, to combat the social ills that they felt were intensified by increasing industrialization and urbanization. Though their power was limited by an overriding authority, these groups of people, too, were seeking to re-invent themselves in the post-Civil War years, to contribute to the revival of the region, and—to modify geographer David Harvey's words—to claim their right to the New South city.[6]

The Road: Corporatism and Theatre Management

In early 1896, Harrison Grey Fiske, husband and manager of Minnie Maddern Fiske, one of the most popular and acclaimed actresses in the U.S. during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, began to receive telegrams from theatre managers around the country. The managers complained about recent press announcements indicating that Minnie Fiske would be performing at theatres other than theirs, which had not been the case in previous seasons. Neither of the Fiskes were aware of any changes of venue and had been happy with their booking arrangements in the past.

---

[6] David Harvey, "The Right to the City," in *Social Justice and the City* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973; revised edition, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 315-32.

Harrison Fiske later visited the office of Al Hayman, a booking agent, owner of several theatres in the West, and one of six members of a newly forming theatrical syndicate. Hayman told Fiske that Marc Klaw and Abraham Erlanger, two of his associates in this new syndicate and owners of a booking agency that controlled theatres throughout the South and elsewhere, had gone ahead and secured theatres for Minnie's performances during the next season. Apparently they were concerned that she would miss out on the best venues if she and her husband waited any longer to start the booking process. Hayman also told Fiske that Klaw and Erlanger were responsible for the press announcements regarding the matter. According to Harrison Fiske, Hayman then pulled out a very large map which indicated the locations of hundreds of theatres across the country that were owned or controlled by the members of the nascent theatrical conglomerate—including all of those that Minnie Fiske had been booked into for the coming season. This map seems to have triggered Harrison Fiske's full geographical awareness of the manner in which the combine had conceived and intended to carry out their domination of the legitimate theatre business in the U.S., for he let Hayman know that he and his wife would have no part in such a scheme and would maintain the freedom to map their own road.[7] It was the

---

[7] Monroe Lippman, "The History of the Theatrical Syndicate: Its Effect Upon the Theatre in America" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1937), 34-36. This series of events was related to Lippman in a personal interview with Harrison Fiske. Despite the age of Lippman's study, John Frick comments that it "remains the most comprehensive single source" on the Syndicate. See Frick, "A Changing Theatre: New York and Beyond," in *The Cambridge History of American Theatre, Vol. II: 1870-1945*, ed. Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 231. Although Lippman did not publish widely, he was a very influential figure in U.S. theatre studies, heading the Department of Theatre at Tulane University from 1937 to 1967, mentoring such scholars as Richard Schechner, Brooks McNamara, and Richard Corrigan, and moving to New York University in 1968 to help these three scholars re-shape the department there until his retirement. For more on the Syndicate, see also Alfred L. Bernheim, *The Business of the Theatre: An Economic History of the American Theatre, 1750-1932* (1932; reprint, New York: Benjamin Blom, 1964), 34-84; Peter A. Davis, "The Syndicate/Shubert War," in *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World*, ed. William R. Taylor (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 147-57; and Jack Poggi, *Theater in America: The Impact of Economic Forces, 1870-1967* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), 3-27. For an analysis of the anti-Semitic undertones and overtones of the demonization of the Syndicate by Fiske and others, see Mark Hodin, "The Disavowal of Ethnicity: Legitimate Theatre and the Social Construction of Literary Value in Turn-of-the-Century America," *Theatre Journal* 52, no. 2 (May 2000): 211-26.

beginning of a battle that would almost consume the couple's professional lives for more than a decade.

Like the builders of an empire, the members of this burgeoning syndicate had charted their territory, conceptualizing not "a road," but "the Road"—a grand chain of theatres stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, all of which would pay tribute to the captains of the industry. Six months after Fiske's meeting with Hayman, this combine became by legal agreement the entity that was thereafter referred to as "the Theatrical Syndicate." Eventually the Syndicate not only controlled the majority of the best legitimate theatres in the U.S. and Canada, but also dictated which professional artists' work would be shown in them.

The creation of a single chain of theatres across a vast stretch of North America did not, of course, happen overnight. Since colonial times, theatrical entrepreneurs had created circuits of theatres in limited areas surrounding their home cities, where companies could be exposed to wider audiences.[8] As early as 1836, J. Warrell and Thomas M. Groves of the Nashville Theatre announced plans to build theatres in Franklin, Tennessee, and Tuscumbia, Alabama; the following year, they opened a theatre in Memphis.[9] Small, early circuits such as this were based primarily on stock companies traveling by river or along the coastline.

As other industries boomed rapidly after the Civil War, so did the theatre. With the introduction of large-scale touring combination companies in the 1860s, as well as the expansion of railroads during the 1870s and 80s, theatre managers sought ways to control costs and route their bookings more efficiently in order to increase profits. This desire led to the amalgamation

---

[8] For early circuits in the South, see Susanne K. Sherman, *Comedies Useful: A History of the American Theatre in the South, 1775-1812* (Williamsburg, VA: Celest Press, 1998).

[9] James H. Dormon, *Theater in the Ante Bellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 106-7.

of smaller theatrical circuits into ever larger regional, national, and transnational ones. In 1869, David Bidwell, a prominent New Orleans-based circuit manager and theatrical producer, leased both the Greenlaw Opera House and the New Memphis Theatre, adding Memphis to his Western and Southern Circuit, which extended from St. Louis all the way to Havana, Cuba.[10] Five years later Minnie Fiske's own father, Thomas M. Davey, added the New Memphis to his chain of theatres that eventually stretched from Toronto to New Orleans.[11] Davey was joined at the New Memphis by Joseph Brooks, then a clerk at Lowenstein's Department Store in Memphis, who would go on to establish the firm of Brooks and Dickson in New York City. This firm, although it was short-lived and unsuccessful, was one of the first attempts to systematize the process of theatrical booking on a national scale before the formation of the Syndicate.[12]

Although it was a conglomerate and not technically a corporation, the Syndicate bore many resemblances to the corporate trusts that dominated several industries in the U.S. during this period. The business trends of the era tended more and more to favor consolidation over the old forms of individual, partner, and family proprietorship. Combined business interests had the ability to more effectively control competition; to streamline practices in production, distribution, marketing, and management; and to gain freer access to capital. Also, corporate centralization facilitated both horizontal integration, whereby the corporation could acquire

---

[10] John S. Kendall, *The Golden Age of the New Orleans Theater* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), 563; Seldon Faulkner, "The New Memphis Theater of Memphis, Tennessee, from 1859 to 1880" (Ph.D. diss., State University of Iowa, 1957), 100-101, 105.

[11] Faulkner, 154-55; *New York Clipper*, 14 June 1879. As a nine-year-old girl, Minnie Fiske appeared onstage at the New Memphis and was acclaimed a "child wonder" by the press. See *Commercial Appeal*, 17 February 1932.

[12] Robert Grau claims that Michael B. Leavitt was actually the first to establish a circuit that stretched across the country, and that Brooks, Dickson (and Hickey, who left the firm soon after its formation) succeeded Leavitt in their efforts but were "ahead of their time." See Robert Grau, *Forty Years Observation of Music and the Drama* (New York: Broadway Publishing Company, 1909), 226. On the formation of Brooks, Dickson, and Hickey, see "Gigantic Scheme," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 April 1880. Brooks and Dickson are also mentioned by Bernheim (39) and Lippman (29), who points out that Brooks was later a "strong ally of the Theatrical Syndicate" (29 n. 3).

several companies that sold the same product in different markets, and vertical integration, in which the corporation could gain control over the various steps in the manufacturing and sale of the product.[13]

During the boom of the post-Civil War years, several industries were monopolized by what came to be known as "trusts," corporations that had grown to such mammoth proportions that they stifled all competition within their industries. Probably the most well-known of these is Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company, but the sugar, tobacco, rubber, and steel industries, among others, were also at one time or another dominated by trusts during this period. There were some benefits to be had at the national level from consolidation and streamlining within individual industries, such as more efficient use of resources. However, the virtual elimination of competition effected by the monopolies produced severe resentment, especially at the local level, and gave large corporations unprecedented power, alienating them from consumers. The specter of the giant corporation added to the threat that people in communities all across the U.S. felt as a result of the rapid pace of industrialization and urbanization at the time. Moreover, individual and small-group entrepreneurs had not disappeared completely but had to fight for their continued existence against seemingly insurmountable odds. Opposition to the trusts eventually led to the passage of the Sherman Antitrust Act in 1890 and to the deployment of this law in attempts to combat unfair competition within various industries—including the theatre business.

---

[13] On the business trends of the era, see, for example, Youssef Cassis, "Big Business," in *The Oxford Handbook of Business History*, ed. Geoffrey Jones and Jonathan Zeitlin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 171-93; William G. Roy, *Socializing Capital: The Rise of the Large Industrial Corporation in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Alfred D. Chandler, *Scale and Scope: The Dynamics of Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); and C.J. Schmitz, *The Growth of Big Business in the United States and Western Europe, 1850-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). On general cultural and social reactions to and interactions with these trends, see Trachtenberg, and Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966). With regard to corporatism and theatre, see Michael Schwartz, *Broadway and Corporate Capitalism: The Rise of the Professional-Managerial Class, 1900-1920* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

In terms of industrial capitalism, theatrical touring can be seen as the distribution of the product across the urban geography of the U.S. The Theatrical Syndicate combined the interests of Hayman, Klaw and Erlanger, Samuel Nixon, and J. Frederick Zimmerman—all of whom managed theatre circuits in various parts of the country in addition to serving as booking agents for theatre artists—and Charles Frohman—who was primarily a producer but had also established the largest successful booking office in the country before Klaw and Erlanger's. Thus, the Syndicate was able to integrate the legitimate theatre business both horizontally and vertically. Increased efficiency was a primary goal, especially where touring was concerned. The original agreement that brought the Syndicate into being cited the incalculable losses that had been suffered by all in the theatre business due to indiscriminate bookings. Such poor business practices forced traveling companies to move both forward and backward or to make lengthy, costly, and tiresome railroad "jumps" between locations. The Syndicate's mapping of the Road was an attempt to change this situation so that companies could move in a direct line with profitable stops at reasonable intervals all along the way.[14]

In the process, much of the competition was squelched. As stated above, the Syndicate managed not only theatres, but artists as well. The conglomerate ruled that the local manager at any theatre under its control could book only artists who were also managed by the Syndicate. The reverse was also true: any artist managed by the Syndicate could only play Syndicate theatres. If a local manager or touring artist was found to be in violation of these rules, he or she would be blacklisted and would not be allowed to book any Syndicate artist or play any Syndicate theatre again. Since the majority of the best theatres and most popular artists in the country came under their power by the end of the nineteenth century, the Syndicate had the

---

[14] Lippman, 199. The original Syndicate agreement is reproduced in its entirety in Lippman, 199-203. My summary concerning the Syndicate and the Shuberts is drawn from Bernheim, Davis, Frick, Lippman, and Poggi.

legitimate theatre business fairly well tied up. Like the dominant spatial formation of the New South, the Syndicate's conceptualization of the Road was intended to bring the business of theatre into the new industrial era.

However, as with the New South creed, not to mention other monopolized industries in the U.S., this dominance was never absolute: opposition and competition were not eliminated completely, and those who dissented fought back. Because of their wide renown, the Fiskes, along with other artists such as David Belasco, Fanny Davenport, Richard Mansfield, and James O'Neill, were able to resist the power of the Syndicate for a time. However, all except Belasco and the Fiskes capitulated relatively quickly to the conglomerate's lucrative offers. For a few years Minnie Fiske could not perform in any of the best legitimate playhouses anywhere, and in some places (like New York City) she could not play at all.

Around the turn of the century, the Shubert brothers—Sam, Lee, and Jacob—began to enter the picture, challenging the Syndicate with their "open door" campaign, through which they claimed to support the right of any artist or local theatre manager to book however and wherever they pleased. Naturally, the Fiskes and Belasco became allied with them. The advent of the Shuberts and their struggle against the Syndicate brought the latter's monopoly to national attention, and in 1907 a New York grand jury issued an indictment against the Syndicate under the provisions of the Sherman Antitrust Act. Later that same year, however, a Supreme Court judge dismissed the charge, finding that theatre was neither a necessity nor a manufactured product and was therefore not subject to antitrust laws. Although it was a hindrance for the Shuberts at the time, this decision was to have a major impact on their future.

Even with the Syndicate's monopoly thus vindicated by the shortsightedness of the U.S. justice system, the Shuberts eventually provided a threatening alternative to the Syndicate

because they leased, bought, or built theatres in the same cities that constituted the points on the Road that the Syndicate had mapped. But although the Shuberts repeatedly declared their endorsement of artistic freedom, in reality many legitimate theatre artists and managers could not go their own way but were instead left with a choice between two fixed Roads—either that of the Syndicate or the Shuberts. In 1909, Belasco and the Fiskes became so disillusioned with the Shuberts that they reconciled with the Syndicate.

The year that followed saw the beginning of an all-out war between the two theatrical giants. According to Lippman, the monopoly of the Syndicate was finally broken when the managers of around 1,200 U.S. and Canadian theatres defected to form the National Theatre Owners' Association, which endorsed a true open-door policy that would allow managers to book with whomever they pleased. What made this such a blow to the Syndicate was the fact that many of these theatres were the "one-night stands" of the Road that served to break up the long, costly railroad jumps between major cities into feasible, profitable segments. Without control of the one-night stands, touring became much less cost-effective and profitable for the Syndicate, and monopoly over the Road was impossible; thus, their power gradually declined.[15]

Peter Davis asserts, however, that the primary reason for the Shuberts' victory was their superior internal corporate structure. Whereas the Syndicate had spent most of its business life as an old-fashioned pooling arrangement among several entities that were not completely unified, the Shubert Organization was founded as a modern, centralized corporation. As such, they could maintain clearer focus, as well as make decisions and gain access to capital much more efficiently than an outdated combination.[16] I would argue that Lippman's and Davis's

---

[15] Lippman, 149-50. Theatrical engagements in Memphis typically lasted for half a week, or three nights and a matinee, whereas larger cities such as New Orleans were good for a week or more.

[16] Davis, 153-54.

conclusions could be combined. It seems that it was due to their internal structure as a streamlined corporation that the Shuberts were able to act quickly in negotiating contracts, to readily obtain bank financing, and thus to win large numbers of managers to their side, which helped them triumph over the Syndicate. At any rate, by 1916, the Syndicate was defunct, and the Shuberts—whose monopoly was validated by the Supreme Court decision in favor of the Syndicate—dominated what was by that time the declining Road of the legitimate theatre business.

Legitimate theatre—meaning primarily, as explained in Chapters One and Two, the production of plays and performances deemed by an elite, white power structure to possess cultural value—was not the only segment of the entertainment business to become monopolized during this period. Influenced by the Syndicate and the same trends that brought it about, combinations and corporations also came to dominate vaudeville, popular-priced theatre, and African American theatre. "Big-time" vaudeville was controlled by the Keith-Albee and Orpheum circuits, whereas the firm of Stair and Havlin cornered the market on the booking of popular-priced melodrama at "ten, twent', thirt'" theatres around the country. Sherman H. Dudley, an African American minstrel and vaudeville performer, started a chain of black theatres that eventually became the foundation for the Theatre Owners Booking Association (T.O.B.A.), the organization that dominated touring black vaudeville in the 1920s. Each of these business entities mapped a Road for their respective field, so that in reality the result was a series of overlapping Roads—concurrent lines with points at many of the same cities along the way.

Like the clash between the legitimate circuits, multiple conflicts between corporate entities also erupted in these various other segments of the entertainment business—some of them actually involving the Syndicate and the Shuberts in cross-sector clashes. Although these

battles took place primarily at the national level, they of course had repercussions at the regional and local levels, reverberating along the Road.

* * *

So, what roles did the establishment, ownership, and management of Memphis theatres have in the representations of space that made up the New South city and the Road? To provide some answers, the remainder of this section of the dissertation is divided into three chapters. In the first, I will investigate the two most prominent legitimate theatres in the city, the Grand Opera House and the Lyceum, both of which were built by local, elite white men for various purposes related to social advancement and boosterism, and both of which came into the orbits of national corporations. The second chapter focuses on the proliferation of theatres that served the burgeoning African American population in Memphis around the turn of the century, along with developments in the management of these theatres before the formation of the T.O.B.A. Finally, the last chapter will deal with theatres whose spatiality was transformed in some way—theatres that were converted from streetcar barns for local purposes, and those whose names, management, and programming were changed by forces outside the local scene in the years leading up to the 1920s. By design, each chapter begins by focusing primarily on local developments and entities, and then moves toward a wider view. Throughout, I attempt to reveal the overlapping areas of the two conceived spaces of the New South city and the Road, and to illustrate the connections and tensions between local and global forces in the making of Memphis theatres.

In terms of the actual performances that took place in the theatres described here, I will discuss productions and performers from time to time as they relate to the concepts of the New South city and the Road, and also in order to simply provide more detailed portraits of the

theatres themselves within the urban social and cultural contexts that I will illustrate. Individual local theatre managers had some agency with regard to the shows offered, especially in the beginning of this period, but plays and entertainments presented at Memphis theatres were by and large what audiences in cities all around the U.S. were seeing on the national circuits.

There were a few exceptions. From year to year, amateurs and local citizens did produce plays and entertainments at Memphis theatres while touring productions were on hiatus. For example, in May and June of 1896 at the Lyceum, a group of Confederate veterans produced a play called *Johnson's Island*, concerning the Confederate prison camp of that name. In January 1900 Grace Llewellyn, a local teacher who created a performing arts conservatory at the Lyceum, produced Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman*, a play that had never been seen in Memphis, as part of her amateur "Dramatiques" series. For several years around the turn of the twentieth century, the Grand Opera House had a resident stock company, for which new members were culled annually from the national theatre scene. In many of the African American theatres, original material was often written and produced for a resident company by one or more of its members. In fact, it was here that the most creative agency with regard to production in the local theatre scene was deployed.

Other than such exceptions, however, the majority of performances seen in Memphis were created elsewhere and imported for local consumption. Nevertheless, this trend toward the nationalization and mass production of the content provided in many U.S. theatres is only part of the story of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century theatre in the U.S. The chapters that follow in this case study of Memphis theatres offer a very small portion of what remains to be told about the production and consumption of theatre on the local level in cities all around the country during this period.

CHAPTER THREE

NEW MEN, NEW THEATRES, NEW SOUTH: THE GRAND OPERA HOUSE AND THE LYCEUM THEATRE

Until the early 1920s, the construction of purpose-built theatres in Memphis was essentially a home enterprise financed by local businessmen seeking profit as well as social, cultural, and in some cases political advancement for themselves and the city itself. Only two such buildings constructed for the primary purpose of presenting plays were built before 1890: the New Memphis Theatre (1857) and the Greenlaw Opera House (1866). Certainly other theatres were converted from existing buildings by theatrical impresarios from outside the city, but with the exception of the first Memphis Theatre (1849-94), these converted theatres were all very short-lived.

Ownership of these theatres also remained local for the most part. The New Memphis Theatre was built by a group of businessmen calling themselves the Memphis Dramatic Association, which was headed by James Wickersham, a prominent local attorney. When Wickersham died in 1866, ownership of the New Memphis was transferred to his heirs, who lived in Ohio. However, the Leubrie brothers, Ellis and Louis, who were dry goods merchants in Memphis, bought the theatre from them at an auction for delinquent taxes in 1879. Several years later, the Leubries sold the New Memphis to Jacob Friedman, a partner in the Friedman Brothers Shoe Company based in Boston and Memphis, and apparently a relative by marriage.[1] The Friedmans and the Leubries moved away from Memphis during the 1880s, but Ellis Leubrie was

[1] According to John W. Leonard, Jacob Friedman married Hannah Leubrie in Memphis in 1870. Memphis city directories do not list anyone with that surname other than Ellis, Louis, and their brother Jacob Leubrie. See John W. Leonard, ed., *The Book of St. Louisans: A Biographical Dictionary of Leading Living Men of the City of St. Louis* (St. Louis: The St. Louis Republic, 1906), 206.

back at the helm managing the theatre at the time it burned down in 1891.[2] As mentioned in Chapter Two, the construction of the Greenlaw Opera House (alternately referred to as the Grand Opera House before a new theatre with that name was built in 1890) was the project of the Greenlaw brothers, William and J. Oliver, local real estate developers. Both Greenlaw brothers had died by the time their theatre burned down in 1883, but even though it was "in the hands of a receiver," according to the *New York Times* item about the fire, the property was still mostly owned by the Greenlaw estate.[3]

Although the New Memphis received sporadic competition from the Greenlaw Opera House, it remained the city's premiere legitimate theatre for over thirty years. At the New Memphis, local audiences finally began to be able to see the bigger stars of nineteenth-century U.S. theatre, such as Edwin Booth. Until 1869 the theatre operated on a resident stock company and touring star basis; after that time, it housed touring combination companies for the most part. Reflecting the eclectic tastes of the time, the two most-performed plays at the New Memphis during the first twenty years of its existence were *Hamlet* and *The Black Crook*. Dion Boucicault was the most well-represented dramatist with regard to number of performances, and many of his plays were seen there. Shakespeare followed close on his heels, with—besides *Hamlet*—*Macbeth*, *Richard III*, and *Romeo and Juliet* having the most performances. Romantic dramas such as Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Richelieu* and *The Lady of Lyons*, and Sheridan Knowles's *The Hunchback* were seen often. Joseph Jefferson in *Rip Van Winkle* was a perennial favorite.

---

[2] For more on the New Memphis Theatre (which started out life as Crisp's Gaiety Theatre), see Charles C. Ritter, "The Theatre in Memphis, Tennessee, from Its Beginning to 1859" (Ph.D. diss., State University of Iowa, 1956), 229-65; Seldon Faulkner, "The New Memphis Theater of Memphis, Tennessee, from 1859 to 1880" (Ph.D. diss., State University of Iowa, 1957); and Kenneth T. Rainey, "Footlights and Sidelights: The Last Years of the Memphis Theater (Leubrie's Theater)," *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 41 (1987): 62-73.

[3] "Nearly $500,000," *Memphis Daily Appeal*, 9 October 1883; "Flames in Memphis," *New York Times*, 9 October 1883. For more on the Greenlaw Opera House, see Eugene K. Bristow, "'Look Out for Saturday Night': A Social History of Professional Variety Theater in Memphis, Tennessee, 1859-1880" (Ph.D. diss., State University of Iowa, 1956), 116-24, 208-10 nn. 21-22.

Melodrama was well-represented with Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* in adaptation and Tom Taylor's *The Hidden Hand*. Performances offered during this early period also catered to the Irish and German immigrant population of the city. Irish plays of all kinds were very popular, the most performed being Boucicault's *The Colleen Bawn* and James Pilgrim's farce, *Paddy Miles's Boy*. A particularly intriguing title was *Chris and Lena; or German Life on the Mississippi*, starring dialect comedians Baker and Farron.[4] Many of these trends in audience taste would continue into the early twentieth century.

During the first season of the Greenlaw, 1866-67, and in 1872-73, this theatre operated on the same stock-and-star basis as the New Memphis. Lotta Crabtree and Adelaide Ristori appeared at the Greenlaw during its first season, and Lawrence Barrett appeared there six years later. But at more than twice the seating capacity of the New Memphis, the Greenlaw was not able to consistently fill the house with higher-paying customers. For most of its life this theatre served as a catch-all venue for a wide variety of performances: opera, lectures, concerts (including Christina Nilsson and Carlotta Patti, the famous Adelina's sister), minstrel shows, and magicians, just to name a few. These kinds of offerings could also be seen at the New Memphis from time to time, but it was nevertheless considered the "high-class" theatre of Memphis, and was never seriously challenged by the presence of the Greenlaw.

The timing of the destruction of both of these theatres, as with several later theatre fires in Memphis that I will discuss, raises some suspicion as to the causes of their demise. Often these fires happened to occur at a moment that was particularly advantageous for someone, either in terms of cutting financial losses or eliminating competition—or both. In an age of gaslighting and frantic urban construction without adequate safety procedures, theatre fires were certainly

[4] Faulkner, 227-77.

not uncommon. Although Tracy Davis is discussing theatre in Britain during this period, her comment that "fire was a risk commensurate with theatre-making itself" could certainly be applied to theatre in U.S. cities as well.[5] The most notorious theatre fires were, of course, ones that caused great loss of life, such as the Iroquois Theatre fire in Chicago in 1903, which killed around 600 people. But according to a book written on the subject in 1896, the vast majority of theatre fires around this time happened during the night, so that even if arson—or "incendiarism" in the terminology of the period—was suspected, the causes of these fires remain forever unknown.[6] There is no way to prove that any of these theatres was set ablaze on purpose, and the fact that the Greenlaw Opera House was under the receivership of an insurance company is perhaps not quite enough evidence to suspect arson. However, the fire that destroyed the New Memphis Theatre one year after the opening of the new Grand Opera House and the Lyceum Theatre was indeed assumed to have been incendiary and occurred at a precipitous moment tying together the transfiguration of Memphis into a New South city and the involvement of theatre-building in this process.

* * *

Ellis Leubrie stood in the first glimmer of a mid-September dawn, looking at the smoldering remains of his theatre on Jefferson Street.[7] The season of 1891-92 at the Memphis Theatre was not to be. During the first year of the taxing district, twelve years prior, he and his brother Louis had claimed the New Memphis Theatre as their auction prize and renamed it "Leubrie's Theatre." When the Leubries sold the theatre a few years later to the Friedman

---

[5] Tracy C. Davis, *The Economics of the British Stage, 1800-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 94.

[6] William Paul Gerhard, *Theatre Fires and Panics: Their Causes and Prevention* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1896), 8-10, 21.

[7] "Memphis Theater Fire," *Appeal-Avalanche*, 18 September 1891.

Brothers, it was renamed the Memphis, with the "New" dropped from the title—aptly enough, for the theatre had not been new for more than twenty years. Still, during its last decade this theatre had endured as Memphis's leading stage, hosting such attractions as Sarah Bernhardt on her first tour to the U.S. in 1881 and the joint appearance of Edwin Booth and Lawrence Barrett in 1888.

No photographic evidence exists to reveal what the expression on Leubrie's face might have been as he contemplated the ruins. This theatre was one of his only ties left to the city; both the Friedmans and the Leubries had recently moved the majority of their business concerns to St. Louis. Further, the theatre had been something of a surplus in its last year of existence. While two brand new theatres were under construction in Memphis early in the previous year, a Birmingham theatre manager and member of the Southern Circuit had expressed grave doubts in the regional press about the ability of any southern city to support more than even one theatre, pointing to major losses and problems in Montgomery and Nashville brought about by such a situation.[8] For the 1890-91 season, Memphis had had three, and the Memphis Theatre had loped along as a popular-priced playhouse. Interestingly, the insurance on the property was to have expired three days later, and the local press reported that arson was suspected.[9]

The manager of the Memphis was soon joined at the site of the fire by John Robb, manager of the new Lyceum Theatre. Robb offered his condolences and his stage for Carroll Johnson in Edward E. Kidder's Irish comedy-drama *The Gossoon*, the show that was supposed to have been presented that night at the Memphis. Just days later, Leubrie would find himself seated in the audience at the new Grand Opera House for a benefit given in his honor, to commemorate his role in presiding over several seasons at the Memphis and in helping to keep

[8] "One Is Enough," *Atlanta Constitution*, 26 January 1890.
[9] "Memphis Theater Fire."

the old workhorse of a theatre going. This benefit occurred one night prior to the official opening of the new season for both the Grand Opera House and the Lyceum Theatre. Very conveniently for everyone, it might seem—except for the orchestra leader who lost $800 worth of uninsured musical instruments—an older era of theatre in Memphis had been consigned to memory by the fire.[10]

The new city, rising out of the mire of yellow fever and bankruptcy, had needed a new theatre. In the spring of 1889, several members of the city's white business elite had begun formal meetings to oversee the building of a new Grand Opera House. In all likelihood there was a sense of competition with Memphis's older sister city and constant rival, Nashville, where the large and lavish new Vendome Theatre had opened to great acclaim less than two years earlier. Ever conscious of boosting the city's reputation, and thereby their own investments, the city's elite sought to adorn Memphis with an elaborate new theatre, half again as large as the old one, where they could place themselves and their business associates on display for the citizenry.

The original subscribers of the Grand Opera House included William D. Bethell, who would soon be elected mayor of the city; Napoleon Hill, the "merchant prince of Memphis"; Jacob S. Menken, a dry goods magnate who, according to the press, may have been the instigator of the project (and who, incidentally, was at one time the brother-in-law of Adah Isaacs Menken); Enoch Ensley, a Memphis businessman who had had a prominent role in the early industrialization of Birmingham; and several others who represented the upper echelons of Memphis by serving as directors and officers on the boards of most of the city's thriving businesses in law, transportation, utilities, real estate, banking, insurance, newspaper publishing, wholesale groceries, and, of course, cotton. These men had a hand not only in the majority of the

[10] "The Theaters," *Appeal-Avalanche*, 18 September 1891; "A Deserved Tribute," *Appeal-Avalanche*, 20 September 1891; "The Theaters," *Appeal-Avalanche*, 25 September 1891.

city's high-profile business dealings, but also in the construction and support of many of its social, educational, financial, and cultural institutions, such as the Tennessee Club, the Clara Conway Institute (a private girls' school), the Cotton Exchange, and the Cossitt Library.[11]

In *New Men, New Cities, New South*, Don Harrison Doyle discusses such groups of white men, who made up a new urban business class that served as the major driving force behind the capitalist enterprise of city-building in the region. Acknowledging that this class did not appear overnight but was instead preceded by an antebellum urban elite, he nonetheless asserts that the development of this new urban business class

> was far more imposing in scale, in geographic breadth, and in ideological vigor. The New South movement that gathered full power in the 1880s was the product of this ascendant business class of merchants, financiers, and industrialists and their allies, particularly those in the press. Through this program, business leaders proposed an agenda for economic development and social uplift that cast them in pre-eminent roles as architects of the new order.[12]

Doyle compares the men who made up this class in four different southern cities—Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, and Mobile—in terms of their progressiveness and openness to new business practices such as modern capitalist corporatism. Composing collective biographies of the major players in each city, he characterizes the first two cities as thoroughly embodying the spirit of the New South movement. However, the latter two—older port cities where longstanding social and business traditions connected to the antebellum planter class held more sway—seem to have lagged behind. Surprisingly, he does not consider New Orleans, the largest city in the South at this time; nor does he have much to say about Memphis.

---

[11] "About Ready to Launch," *Memphis Appeal*, 7 May 1889; David Burke, "Enoch Ensley," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Article.jsp?id=h-2448, accessed 28 October 2011; "Menken, Jacob Stanwood," *The National Cyclopedia of American Biography*, vol. 8 (New York: James T. White and Company, 1898), 294-95; Renée M. Sentilles, *Performing Menken: Adah Isaacs Menken and the Birth of American Celebrity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 28. For a complete list of the original subscribers of the Grand Opera House, see Rainey, 72 n. 28.

[12] Don Harrison Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 87.

A detailed analysis of the white urban business class of Memphis such as Doyle has done for his chosen New South cities is not within the scope of this dissertation. However, placing the city and its elite in a bit more context of this kind will help to reveal the connections between how this class conceived of Memphis as a New South city and their decision to make theatre-building a part of this spatial representation.

In the late nineteenth century, Memphis seems to have fit somewhere between Doyle's two opposing characterizations of southern cities. It had railroads, but it was also still a river-port city with a continuing reliance on trade by waterway. It had attracted industry, but nowhere near the level of cities like Atlanta or Birmingham. Memphis maintained strong ties to the planter class of the Mississippi Delta because of the dominance of cotton in its economy. The city hosted no grand conventions such as the International Cotton Expositions of 1881 and 1895 in Atlanta or the greatly attended 1897 Tennessee Centennial Exposition in Nashville. Rather, one of the largest conventions that took place in Memphis during this period was the Reunion of Confederate Veterans in 1901, an event that looked more backward than forward. Still, there was enough progress in the city through the growth of distribution, trade, commerce—and, as a result, population—to make Memphis a major New South city by the beginning of the twentieth century.

The business elite of Memphis was also a mix of the old and the new. Doyle points out the appearance of biographical sketches in Atlanta and Nashville papers which extolled the exemplary lives of these "new men." Memphis was no different in this respect: half of the second volume of Keating and Vedder's 1888 history of Memphis is devoted to the same sort of

encomia on the members of the business elite.[13] Unlike Atlanta and Nashville, however, rags-to-riches stories do not appear to have been a primary narrative trope. Some of these men in Memphis were born wealthy; others made their fortunes from scratch. Most had come of age before or during the Civil War, and most were natives of the South. Several had fought for the Confederacy, and some had grown up as members of the former slaveholding planter class in the Delta. A few—the Overtons and the Brinkleys—had familial ties to the founders of the city. Others were transplants from northern or midwestern cities, such as Menken, who came to Memphis from Cincinnati. Many of the original subscribers of the Grand Opera House lived in one of the two "silk stocking" districts of Memphis, along Adams Avenue in the northern part of the city and Beale Street in the south.

Several of these subscribers were not only part of a new guard in terms of business and industry, but were also at the forefront of a changing political environment in Memphis at the time. Since the repeal of the city's charter in 1879, the taxing district had been governed by a three-person board of fire and police commissioners and a five-person board of public works supervisors, who were elected at large but maintained tight control over the nomination process. One of the commissioners was selected to be the president of the taxing district (essentially the mayor of the city). This system of municipal government had replaced the old structure, which consisted of a weak mayor and a bicameral legislature of councilmen and aldermen elected by wards.

As historian Lynette Boney Wrenn explains, the new form of commission government had been utilized, often on a temporary basis, in cities throughout the South as they grappled

---

[13] J.M. Keating and O.F. Vedder, *History of the City of Memphis, Tennessee*, 2 vols. (Syracuse, NY: D. Mason & Co., 1888).

with one crisis or another during the period after the Civil War.[14] Echoing the increased use of the corporate form in the business world, the commission was intended to provide greater efficiency and more centralized power so that government might operate more effectively in crisis situations. The result, in Memphis at least, was a less representative—i.e., less African and Irish American—city government in the hands of a privileged elite.

At first, the new government did what it was supposed to do, and vast improvements were made to the city. Toward the end of the 1880s, however, political tensions between those in power and those who favored the politics of the New South began to be keenly felt. The old guard included, among others, David P. Hadden, a cotton factor and third president of the taxing district, and John Overton, Jr., real estate magnate, a grandson of one of the founders of the city, second president of the taxing district, and personal friend of the African American millionaire, Robert Church. The opposing group consisted of men such as Napoleon Hill and Noland Fontaine, partners in one of the largest cotton companies in the world and stockholders in the Grand Opera House, and Hugh Brinkley, another real estate tycoon and grandson of city founder John Overton. Brinkley would in the near future become a major underwriter of the Lyceum Theatre. The leader of the new faction was William D. Bethell, who was also heir to a real estate fortune, in addition to serving as president of the State National Bank and as a director of the Security Bank of Memphis, the Memphis Cotton Press and Storage Company, the Chickasaw Cooperage Company, the City Oil Mills, the Bluff City Stove Works, the Memphis Water Company, and several insurance companies.[15]

---

[14] Lynette Boney Wrenn, *Crisis and Commission Government in Memphis: Elite Rule in a Gilded Age City* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), xxiii. Although it is often stated that the commission form of city government originated in Galveston in 1900 as an effort to deal with the effects of a major hurricane, Wrenn points out that this political structure had actually been around for decades in cities throughout the South.

[15] Wrenn, 57-60; Westin A. Goodspeed, *History of Tennessee* (1887; reprint, Nashville: C. and R. Elder Booksellers, 1972), 928. It should be pointed out here that Wrenn contests the idea that the Bethell faction

The new guard felt that Hadden's rule of the city, which had been the longest of the taxing district presidents thus far, had become autocratic, corrupt, and inefficient. According to Wrenn, district presidents "exercised executive, legislative, and judicial power." Not only did Hadden have authority over all branches of governmental power, but in addition so many honorific titles had been granted him by the public and the press that after a performance by a traveling company of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Mikado*, Hadden was referred to as "Pooh-Bah, a character who held the positions of First Lord of the Treasury, Lord Chief Justice, Commander-in-Chief, Lord High Admiral, Master of Buckhounds, Groom of the Back Stairs, Archbishop of Titipu and Lord Mayor."[16]

Also, whereas the old guard prided themselves on the nonpartisan nature of their politics and purposefully courted leaders of the African American community in order to gain black votes, the new guard were staunch Democrats who advocated white supremacy and the disfranchisement of black voters. Throughout 1889, they waged a bitter campaign against Hadden and were ultimately successful. Bethell was sworn in as the fourth president of the taxing district in January of 1890.

By that time, plans were well underway for a new theatre. The Grand Opera House Company had been incorporated and Bethell elected president of its board of directors, which included others of the most powerful men in the city. The group estimated that the total cost of grounds and building would be $150,000. Each of the twenty-five original subscribers put up $3,000, comprising half; the other half was to be raised by selling 750 shares of stock in the Company at $100 each. For their financial support, each original subscriber was to be entitled to

---

represented "new men" in Doyle's sense of the phrase, which he uses to describe a younger generation who came to power in Mobile and Charleston during this period. Wrenn points out that both the Hadden and Bethell factions were cross-generational in nature. However, I am making the distinction of old and new here based on politics rather than age—that is, the difference between traditional "Bourbon" Democrats and New South Democrats.

[16] Wrenn, 48.

ownership in fee simple of a private box with two seats, which meant that the new theatre would have to be constructed with at least twenty-five boxes. One of the first actions of the board was to form a committee to purchase a lot on the southwest corner of Main and Beale from the (serendipitously named) New South Land Company for $60,000.[17]

In spite of—or perhaps ignorant of—the warnings from theatre managers in the regional press about the problems caused by the presence of more than one legitimate theatre in southern cities, the subscribers optimistically expected profits from the theatre to be in the neighborhood of $15,000 per year. They also assumed that they would be able to rent out the upper floors of the building—for which the prestigious Chickasaw Club was put forward as a potential tenant—as well as retail store frontage. After representatives of the Company traveled to Nashville, St. Louis, and Chicago to survey the architecture of theatres in those cities, they hired McElfatrick and Sons, the same architects who had designed the Vendome in Nashville, as well as many other prominent theatres all around the country, to design the new Grand Opera House in Memphis.[18]

For the opening night of the theatre, the board chose Judge Eli S. Hammond to deliver the dedicatory address. An ex-Confederate soldier, Hammond had been appointed as the first U.S. judge for the newly created Western District Court of Tennessee in 1878 by President Rutherford B. Hayes. His appointment was one of many concessions given at the time in order to ease tensions between the North and South. Hayes, of course, had come to power after a hotly disputed presidential election by agreeing to withdraw all remaining federal troops from former

[17] Grand Opera House Company Minute Book, 6 May-1 June 1889, Memphis and Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library & Information Center.

[18] Grand Opera House Company Minute Book, 1 June-14 September 1889. For more on these important theatre architects of the period, see Byrne David Blackwood, "The Theatres of J.B. McElfatrick and Sons, Architects, 1855-1922," 2 vols. (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1966).

Confederate states and to aid in industrializing the South under the Compromise of 1877. This action had ended Reconstruction and shifted power in the region to New South Democrats who, like those described above, advocated industrialization, urbanization, and white supremacy.

In a verbose and convoluted speech, Hammond praised Bethell and, on behalf of the audience, thanked the corporation over which he presided "for this gift of a new play-house as grateful children thank a father for a new and handsome toy." He went on to praise the city for its endurance in the face of calamity and the force of its new growth, as well as the city's commissioners for their work in making such rapid rebuilding of the city possible. Hammond likened the city's gratefulness for the new theatre to "the joys of the ancients, our barbaric forerunners in city building," for whom "this sentiment finds its first expressions in the erection of playhouses where the delighted populace may amuse itself."[19]

The opening performance at the Grand Opera House was, appropriately, grand opera. Emma Juch and her English Grand Opera Company performed Giacomo Meyerbeer's majestic *Les Huguenots* to a very appreciative crowd. One reviewer remarked that "the opera was mounted with a completeness and historical accuracy altogether new to Memphis theater-goers and worthy of metropolitan cities."[20] Although Memphis was normally a three-night and one matinée town, the opening of a new theatre was a special event, so the Juch company stayed for an entire week with a repertory that also included *Il Trovatore*, *Lohengrin*, *Faust*, *Carmen*, *Rigoletto*, and *Der Freischütz*. Apparently, Memphis was in good company with Juch, not only with regard to the quality of performances, but also in terms of her connection to theatre-building

---

[19] "Another Thespian Temple," *Memphis Avalanche*, 23 September 1890.
[20] Ibid.

in metropolitan cities: for the 1890-91 season, Juch was also slated to open new theatres in Brooklyn, Chicago, Denver, Milwaukee, and Pittsburgh.[21]

Bookings for the remainder of the first season at the Grand Opera House included many famous and popular actors of the time, such as James O'Neill, Fanny Janauschek, E.H. Sothern, Nat Goodwin, Robert Mantell, Sol Smith Russell, Maud Granger, Rose Coghlan, Effie Ellsler, Alexander Salvini (son of the world-renowned Tommaso Salvini), Annie Pixley, and Stuart Robson. A combination featuring Joseph Jefferson, Mrs. John Drew, and Viola Allen performed Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* and George Colman's *Heir at Law*. Additional opera and operetta companies included the DeWolf Hopper, W.T. Carleton, and Conried Comic Opera companies, as well as the Bostonians. Recent hit plays from New York included David Belasco and Henry C. DeMille's *The Charity Ball* and *The Wife*, Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, A.C. Gunter's *Mr. Barnes of New York*, and Bronson Howard's *Shenandoah*.[22]

The latter play, with its Civil War setting, was an unexpected hit in Memphis. Less than a month earlier, audiences had stayed away from William Gillette's *Held by the Enemy*, also set in the South during the conflict, when it appeared at the Memphis Theatre. Nevertheless, the critic of the *Appeal-Avalanche* announced that the opening night performance of *Shenandoah* "received more and heartier applause than anything that has been put on a Memphis stage this season." As in many plays of this ilk, sectional reconciliation is symbolized through the romantic union of a northern man and a southern woman.[23] Chalking up the success to Howard's creation of a "war drama with plenty of war in it, but not enough partisanship to

---

[21] "Coming Attractions," *New York Tribune*, 10 August 1890.

[22] Information about bookings at the Grand Opera House was culled from theatre coverage and advertisements in the *Memphis Appeal*, September-November 1890, and the *Appeal-Avalanche*, November 1890-April 1891. The *Appeal* purchased the *Avalanche* in November 1890.

[23] On this and other aspects of Civil War plays, and *Shenandoah* in particular, see Jeffrey D. Mason, "*Shenandoah* (1889) and the Civil War," in *Melodrama and the Myth of America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 155-86.

arouse the prejudice of the most confirmed enthusiast on either side," the critic asserted that the play contained "not the slightest intimation that somebody was right and somebody else was wrong." It would seem that in order for a Civil War play to succeed in a New South city (at least in a predominantly white theatre), a certain level of denial was necessary.[24]

Despite a stellar first season in terms of bookings, financial matters did not turn out quite as well the subscribers had hoped, much less as glittering as the picture that Hammond had painted on opening night. Although the Company had promised not to incur additional debt for the building of the theatre, they had had to renege, since the lowest contractor's bid was well beyond what the board had budgeted. It seems that they had been so pre-occupied with the details of their private boxes that they had failed to consider such basic items as chairs for the rest of the theatre's 2,200 patrons. Several of the wealthier subscribers had put up the necessary additional funds in exchange for bonds. By the time the theatre opened, the upper floors of the building were still not finished; in fact, it would be nearly four more years before the Chickasaw Club moved into the space. The architects apparently had to whittle the large number of planned two-seat boxes down to ten proscenium boxes, with larger ones seating eight and smaller ones seating four. Ironically, the specially designed chairs for the boxes were not ready for opening night, so box patrons had to sit in plain ones. Moreover, in February 1891, after fifteen weeks of business, it was reported that instead of making money, the Company had actually suffered a loss of $200.[25]

The board laid much of the blame for the loss at the feet of the manager they had hired, Frank Gray. Gray had worked under Thomas Davey and Joseph Brooks at the New Memphis

---

[24] *Appeal-Avalanche*, 13 January 1891.

[25] Grand Opera House Company Minute Book, 16 September 1889, 15 May 1890-12 February 1891; "Another Thespian Temple."

Theatre since 1877, and after those two managers moved on to other cities to oversee a wider circuit of which the New Memphis was a part, he had served as the local manager there for more than five years. Since the New Memphis had been the premiere legitimate theatre in the city for a number of years, Gray was not only experienced but also very well known. A year before the Grand Opera House opened, the board had discussed whether to lease the theatre or employ a manager. Edmund Greenwood and John Robb, who would soon become co-lessees of the Lyceum, had approached the board about a lease; however, the board decided to lure Gray over to the new theatre and employ him as manager.

Five months into the first season, there were complaints that Gray was careless, that he gave away too many free passes to members of the press, and that he ran the theatre as if it were his own rather than the property of a corporation. It was also remarked that "extra help is employed at times for different attractions and in some instances it looks to us excessive; but as to whether such expense is necessary or not, we are unable to say." Comments such as these, from a committee formed to audit Gray's management, seem to indicate two things. The first is a clash of mindsets with regard to sole proprietorship versus corporate governance, which was very much a hot-button issue across the country at this time. Gray was indeed used to running the New Memphis as if it were his own. At that theatre, he had worked for Joseph Brooks, the lessee on the property and a nationally known theatre impresario, who knew Gray and trusted him to run the theatre according to his own judgment. At the Grand Opera House, Gray found himself working for a local corporation made up of non-theatrical businessmen. This situation brings up the second thing indicated by the comment above: regardless of their expertise in other fields, this board of New South businessmen was clearly out of its depth when it came to theatre management. Fired by the board, Gray left Memphis and served for a while as advance agent for

actor William H. Crane, but he would soon return to continue his long career as a theatre manager in the city.[26]

In an attempt to recover some of the loss, stockholders were asked to give up their rights to extra box seats at the beginning of the theatre's second season. During the previous season these fifty choice seats had rarely been used because box owners, as a rule, did not inform the box office that they would not be attending the theatre in time for the seats to be sold. Further, stockholders were also requested to select seats in different parts of the house from time to time so that they "might be more thoroughly 'mixed' with the audience and thus avoid the 'exclusiveness' and partly overcome the prejudices made apparent last year."[27] Apparently, Gray's generosity toward the press was only part of the problem.

Despite these measures, financial issues continued to plague the Grand throughout its second season. By December, the stockholders agreed to give up their rights to free seats altogether, at least through the end of the season. A letter from the new president of the board, Charles Grosvenor, in March 1892 indicated that in addition to bonded indebtedness of $90,000 on a first mortgage, the Company owed $35,000 to outside creditors and $12,000 to stockholders. Grosvenor recommended taking out a second mortgage to restructure the debt, adding, "There is one thing certain, if some arrangement is not made soon to relieve the necessities of the Company our stock is valueless."[28] The remainder of the Company minute book (through November 20, 1892) indicates that the board offices became a revolving door, with no one wanting to take responsibility for the faltering corporation.

---

[26] Grand Opera House Company Minute Book, 12 February-9 May 1891; "Veteran Showman Dies after Brief Illness," *Commercial Appeal*, 29 June 1922.

[27] Grand Opera House Company Minute Book, 1 September 1891.

[28] Grand Opera House Company Minute Book, 30 March 1892. Grosvenor was the son-in-law of Napoleon Hill and the business partner of John Overton, Jr. in a real estate firm.

The bookings, however, remained top-notch during the second and third seasons, with several stars from the first season returning to the stage of the Grand. A few productions were of particular note during these two seasons with regard to their southern settings and references to the Civil War, along with the local responses to them. The first was the Memphis premiere of A.M. Palmer's production of Augustus Thomas's *Alabama*, which packed the Grand's large house nightly during its half-week stay in October 1891. Thomas would become noted for his plays which, like *Alabama*, presented "local color" in a relatively realistic manner, such as *In Mizzoura* (1893) and *Arizona* (1899). The depiction of southern life in the touring production of *Alabama* was appreciated by the *Appeal-Avalanche* critic, who commented that "the idiosyncrasies of types of men and women peculiarly Southern are depicted in a strikingly life-like manner." The critic made special note of the differentiation of rural and urban South as embodied in the ingénue's performance:

> Miss Stella Tenton as Carey Preston is delightful. She has the soft, sweet, drawling accent peculiar to the maiden of the South who has been reared in happy ignorance of voice culture. Such a voice could not be found in the social circles of Memphis or any other city, but it may frequently be heard in those regions where Delsarte is unknown.[29]

Also noted was George Bunny's portrayal of Decatur, the African American servant in the play (most likely done in blackface), which the critic described as "much nearer nature than the stage negro usually is." I will comment on this interpretation of the performance of African American characters by European American actors below, with regard to a similar remark in a review for another production.

Before the performance of *Alabama* began, the orchestra played "Dixie," which resulted in a burst of applause. Moreover, the set seems to have inspired some nostalgia for the Old

---

[29] François Delsarte was a French educator whose theories of acting and elocution had wide influence throughout U.S. theatre and society during the late nineteenth century.

South, as “the moonlight view of the ruined gateway and the negro quarters in the distance, from which the sound of plantation melodies floated in the third act, was as beautiful as nature.” As with *Shenandoah*, an absence of “politics” aided the Memphis reception of *Alabama*, in addition to its setting in time eighteen years after, rather than during, the Civil War.[30] Thomas’s depiction of a world uncomplicated by political or racial issues—a world where (disconcertingly for today) a sympathetic white character can be heard to say: “Ef they is any white folks, Colonel, that despise a niggah, it’s because they neveh own one”—appealed to white Memphis audiences, and *Alabama* returned to the city several times.[31]

Other plays with southern settings which appeared at the Grand did not engender such positive responses, however, and by the beginning of the following year, it would seem that some theatre-goers in the South were weary of northern theatre producers’ propensity to package southern culture in a certain way and sell it back to them on the stage. Perhaps they were becoming aware of how they were being exoticized or “domesticated” (to echo Edward Ziter) through romantic depictions of southern landscapes and cross-sectional love affairs in these plays.[32] In February 1892, *Shenandoah* returned. This time, however, the response was not as enthusiastic. The *Appeal-Avalanche* critic described the play as “of a character that interests Northern audiences more strongly than those of the South, to whom war flags based on the late contest between the States, are not suggestive of much mental enjoyment.”[33]

---

[30] *Appeal-Avalanche*, 16 October 1891.

[31] Quoted in Gerald Bordman, *American Theatre: A Chronicle of Comedy and Drama, 1869-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 312.

[32] Edward Ziter, “Staging the Geographic Imagination: Imperial Melodrama and the Domestication of the Exotic,” in *Land/Scape/Theater*, ed. Una Chaudhuri and Elinor Fuchs (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 204.

[33] *Appeal-Avalanche*, 9 February 1892.

A similar but even more strongly expressed response met the production of Augustus Pitou and Edward M. Alfriend's *Across the Potomac* in January 1893. I quote this review at length because it sums up a particular point of view about Civil War plays during this period in a very striking way:

> The story [of the play] has been told so often that a repetition of it is unnecessary. There is but little to commend. The provincial instinct which, after all, dominates, does not take kindly to the spectacle of a strident-voiced Massachusetts dame sending her son across the Potomac to kill us all. The war is over. The national flag is the emblem of "freedom, national power, and national unity," as this raucous-voiced lady would have us believe, but it was not so in '61, when the scene is laid. People in Dixie used to shoot at it. Boyd Putnam [who played Captain Ralph Baker] is a great character anywhere. Henrietta Lander [who portrayed Edith Garland] should not attempt to personate a Virginia lady with a vaudeville voice. There is no better negro delineator on the stage than Gus Frankel [in the role of Ephraim], because he is more like the negro as we know him than anyone who has visited us. Ada Dwyer [as Madge Hanford] sustains her role excellently. The rest are passable.

The critic shows an exasperation here with the proliferation of war plays set in the South, which he develops as the review goes on. However, it should be pointed out that, as in the review of *Alabama*, here again is the notion that "the negro" is some essential thing that can be known, delineated, played, and thereby controlled in some way. This phenomenon was, of course, key to many nineteenth-century depictions of African American characters on the stage, especially with regard to minstrelsy, which has been widely discussed in theatre scholarship.[34] But in these two particular instances the "stage negro" and the "negro as we know him," with the "we" understood as white *and southern* ("more than anyone who has visited *us*"), are set against each other as a test of the ability of a white actor in blackface to portray a realistic character to a degree that would satisfy the aesthetic sense of white southerners. It is this ironic sense of

---

[34] See, for a start, Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); Eric Lott, *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch, and Brooks McNamara, eds., *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1996).

knowledge and control that African American performers (and theatre critics) during this period were working against, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

The review of *Across the Potomac* continues:

> Those who write war dramas tread over a volcano on a bridge of ashes, with the to be expected result of breaking through and being overwhelmed. *Shenandoah*, *The Fair Rebel* [which had been presented at the Memphis Theatre in October 1890], *Held by the Enemy*, and *Alabama* are war dramas, but, with the exception of the last named, which makes the war an incident and not an object, a piece of coloring and not a basic principle, they are all failures, more or less, on this side of the line. And it is only natural that they should be. A vanquished people, if they have spirit, object to and resent every effort to remind them of their ill-fortune and humiliation. No English dramatist has presented to the Britons a stage-picture of Valley Forge; no French dramatist has presented his country with a picture of Sedan; no Russian cares to remind his countrymen of Balaklava or Alma, and no American need hope to please Southern audiences by realistic scenes from the late internecine conflict. Artistic clearness and historical accuracy are well enough in their way, but no one cares to see pictures, however just and faithful, of realities which they can only deplore. Let the dead past bury its dead. These war dramas are written for Northern audiences. No matter how much they may be modified and emasculated when they come South, their primal purpose is to pander to that spirit which swells in joy in contemplating Sherman's black line of desolation through the Shenandoah valley—that spirit which sent hired Hessians to devastate the South, and which is ready to apotheosize John Brown's robberies and murders at Harper's Ferry. It is too much to ask of Southern people that they receive with cordiality, or even countenance with equanimity, the laudation of those emissaries of brute force, who scourged and Heliogabalized the country. Admitting that the plays are not inspired by unrelenting malevolence which, at worst, equalizes to a certain extent the hated and the hating, it is more exasperating to realize, as one must, that the purple patches on the garment, put on to palliate the affront to Southern sentiment, are accompanied by an exegesis of conscious superiority, a mercenary superciliousness that cannot wholly conceal itself, and dare not wholly expose itself, but must intensify the wrong and amplify the insult by a vulgar air of patronizing conciliation. So long as Southern spirit and Southern pride preserves its integrity, such plays as *Across the Potomac* must expect to receive a limited support in this section.[35]

It is worth noting the rupture created in the use of "American" and "Southern" here as they refer not only to geographical and cultural identity, but also to the production and consumption of

---

[35] *Appeal-Avalanche*, 10 January 1893.

theatre. Theatre is something that is not made in the South, but, like many other products at the time, manufactured in the North and sold in the South. The incongruity of purpose between "American" producer and "Southern" consumer is made strikingly clear by this local experience of reception.

But is "American" simultaneous with "Northern"? The analogies to British, French, and Russian playwrights and audiences of their compatriots would appear to indicate that this is not the case—that southerners are indeed "Americans" as well, even if they can be differentiated by particularly southern notions of "sentiment," "spirit," and "pride." Leaving aside for a moment the racist connotations which may be associated with such concepts voiced by a white southerner, there is a great deal of resentment here aimed at the depiction of the South's destruction, along with an admonition to let go of the "dead past." If "the figure of America," to quote Una Chaudhuri, is the utopia which it claims to be, then this critic seems to be in agreement that it must be able to contain within it these "different, even incompatible" regional sensibilities.[36] This critic's opinion seems not to have gone unnoticed by local managers: aside from *Alabama*, none of the plays mentioned in this review ever returned to Memphis. Struggling to advance in the new industrial age, whites in the New South city did not take kindly to theatrical reminders of past defeat and devastation.

By the third season of the Grand Opera House, the board was able to obtain a satisfactory lessee, but financial damage had already been done. Deep in debt, the theatre had also developed an elitist reputation which, at a time when the city was becoming populated more and more by migrants from rural areas, was looked upon with some skepticism. Nevertheless it appears that for the 1892-93 season, the policy of free seats for stockholders was reinstated. In addition, there

---

[36] Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 5.

had been rumors since the theatre's opening that the building itself was not completely sound. In March of 1893, the Grand Opera House was put on the auction block.

There was a bit of speculation about who would buy the property, but it was assumed that the stockholders would purchase it themselves in order to write down and pay off the first mortgage, repay the floating debt, and retain their original stake in the property. A few days before the sale, Charles Osgood, a representative for Klaw and Erlanger, was spotted in the city, and rumors arose that the country's largest theatrical booking agency was interested in buying the Grand. Osgood, whose own firm, Brown, Osgood, and Reilly, had theatres in Nashville, Louisville, and Evansville—known as the "Bijou Circuit"—had been in Memphis several months earlier to scope out the possibility of building a popular-priced theatre in the city. However, he had abandoned that plan, since there were already two theatres in operation at the time. Despite the rumors, there is no indication that Osgood was actually present at the auction. Stanwood D. Kyle, a local businessman and stockholder of the Lyceum Theatre, put in a bid, but then dropped out early.[37]

No one expected Bethell to purchase the Grand Opera House for himself. On his doctor's orders, Bethell had moved to Denver two years previously, during the theatre's first season, in order to improve his health. It was assumed that he would eventually divest himself of all business interests in the city, but this was apparently not what he had in mind. With his bid of $100,000, the debts were paid off, and the theatre became the sole property of the man who had once been president of the corporation that owned it. All the original subscribers' investments were wiped out. As a result, there would be no more free tickets at the Grand for the New South elite of Memphis. This was to be quite a relief to Fritz Staub, the manager and lessee of the

[37] "The Grand Opera House," *Appeal-Avalanche*, 14 March 1893; "The Grand Opera House Sold," *Appeal-Avalanche*, 19 March 1893.

theatre, as well as Klaw and Erlanger, who, it was revealed, would be joining Staub on the lease of the Grand as of June 1, 1893.[38]

The Grand Opera House had started out life as the conception of a group of the city's most prominent business and political leaders, who incorporated to purchase land and oversee the building of an extravagant new theatre that would represent them spatially, heralding Memphis as a New South city. Constructed at the peak of a resurgence of urban and commercial development in the city—the workings of which many of these men controlled—the theatre, with its large array of private boxes, was to serve as the icing on the cake of their grand achievements. Three years later, it was the property of an absentee landlord, leased by a firm that would soon be central to the largest theatrical conglomerate in the nation. This shift away from local interests was not absolute, however. Although the theatre would continue to be run by outside interests, which will be discussed later in this chapter, ownership remained in the hands of Bethell's heirs, who were citizens of Memphis, until the theatre's demise in 1923.[39]

* * *

Although the Grand Opera House was built by Memphis's most prominent citizens, it was not the only theatre that materialized to adorn this New South city in the fall of 1890. One week after the Grand opened its doors, the Lyceum Theatre commenced its circuitous journey to becoming the premiere legitimate theatre of Memphis. But why, given the concern among regional theatre managers, would Memphis need two brand-new theatres, especially when there was already an older one (the Memphis Theatre, which burned down the following fall) in the city?

---

[38] "The Grand Opera House Sold."

[39] Until his death in 1906, Bethell maintained his interest in the local business dealings of the Grand Opera House through his son-in-law, John P. ("Jack") Edrington. See H. Lee Scamehorn, "A Calendar of the Papers of Pinckney C. and William D. Bethell, 1848-1901" (Denver: Library of the State Historical Society of Colorado, 1968); "Orpheum Theater Is Destroyed by Fire," *Commercial Appeal*, 17 October 1923.

In its first conception, the Lyceum Theatre was merely a part of the Amateur Athletic Association building, a striking new architectural, social, and cultural addition to the city at the time of its opening. During the 1870s and 80s there was a proliferation of amateur athletic clubs all over the country, especially after the formation of the National Association of Amateur Athletes of America in 1879. The club in Memphis was formed in 1883 by a group of young men who, according to local attorney Frank Poston in his opening night speech for the theatre, represented "the bone and sinew, the pride and future hope of this the Queen City of the Mississippi Valley."[40]

In his article on masculinity and athletics in the New South, Patrick B. Miller has remarked that influential developments in athletic competition nationwide during the period "spoke to traditional notions of southern honor and, at the same time, to the 'New South creed,' especially as both ideals reinforced distinctions predicated on gender and race." Although Miller focuses primarily on college team sports such as football and baseball, his statement could also be applied to the spread of amateur athletic clubs. Focusing, as Poston does above, on the southern white male body, new ideas about technical proficiencies honed in a gymnasium, as opposed to antebellum notions of gentlemanly equestrian sports, pitted the urban New South against the agrarian Old South and "attested to increasingly 'modern' sensibilities."[41]

So, the "new" men responsible for instigating the construction of the Lyceum Theatre were, on the whole, younger than and not nearly as prominent as those who built the Grand Opera House, and had different ideas about representing themselves spatially. In order to come up with the money to build their new clubhouse, the members of this young New South elite

---

[40] "The Lyceum," *Memphis Appeal*, 30 September 1890.

[41] Patrick B. Miller, "The Manly, the Moral, and the Proficient: College Sport in the New South," *Journal of Sport History* 24, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 287.

turned to their older, wealthier, and more influential counterparts. Well over a year before the formation of the Grand Opera House Company, the Amateur Athletic Building Company was incorporated for similar purposes—to purchase land and access capital for building. A board of directors was chosen, and Dr. David T. Porter was elected president. Porter had served as the first president of the taxing district, and at the time of the incorporation was president of the Memphis National Bank, the Gayoso Oil Works, and the Planters Fire and Marine Insurance Company, in addition to running his own wholesale grocery company.[42]

On September 10, 1888—eight months before the Grand Opera House Company began their initial meetings—the Amateur Athletic Building Company purchased a lot at Union Avenue and Third Street from John and Matilda Overton for $20,000.[43] On the same day, the Company took out a mortgage of $35,000 for improvements on the lot. The trustees of this mortgage were none other than Bethell, Grosvenor, and Samuel H. Brooks—all of whom would become board members of the Grand—as well as Fred Orgill, a partner in an extremely successful local hardware business.[44] Additional funds were raised, and less than a year later, around the same time that the Grand Opera House Company was securing land, construction began on the new building for the Amateur Athletic Association.

According to Poston in his opening night speech at the Lyceum, it was decided at some point after the Association had made plans for the building that a theatre should be included, since the city needed a new one that would be "commensurate with the advancement, prosperity,

---

[42] "The Lyceum"; *Dow's Memphis City Directory for 1888* (Memphis: Harlow Dow, 1888), 595-96.

[43] Shelby County Register of Deeds, Book 188, p. 163-64, accessed 8 December 2011, http://register.shelby.tn.us.

[44] Shelby County Register of Deeds, Book 188, p. 165-69, accessed 8 December 2011, http://register.shelby.tn.us. Brooks's widow, Bessie Vance Brooks, funded the establishment of the Brooks Memorial Art Gallery—now the Memphis Brooks Museum—the oldest fine arts museum in the state of Tennessee. At this writing, Orgill, Inc. remains the largest independent wholesale hardware distributor in the world, and is still based in Memphis.

and importance of our city, there being but one here [the Memphis], and none other contemplated."[45] Oddly, Poston made no mention of the Grand, which had opened just one week prior to his speech. This glaring omission would seem to indicate that there may have been some tension concerning the establishment of a theatre between the younger and older elite groups which had developed during the interval between the formation of the Amateur Athletic Building Company and the Grand Opera House Company.

Were the two generational groups at odds with each other? It is possible—though it seems unlikely, given that certain board members of the Grand were trustees for the athletic club's mortgage—that the Grand company was unaware of the younger group's plans to include a theatre in their new building. It seems more likely that the members of the older elite knew about the inclusion of the theatre but did not feel that it represented them in as grand a manner as they would have liked. However, the old theatre already in existence would not do, either. Ignorant of managerial concerns when it came to theatre, perhaps all involved in the creation of these two new theatres felt that Memphis was capable of supporting them—a sprawling, ornate opera house for the elder elite and a smaller, more intimate house for the younger—in addition to the existing one, which was soon to meet its demise. At any rate, it is clear that theatre-building was viewed as an integral part of the capitalist enterprise of city-building in Memphis, regardless of the concerns of those more knowledgeable about the larger scheme in terms of the regional and national theatre business.

Contrasting the opening performance at the Grand Opera House, but still in keeping with "high-class" entertainment, the Lyceum Theatre opened with Julia Marlowe as Rosalind in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. The company also included Creston Clarke and Charles B.

---

[45] "The Lyceum."

Hanford, two other Shakespearean actors who had gained prominence on the touring circuits. Marlowe was very young at this early point in her career. One Memphis reviewer referred to her as a "budding genius," but not someone who could be compared with more seasoned actresses such as Helena Modjeska, Rose Coghlan, or Marie Wainwright. The reviewer asserted that she ought to surround herself with a better company and criticized Clarke in particular for relying on his status as Edwin Booth's nephew for his advancement, rather than on acting skills. In fact, aside from Marlowe's performance, the reviewer stated that the performance of *As You Like It* was "about as poor a representation as has ever been seen in this city by a professedly first class company." Like the Juch company, Marlowe stayed for a week, appearing in *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Twelfth Night*, as well as the standard romantic dramas *Ingomar*, by Maria Lovell (based on *Der Sohn der Wildnis*, by Friedrich Halm) and Knowles's *The Hunchback*.[46]

Although the Lyceum, with a smaller seating capacity than the Grand, had nowhere near the number of prestigious engagements as the latter theatre during its first season, by 1891-92 it had managed to steal away some of the Grand's thunder. James O'Neill and Maud Granger appeared at the Lyceum during that season, as did the Joseph Jefferson-Mrs. John Drew combination. The smaller theatre was developing a reputation for comedy and drama, rather than the huge spectacles that could be staged at the Grand. Charles Hoyt's farces, such as *A Tin Soldier*, *A Parlor Match*, and *A Hole in the Ground*, appeared here, as did the returning engagements of *Alabama*.[47]

---

[46] "The Amusement World," *Memphis Daily Avalanche*, 5 October 1890.

[47] Carolyn Powell, "The Lyceum Theater of Memphis, 1890-1900" (Master's thesis, University of Mississippi, 1951), 216-22.

In order to manage the Lyceum, another corporation, the Southern Amusement Company (which was composed primarily of the same membership as the Amateur Athletic Building Company), was formed and granted a lease on the theatre. After breaking even the first season and making money the next, the leasehold and furnishings of the theatre were put up for sale at auction in the summer of 1892 in order to write down and pay off a first mortgage and eliminate floating debt. Fritz Staub, the new lessee and manager of the Grand, was present at the auction, but apparently did not bid. Edmund Greenwood, representing the stockholders of the Southern Amusement Company, put in the winning bid, which meant that the lease and fixtures would remain in their possession while they reformed as the Lyceum Theatre Stock Company. Two weeks later the new Company received its charter.[48] Given this precedent, it is not surprising that the stockholders of the Grand Opera House expected the field to be clear for them to retain that theatre when it came to the auction block the following year.

Perhaps the most interesting booking of the Lyceum's first three seasons was that of Sarah Bernhardt, who presented a repertory that included *Tosca*, *Jeanne d'Arc*, *Cleopatra*, and *Fédora* in February 1892. While in Memphis, Bernhardt became very intrigued with a recent, sensational murder case that had shocked the city. Alice Mitchell, a young, middle-class woman, desperately in love with but estranged from her lover Freda Ward, had cut Ward's throat rather than live without her. The two had planned to be married, with Alice taking on the identity of a man. Bernhardt reportedly began to collect a book of clippings to show Victorien Sardou so that he could write a play for her based on the incidents of the story. Lyceum manager John Mahoney and future Memphis theatre critic Hugh Higbee Huhn, then a press agent for the

---

[48] "Trust Sale of the Lyceum Theater," *Appeal-Avalanche*, 31 May 1892; "The Sale of the Lyceum," *Appeal-Avalanche*, 10 June 1892; "Lyceum Theater Company," *Appeal-Avalanche*, 21 June 1892. Incorporators included, besides Greenwood, Fred Orgill, Austin Miller, Stanwood D. Kyle, and Frank B. Hunter. All except Greenwood were prominent businessmen in their early thirties.

theatre, took Bernhardt to the jail so that she could speak with Mitchell, but the authorities would not allow the meeting to happen.[49]

Just as the Lyceum's fourth season had started in November 1893, the Amateur Athletic Association building burned down. As with the New Memphis Theatre, the circumstances surrounding this fire were somewhat suspicious. The newspaper report, describing the progress of the fire in lurid detail, posited that a live wire in the flies was the cause. The assistant engineer of the building suspected gas light under the stage. Mahoney claimed that when he had left the theatre a little over an hour before the fire started, everything had been in order, and he could not imagine how the fire had originated. One tenant of the club's sleeping rooms who escaped the burning building, Judge Pitkin C. Wright, speculated that arson was the cause. Whatever the actual origin of the fire may have been, it remained an unsolved mystery.[50]

Although no hard evidence arose to warrant an official declaration of arson as a possible cause, certain factors elicit a bit of skepticism. For one thing, the Panic of 1893 had created a very different economic environment than what had prevailed three years earlier, when Memphis found itself with three competing theatres, one of them housed in a very lavishly outfitted club building. Although the club had been extremely popular in the beginning, hard times had

---

[49] Lisa Duggan, in her book, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), analyzes this case as the beginning of the "lesbian love murder" narrative and draws parallels with lynching narratives, particularly the People's Grocery incident, which happened right around the same time in Memphis. Duggan briefly discusses the Sarah Bernhardt connection on 149 and 266 nn. 19-20. Huhn reminisces about Bernhardt's fascination with the case in the *Commercial Appeal*, 7 August 1910. Harry Bilger, one of the young men with whom Freda Ward had become involved, later worked at the second Lyceum Theatre as property man ("The New Lyceum," *Commercial Appeal*, 2 December 1894) and became a director of the Jefferson Theatre when it opened in 1908 ("Jefferson Opens Tomorrow Night," *Commercial Appeal*, 15 November 1908). Apparently, Bilger had asked Ward to "run away and go on the stage with him," which was one of the reasons for Mitchell's jealousy (Duggan, 112).

[50] "Lyceum Now in Ashes," *Appeal-Avalanche*, 8 November 1893.

rendered it too expensive to pay for itself, and membership had dropped significantly.[51] The young man who had been the guiding spirit behind the establishment of the club's home, David McComb, had, as the sons of the New South elite sometimes did, moved away to New York by the time of the fire. During the same year that the Amateur Athletic building opened, the older and more prestigious Tennessee Club had constructed and opened its own luxurious home a few blocks north, which, like the rival theatre built by older and more prominent citizens, provided competition in the social arena. Moreover, there was some feeling in the city, maybe because of increased rural immigration in addition to the difficult economic situation, against the idea of social clubs whose members flaunted their wealth openly.

Ironically, it was perhaps this same feeling that had benefited the Lyceum over its larger, more pretentious rival, the Grand Opera House, in previous seasons. A few days after the fire, the *Appeal-Avalanche* asserted that since its opening the Lyceum had "stood foremost in the affections of the playgoing public" because of its intimacy and appropriateness for "such gems of dramatic art that would seem out of place in a theater as large and roomy" as the Grand.[52] While that theatre had been losing money since its opening, the Lyceum had remained profitable or at least broken even, according to Mahoney. Citing the fact that this was the second theatre to burn down in as many years, the paper echoed the earlier comments of Southern Circuit managers: "The remark that this is a one theater town now holds good…The Grand Opera House…has a clear field at present."[53]

---

[51] In addition to lapsed memberships, the fact that the headline of the article about the fire read "Lyceum Now in Ashes," as above, with the subline "Beautiful Athletic Club Building Destroyed" located five lines down, would seem to indicate the relative ascendance of the theatre and decline of the club.

[52] "The Past Week's Productions," *Appeal-Avalanche*, 12 November 1893.

[53] "Lyceum Now in Ashes."

Within a short time, however, the prospect of a new Lyceum was assured. Determined that the theatre should be rebuilt, Mahoney and Stanwood Kyle enlisted the financial aid of several leading citizens of Memphis who had not yet been involved in theatre-building projects, including Elias Lowenstein and Hu L. Brinkley.[54] Lowenstein was the head of B. Lowenstein & Bros., one of the city's most well known department stores, with a beautiful, recently constructed building near Court Square.[55] He was also a leader in the Jewish community of Memphis, serving as president of Temple Israel for fifteen years. As did others of the city's elite, he owned a mansion in the Adams Avenue neighborhood. Brinkley was one of the political leaders of the city, having been elected to the board of fire and police commissioners during the same year that the new Lyceum was built. The following year, he would begin a term in the Tennessee Senate. He had been involved in railroads and real estate in Memphis for many years and was noted for his charitable gifts, including the establishment of a hospital and a boarding house for young women. Like John Overton, Jr., who had sold the lot on which the Amateur Athletic Association building had been constructed, Brinkley was a grandson of John Overton, one of the founders of the city of Memphis. His father, Robert C. Brinkley, managed the vast real estate holdings of his mother, Anne Overton, and had built the first Peabody Hotel in 1869. In fact, Brinkley owned the Court Square lot on which the new Lyceum Theatre would be built. At the groundbreaking ceremony for the new theatre in April 1894, Lowenstein turned the first spade of dirt, and Brinkley the second.[56]

---

[54] Other directors of the newly formed Lyceum Theater Company were Annesley A. Arnold, Charles F. DeGaris, Hunter, Kyle, and Simon Lehman. See "The New Lyceum."

[55] As part of the current redevelopment of downtown, the Lowenstein Building (built in 1886), which had been vacant and decaying for thirty years, was completely renovated and reopened in 2009. Lowenstein's department stores were prominent in Memphis until the 1970s.

[56] "The New Lyceum"; "Ground for the Lyceum Broken," *Appeal-Avalanche*, 29 April 1894.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the Lyceum's move to Court Square seems to have been predicated on the area's rising status as the center of the city. This relocation was an indication that the board of the new Lyceum saw the rebuilding of the theatre as central to the development of the city—a sentiment which was again echoed in opening night remarks. Gustavus C. Matthews, the editor of the *Commercial Appeal*, who had supported Brinkley in his campaign to restore home rule to the city, was chosen to give the dedicatory address. Alluding to the fire that had destroyed the previous theatre, as well as other past events in the city, he observed that "the history of Memphis has a curious phase—the projects most essential to the progress and welfare of the people have always been conceived and undertaken when the genii of ill-luck seemed to establish themselves on every corner of our streets."[57] Thus, once again, progress had triumphed over adversity in the form of theatre-building.

In addition to the theatre's new geographic centrality, it also seems clear that the members of the new Lyceum Theatre Company intended for their venture to eclipse the Grand Opera House in its spatial representation of the elite. The architects chosen to design the new theatre, Wood & Lovell of Chicago, included not only proscenium boxes but also an entire mezzanine composed of boxes and a promenade, which provided more than double the number of box seats at the Grand. This was the first such mezzanine in a Memphis theatre, and it would come to be known as the "golden horseshoe"—a space in which the social and financial leaders of the city could be viewed in all their splendor.[58]

Perhaps in tandem with the goal of emphasizing the elitism of the new Lyceum, the theatre was to have opened with a week-long engagement by the Marie Tavary Grand English Opera Company. However, the theatre was not finished in time, and Mahoney had to transfer

---

[57] "Great House and Great Actor," *Commercial Appeal*, 4 December 1894.

[58] "Lyceum Theatre May Be Razed Because It Can't Pay Upkeep," *Commercial Appeal*, 6 January 1935.

this company to the Auditorium. The grand opening had to be postponed until the beginning of December. Whether or not it was by design, the newness of the theatre was reflected in the newness of its opening performance. Four years earlier, both the Grand Opera House and the first Lyceum had opened with older, tried and true plays (albeit performed by rising operatic and Shakespearean stars). The New Lyceum Theatre opened with Otis Skinner in Clyde Fitch's new (albeit traditionally romantic) play, *His Grace de Grammont*. After working as a supporting player with Booth and Modjeska, Skinner had made his debut as a star in this play at the Grand Opera House in Chicago just over two months prior to the opening of the Memphis Lyceum. He and the company were well-received in Memphis, although they only stayed for the usual three nights and a matinee, presenting *The King's Jester* (based on Victor Hugo's *Le roi s'amuse*) and *Merchant of Venice*, in addition to the Fitch play.[59]

From its first season, it was clear that the new Lyceum would be a serious rival to the Grand in terms of its spatial representation of legitimacy and elitism, through its location in the city, its interior architecture, and its bookings. Eventually the Lyceum would become the premiere legitimate stage in Memphis. However, changes in management at the local, regional, and national levels would temporarily delay its rise to the top.

Memphis and the Southern Circuits

The fortunes of Klaw and Erlanger, the booking agency at the heart of the Theatrical Syndicate, were tied to the South. In 1888 David Bidwell, the New Orleans producer who had briefly controlled both the New Memphis Theatre and the Greenlaw Opera House almost twenty years earlier, purchased the H.S. Taylor booking agency in New York and placed Charles Jefferson (son of the prominent actor Joseph Jefferson), Marc Klaw, and Abraham Erlanger in

---

[59] "Great House and Great Actor," *Commercial Appeal*, 4 December 1894.

charge of the firm. The latter two men had extensive experience managing tours for traveling stars, and both were very knowledgeable about southern routes. Over the next several years, until the formation of the Syndicate, Klaw and Erlanger (and, until 1895, Jefferson) built their business up to the point that they were booking nearly 200 theatres located, for the most part, in the South. For this reason, during their conflicts with the Shuberts and independent artists, the Syndicate held such a grip on the Road in the South that no one else could book a successful tour of the region, which was not necessarily the case with other regions of the country.[60]

Memphis first became a part of Klaw and Erlanger's spatial concept of the Road when the booking agents joined Fritz Staub on the lease of the Grand Opera House on June 1, 1893. Although not as large a city as St. Louis or New Orleans, Memphis's size and central location in the country made it a relatively lucrative stop and a good connecting point, which is illustrated by its position on the railroad maps in Figures 26-28.

Staub had managed his own theatre in Knoxville, Tennessee, since the early 1880s and had become Treasurer of the Southern Circuit when it was formed in 1885 in Atlanta.[61] Like many other regional circuits around the country at the time, the Southern Circuit was established for the mutual benefit of theatres in the region and the companies that toured there, in order to simplify the booking process. This circuit stretched from Lynchburg, Virginia, to New Orleans and also included cities such as Atlanta, Savannah, Augusta, and Macon, Georgia; Jacksonville,

---

[60] Alfred L. Bernheim, *The Business of the Theatre: An Economic History of the American Theatre, 1750-1932* (1932; reprint, New York: Benjamin Blom, 1964), 44; Monroe Lippman, "The History of the Theatrical Syndicate: Its Effect Upon the Theatre in America" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1937), 24-26, 135.

[61] "Southern Circuit," *Atlanta Constitution*, 8 April 1888. Staub was the son of Peter Staub (1827-1904), a Swiss immigrant who served as mayor of Knoxville during the 1870s and 80s, as well as U.S. Consul to Switzerland. The elder Staub built Knoxville's first opera house (Staub's Theatre) in 1872. See Robert Parkinson, "Peter Staub," *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=1259, accessed 14 December 2011.

Florida; Birmingham, Mobile, Montgomery, and Selma, Alabama; and Chattanooga and Knoxville, Tennessee.

Rather than combinations formed for the purpose of pooling profits, these circuits were associations organized primarily to influence business practices. They could send one manager to New York who would work with booking agents to supply an entire season of shows to every theatre in the circuit. However, the group could also use its influence against a particular member if that manager violated the rules of the organization, such as building more than one theatre in any particular city, as mentioned above. The organization saw this action as counterproductive, given the size of southern cities and their theatre-going publics, and what hurt one city in the group would hurt them all. Traveling companies whose profits were slashed by the presence of more than one theatre in a town might decide not to make the arduous trek to the South again. Non-member cities such as Nashville and Memphis, where people not so knowledgeable about the business of theatre were responsible for instigating new building projects, were made examples of in the press for having overbuilt.[62] When Staub obtained the lease on the Grand Opera House in 1892, Memphis entered the established orbit of the Southern Circuit.

Because of the Southern Circuit's power to determine what would be seen in theatres across a wide region, there seems to have been some public concern even at this early stage about the Circuit's leanings toward monopoly. Interviewed in the *Atlanta Constitution* in January 1890, Jake Tannenbaum, routing-master of the Circuit and manager of the Mobile Theatre, denied that the organization was a monopoly, stating that it was formed "to protect the

---

[62] "Southern Circuit"; "One Is Enough"; "Theatre Managers," *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 May 1891.

companies and the persons who have money invested in theaters."[63] Three years later, Tannenbaum issued a more emphatic disclaimer due to what he perceived was a general misunderstanding about the Circuit's function, remarking, "A fair investigation will show that our organization benefits the public, the traveling companies, and ourselves alike."[64]

In spite of Tannenbaum's refutations, further consolidation and centralized power did appear to be on the horizon for southern theatres. For one thing, certain managers within the circuit, like Staub, seem to have been interested in expanding their territory. In 1892 Staub obtained leases on both the Grand Opera House in Memphis and the Vendome Theatre in Nashville, which, along with Staub's Theatre in Knoxville and the Chattanooga Opera House, gave him managerial control of the largest first-class playhouses in all of the largest cities in the state of Tennessee.[65]

Further, during the following year, Klaw and Erlanger began to solidify their presence in the South by diversifying their business. Not only did they provide bookings for the Southern Circuit, but they also began to lease theatres in major southern cities. The late David Bidwell had granted them a lease on his St. Charles Theatre in New Orleans at the same time that he helped them start the booking agency, and now his widow leased the other theatre she had inherited, the Academy of Music, to them. In addition, Klaw and Erlanger joined Staub as co-lessees at the Grand in Memphis and the Vendome in Nashville, and leased Macauley's Theatre in Louisville. The *Atlanta Constitution* interpreted this development to mean that "the best

---

[63] "Southern Circuit."

[64] "Theatre Managers."

[65] Grand Opera House Company Minute Book, 21 March 1892; *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 18 and 25 June 1892. When the leasehold and fixtures of the Lyceum Theatre were auctioned on June 9, 1892, Staub was present but apparently did not bid. See "The Sale of the Lyceum."

shows ever seen in the South will come next season."[66] An item in the *Washington Post* noted that "all the states south of Mason and Dixon's line, the imaginary boundary which Henry W. Grady said was fast disappearing, are experiencing something akin to a theatrical boom." Further, the author of this article put the situation in sectional terms evocative of the romantic reconciliation literature of the day (such as *Held by the Enemy*, *Shenandoah*, *Alabama*, et. al.): "As the South builds up and recuperates from the effects of the rebellion, she is inviting a more pleasing invasion which the theatrical managers of the North will lead."[67]

Despite their growing dominance, Klaw and Erlanger were not without strong competition on the southern portion of the Road. Throughout the 1890s, they had a major adversary in Henry Greenwall. A New Orleans native, Greenwall had by 1888 created a circuit of theatres in Texas and wrested control of the Grand Opera House in New Orleans from Bidwell, who had previously had command over all three of the major theatres in that city. According to Michael B. Leavitt, Greenwall's increasing power in the region—and particularly his attainment of the New Orleans Grand—was what caused Bidwell to sponsor the establishment of the Klaw and Erlanger booking agency; the intent was "to drive Greenwall out of business."[68] Such tactics did not work, however, and in 1893 Greenwall created his own New York booking office, the American Theatrical Exchange.

During that same year, as Klaw and Erlanger were beginning to lease theatres in the region, Greenwall began to expand his own influence, claiming in May that he had secured the

---

[66] "Mr. Erlanger's Mission," *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 February 1893.

[67] "Live Topics of the Stage," *Washington Post*, 25 June 1893.

[68] Michael B. Leavitt, *Fifty Years in Theatrical Management* (New York: Broadway Publishing Co., 1912), 565.

authority to book hundreds of theatres throughout the country.[69] His former stage manager and partner at the New Orleans Grand, Thomas J. Boyle, leased the Grand Opera House in Nashville and retained Greenwall as booking agent. John Mahoney, the manager of the Lyceum Theatre in Memphis, had also hired the American Theatrical Exchange to book the 1893-94 season before his theatre burned down in early November of 1893. A glance at some of the attractions that were to grace the stage in New Orleans, Nashville, and Memphis at theatres booked by Greenwall during this season would seem to indicate that at that particular point in time, he was providing serious competition to Klaw and Erlanger in terms of legitimate bookings in those cities. Stars to appear on the circuit in theatres booked by Greenwall included Coquelin of the Comédie-Française, Fanny Davenport, Nat Goodwin, Richard Mansfield, Helena Modjeska, and James O'Neill.[70] When the first Lyceum burned, the *Appeal-Avalanche* remarked that Mahoney had garnered universal sympathy for his loss because he had "booked for the present season the finest line of dramatic attractions that ever had agreed to appear in this city."[71] For the remainder of a season that was to have brought the rivalry between Klaw and Erlanger and the American Theatrical Exchange to Memphis for the first time, the former would operate without competition.

However, Mahoney was not to be cowed. Almost before the ashes of his theatre had stopped smoldering, the newspaper quoted him as saying:

> You have heard it stated that two theaters can't thrive in a city like Memphis, and to rebuild the Lyceum is suicide. Well, there are a few young men in this town who are going to commit suicide if this be true, but aside from that, the Lyceum

---

[69] New Orleans *Times-Democrat*, 21 May 1893, quoted in Claudia Anne Beach, "Henry Greenwall: Theatre Manager" (Ph.D. diss., Texas Tech University, 1986), 143.

[70] Beach, 144-46; Lewis Smith Maiden, "A Chronicle of the Theater in Nashville, Tennessee, 1876-1900" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1955), 509-19; "The Past Week's Productions," *Memphis Appeal-Avalanche*, 12 November 1893.

[71] "Lyceum Now in Ashes."

> made money last year, it made money the year before, and broke about even the year previous to that, and when rebuilt will make money again. We have got the attractions, and we will "hit 'em hard."[72]

Clearly, Mahoney was confident in the potential of his relationship with Greenwall's company and its ability to beat the competition, fire or no fire.

From the time that the new Lyceum opened in the fall of 1894, it and the Grand Opera House shared the best bookings. For example, in 1894-95, the Grand Opera House presented Hoyt's very popular musical comedies, *A Trip to Chinatown* and *A Texas Steer*, Charles Frohman's company in *Charley's Aunt*, and starring engagements by Joseph Jefferson, Lillie Langtry, romantic actors Frederick Warde and Louis James in a repertory of Shakespeare, Rose Coghlan, Effie Ellsler, and Alexander Salvini, among others; whereas actors such as Marie Wainwright, Robert Mantell, Nat Goodwin (in Thomas's *In Mizzoura*), Richard Mansfield, James O'Neill, and popular musical star Thomas Q. Seabrooke appeared onstage at the Lyceum. The following season showed a relatively similar breakdown in terms of engagements between the two theatres, with the notable additions of one-night-stand performances—within a week of each other—by Minnie Fiske in her husband's *The Queen of Liars* at the Lyceum, and Henry Irving and Ellen Terry in *The Merchant of Venice* at the Grand.[73]

Greenwall was also beginning to make his presence felt in other southern cities, building his own version of the Road. For nearly twenty-five years, legitimate theatre in Atlanta had been controlled by Laurent DeGive, who had built an opera house there in 1870 and was president of the Southern Circuit.[74] In 1893 DeGive built a new, larger Grand Opera House in Atlanta, and the following year he granted exclusive booking rights to Klaw and Erlanger, as had all of the

---

[72] "The New Lyceum Theatre," *Appeal-Avalanche*, 11 November 1893.
[73] Grand Opera House Box Office Statement Book, 5 November 1894-14 March 1896; Powell, 232-44.
[74] A native of Belgium, DeGive also served as Atlanta's Belgian Consul.

other managers in the Southern Circuit by this time. Greenwall, who stated in the press that he had hoped DeGive would be able to remain neutral in what he characterized as his war with Klaw and Erlanger, announced plans to build a New Lyceum Theatre in Atlanta. He explained that the root of the regional conflict was to be found in the New Orleans rivalry. In order to entice the best traveling companies to make the long trek from New York to New Orleans, he had to be able to provide them with lucrative stops in major cities and numerous towns along the way. By proposing to build a theatre in Atlanta, the missing link in his chain, Greenwall argued that he was acting in self-defense.[75]

In his own defense, DeGive stated that his contract with Klaw and Erlanger did not shut Greenwall out of the Atlanta Grand entirely since there was, at least at this point, a modicum of flexibility in it. However, Greenwall would not be able to advertise the Grand as under the control of the American Theatrical Exchange. Moreover, DeGive said that he had been forced to sign with Klaw and Erlanger not only because every other manager in the Southern Circuit had already signed with them, but also because they had threatened to build a competing new theatre in Atlanta in time for the opening of the World's Fair there in 1895 if he did not.[76]

Over the next few years, the conflict continued between Klaw and Erlanger and Greenwall's American Theatrical Exchange over the southern portion of the Road. Just a few days after the announcement of Greenwall's new theatre in Atlanta, it was revealed that he had also bought the Savannah Theatre in order to complete his southern circuit. Within two weeks, Klaw and Erlanger announced plans to build in Savannah.[77] In Nashville, the latter company had relinquished their contract on the Vendome due to high rent and disagreements over free boxes

---

[75] "Another Theater," *Atlanta Constitution*, 2 October 1894.

[76] "Mr. D'Give's Side," *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 October 1894.

[77] "Bought the Savannah Theater," *Atlanta Constitution*, 5 October 1894; "The New Circuit," *Atlanta Constitution*, 6 October 1894; Joe Ohl, "The Man in Front," *Atlanta Constitution*, 14 October 1894.

for stockholders of the theatre. Greenwall immediately took up the lease, giving him control of two theatres, the Grand and the Vendome, in that city. Again, less than two weeks later, Klaw and Erlanger secured the New Masonic, a popular-priced theatre, in order to maintain their foothold in Nashville. In Memphis, Klaw and Erlanger remained on the lease of the Grand along with Staub. Simultaneously with his takeover of the Vendome, and two days after the opening of his New Lyceum Theatre in Atlanta in 1895, Greenwall became co-lessee of the New Lyceum in Memphis.[78]

It appears that at least some theatre-goers in the southern cities along the competing circuits enjoyed being fought over, believing that the conflict would draw the best attractions to the region. In Charleston, the press virtually beckoned the rivals, speculating that the fight would certainly be brought there because of the city's strategic location, and declaring that it was "scarcely probable that either of the combinations will be content to see the other with a monopoly of the business here."[79]

Rivalries among southern cities themselves also seemed to continue with regard to happenings in the theatre: although Greenwall had made no statement of the kind, the *Atlanta Constitution* gloated that it was understood he was to give up the Lyceum Theatre in Memphis because that city was "an exceedingly poor show town."[80] According to a later report in the *Commercial Appeal* that would seem to confirm this remark, however, Greenwall did relinquish the lease on the Memphis Lyceum after one season.[81] Management reverted to the Lyceum

---

[78] *New York Clipper*, 16 March 1895; "The Theater War," *Atlanta Constitution* 26 March 1895; New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, 5 May 1895, quoted in Beach, 159; *Nashville Evening Herald*, 9 May 1895, quoted in Maiden, 557.

[79] *Charleston News and Courier*, 20 October 1894, quoted in *Daily Picayune*, 21 October 1894, quoted in Beach, 152; Ohl, "The Man in Front."

[80] "Talk of Politics and Other Matters," *Atlanta Constitution*, 2 May 1896.

[81] "Lyceum Building Sold at Auction," *Commercial Appeal*, 24 June 1906.

Theatre Company, with Mahoney as acting manager. Still, Greenwall continued to provide bookings for the theatre, and his associate, Thomas J. Boyle, would soon replace Mahoney there.

By the end of 1896, Klaw and Erlanger had joined the Syndicate, greatly increasing their power on a national scale, and Fiske had begun his campaign against the conglomerate in the *New York Dramatic Mirror*, of which he was editor. In November of the following year, Fiske began a new section of his paper entitled the "Theatrical 'Trust' Supplement," in which he drummed up responses against the Syndicate from artists, theatre managers, and members of the press from all around the U.S. Drawing on the already-existing fear of corporate monopolies that gripped the country, Fiske detailed the transgressions of the Syndicate and recruited advocates for its demise. An Atlanta journalist contended that the South was the region most affected by the monopoly. In the new national scheme with suppressed competition, the journalist argued, southern managers were the ones most likely to be stuck with inferior attractions or broken contracts if the Syndicate deemed such actions beneficial to their own pockets. The Memphis *Commercial Appeal* was also among those listed under "Newspapers Opposed to the Theatre Trust" in the *Dramatic Mirror*.[82]

This backlash against the Syndicate appears to have had at least some effect in the South. In January 1898, after almost five years of control over both the St. Charles Theatre and the Academy of Music in New Orleans, Klaw and Erlanger lost their leases on both theatres to John D. Hopkins, a Chicago-based theatre manager, vaudeville impresario, and friend of Greenwall's. Hopkins and Greenwall now had the management of all three of the major theatres in New Orleans. In a proclamation strangely reminiscent of Civil War emancipation, a headline in the

---

[82] "The South Affected" (quoting the *Atlanta World*, 12 December 1897) and "Newspapers Opposed to the Theatre Trust," *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 25 December 1897.

Dramatic Mirror with boldface letters an inch high announced that "The South is Now Free!"[83] Further, items in the press pointed out that since Greenwall now had control over all theatrical bookings in New Orleans—the ultimate destination city of any southern tour—the American Theatrical Exchange would dominate the South.

In reality, however, the Syndicate's power was far from broken. They still controlled most of the one-night stands between major cities in the South, which was the real key to domination of the Road. In addition, after a short rebellion among prominent actors led by the Fiskes, they had by this time lured the majority of the most popular legitimate theatre artists into their camp. True to form, the Syndicate also purchased land formerly used by Tulane University on which to build not just one but two new theatres in New Orleans in order to compete with Greenwall and Hopkins. These theatres, the Crescent and the Tulane, opened in the fall of 1898. It would appear that by this time they had also regained control of the Vendome Theatre in Nashville.[84]

During that same year, Hopkins also took over management of the Memphis Lyceum and placed Boyle in charge there. Having managed theatres in Chicago for several years, along with more recently acquired theatres in St. Louis, Louisville, and Pittsburgh as part of his own circuit, Hopkins was a major force in the vaudeville arena. Like Benjamin F. Keith and Edward F. Albee in the northeast, he introduced continuous vaudeville—variety shows running up to twelve hours with individual acts repeating two or three times a day—in order to accommodate the leisure time of all classes of people. He also brought legitimate stars to the vaudeville stage to

---

[83] *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 29 January 1898.

[84] "Wedge into the Trust's Southern Circuit," *Atlanta Constitution*, 24 January 1898; "Greenwall Holds the Key to the South," *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 29 January 1898; "Theater Row in New Orleans," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 31 January 1898. The Vendome is listed as a Syndicate theatre in the 1898 edition of *Julius Cahn's Official Theatrical Guide, Volume 3* (New York: Julius Cahn, 1898), 734.

appeal to higher-class audiences. These experiments had paid off well. Moreover, he had recently been at the forefront of the creation of the Western Circuit of Vaudeville Theatres, a combination that signaled the beginning of the syndication of "big-time" vaudeville, which will be discussed further in Chapter Five. His association with Greenwall brought Hopkins into the South, and his entrance into Memphis marked the beginning of a new phase of theatre in the city—one that brought the Roads of legitimate theatre and vaudeville into alignment there.[85]

In order to compete with the Syndicate, who still controlled the Grand Opera House in Memphis, Hopkins decided to do what other managers around the country were also doing for this purpose—install a stock company. Regarding this new movement which revived an old theatrical tradition, an editorial in the *Dramatic Mirror* extolled the virtues of local stock companies over the touring musical and spectacular shows offered by the Syndicate, arguing that such companies provided "a check on the theatrical speculators, efficient enough to make it impossible for them to gain complete control of the American stage, and to force them, for their pockets' sake, to show some respect for the rights of the drama and of the drama-loving public."[86] Echoing the claims of those who supported other local businesses against the onslaught of mushrooming corporations, the writer of this piece also declared that any smaller city would be better off having even an average stock company than relying solely on the offerings of the Syndicate because of the consistency in acting afforded by a resident company.

Greenwall and Hopkins, members of corporations but nonetheless underdogs at this point—at least in the legitimate field—took heed. In New Orleans, Greenwall established a

---

[85] "Continuous Vaudeville Bills," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 31 March 1895; Robert Grau, *Forty Years Observation of Music and the Drama* (New York: Broadway Publishing Company, 1909), 38; *Commercial Appeal*, 31 August 1898. A continuous vaudeville and stock company had come through Memphis in May 1895 and played at the Grand Opera House; it is possible that the company was one managed by Hopkins. See *Commercial Appeal*, 2 May 1895.

[86] "Stock Companies Here to Stay," *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 25 December 1897.

stock company at the Grand Opera House, and Hopkins did the same at the St. Charles Theatre. Since he had also gained control of the Grand Opera House in Nashville, Hopkins put in a stock company there as well.

In Memphis, the Hopkins Stock Company was to perform two shows a day at the Lyceum, every day except Sunday, with vaudeville turns between the acts of the play. Popular plays were to be performed by a resident company, and vaudeville would be performed by traveling "specialty acts" from the national and international vaudeville scene. The stock repertoire consisted of popular contemporary melodramas and comedies such as Bronson Howard's *Young Mrs. Winthrop*, *The Banker's Daughter*, and *Aristocracy*; Steele MacKaye's *Hazel Kirke* and *In Spite of All*; Henry Arthur Jones's *The Silver King* and *Saints and Sinners*; Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *Esmeralda* (the latter written with William Gillette); David Belasco's *May Blossom*; Augustus Thomas's *Alabama* (still a perennial favorite); Dion Boucicault's *Led Astray*; Bartley Campbell's *Fate*; Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windemere's Fan*; English-language versions of Victorien Sardou's *Madame Sans-Gêne* and *Diplomacy*, Octave Feuillet's *A Parisian Romance*, and Adolphe d'Ennery's *The Two Orphans*—and, of course, *East Lynne*.[87]

Traveling vaudeville offerings were to include, among others, Hopkins's Trans-Oceanic Specialty Company; the Elinore Sisters, a comic team; Henry E. Dixie with his magic and Adonis acts; Papinta, the flame-dancer; Almont and Dumont, a trumpet and trombone act; singers Eckert and Berg; Alice Atherton "in her ragtime specialty"; the Three Avolos, acrobats; Imogene Comer, "the best known character artist on the vaudeville stage"; Baby Lund, a popular child performer; Sadi Alfarabi, equilibrist; George ("Honey Boy") Evans, a well-known

---

[87] Powell, 255-56.

blackface minstrel performer; the American Biograph Company, showing moving picture scenes of the Battle of Santiago during the Spanish-American War and the destruction of the Maine and Vizcaya battleships; and Baron's "celebrated dogs."[88]

Since variety theatre had had a relatively sordid history in Memphis up to the time that Hopkins brought it to the Lyceum, the city needed some reassuring about the new stock-and-vaudeville venture. The newspaper appealed to the urban aspirations of citizens by pointing out that the notion of the variety show's identification with "concert halls, circuses, and cheap dives" was an outdated one and that "in the large cities the continuous show and the vaudeville have usurped the place of the regular theater." Further, with the Grand Opera House showing Klaw and Erlanger's road shows and the Lyceum giving stock and vaudeville, there would be no need for rivalry. To the question of whether Memphis was an advanced enough city for such a scheme to prosper, Hopkins reassured the public, stating that the city was "metropolitan in its theatrical taste and can be operated theatrically on the same principle that has succeeded in much larger cities." Finally, to emphasize the importance of the nationally renowned vaudeville artists on tap for the coming season, the newspaper report stated that some might be surprised that such artists would "wonder [*sic*] so far from their native fields as to visit this city," but that Hopkins's entrance into Memphis was part of his plan to "gain a foothold in the South."[89]

Despite a rocky start due to an October quarantine in the city because of yellow fever in New Orleans, the stock and vaudeville venture was a success, and by the spring of 1899 it appeared that Hopkins was going to have his own local monopoly on theatre in Memphis. In addition to the Lyceum, he was also able to prise the lease on the Grand Opera House away from Klaw and Erlanger. He announced that he intended to run one theatre as a house for traveling

---

[88] *Commercial Appeal*, 31 August 1898.
[89] Ibid.

combinations while continuing the resident stock and touring vaudeville scheme at the other. The *Commercial Appeal* noted that Klaw and Erlanger appeared to have "passed from the field." Surprising Benjamin Stainback, the manager at the popular-priced Auditorium (to be discussed in Chapter Five), Hopkins even intimated that he had plans to take over that theatre as well. With no other major theatres remaining, the paper remarked that "unless some contract is given up, there will be a very poor chance of Klaw and Erlanger having a foothold unless they build."[90]

Why was Hopkins suddenly so focused on Memphis? One reason may have been that things had fallen apart in New Orleans. The Syndicate's new Tulane and Crescent Theatres there were hosting the cream of the crop with regard to legitimate theatre while Greenwall and Hopkins struggled to run stock companies at the city's three older theatres. By the end of 1898, Greenwall was all but finished in New Orleans, and Hopkins had been forced to close the Academy of Music and reopen it as a strictly vaudeville house. Strangely, on June 4, 1899, both the St. Charles Theatre and the Academy of Music in New Orleans were discovered to be on fire. Arson was, of course, suspected, but never proven. The St. Charles was completely destroyed, and although the Academy was only slightly damaged, Hopkins decided not to continue his lease there.[91] Perhaps the potential for Memphis to be ranked as the largest city in the South outside of New Orleans in the 1900 census, made clear by the city's moves toward the annexation of a very large portion of its suburbs, also had a bearing on Hopkins's desire to concentrate his efforts in that city.

Hopkins's monopoly on theatre in Memphis appears to have been very short-lived, however. The deal with the Auditorium (which may have been a bluff all along) never came

---

[90] "Theatrical Change," *Commercial Appeal*, 8 April 1899.

[91] Beach, 188; John S. Kendall, *The Golden Age of the New Orleans Theater* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), 575-76.

through, and in the fall of 1899, the Hopkins Stock Company moved over to the Grand Opera House, where Klaw and Erlanger had previously been in control. Further, although this writer was not able to find any direct announcement of Klaw and Erlanger's re-entry into the city, shows presented at the Lyceum during the 1899-1900 season, including several productions by Charles Frohman and others starring Richard Mansfield and James O'Neill—who had gone over to the Syndicate by that time—would seem to indicate that the Syndicate was now in control of bookings at that theatre.

Why did this switch in theatrical affiliations occur? One reason may have been the centralizing of the city's elite businesses near Court Square and the changing nature of Beale Street. Several years prior, when Greenwall had had some power in terms of top-notch bookings, the newer, more centrally located Lyceum had become the place where the white elite of Memphis could be found in the "golden horseshoe" of mezzanine boxes there as they watched Mansfield, O'Neill, et. al. Meanwhile, in 1896 the Auditorium, just one block down and across Main Street from the Grand Opera House, was converted into a popular-priced theatre that was the primary domain of a lower-class audience including a large number of African Americans. As the end of the century neared, the name of Beale Street itself was more and more becoming known as African American territory in the city. The proximity of black Beale, along with the Auditorium and its clientele, may have kept some of the white carriage trade from returning to the Grand Opera House, even as the Syndicate claimed all the best bookings.[92]

When Hopkins entered the scene and put in a stock company at the Lyceum, he lowered ticket prices there to ten, twenty, and thirty cents, whereas prices at the Grand Opera House remained at twenty-five, thirty-five, and fifty. Despite the lower prices, the Lyceum appears to

---

[92] A similar race-prejudice situation with regard to a theatre's location appears to have occurred in Atlanta around this time. See "A Big Damage Suit," *Atlanta Constitution*, 8 April 1895.

have remained the favored theatre of the European American elite. Very soon after it was announced that Hopkins would have control of both theatres, a group of businessmen proposed a summer season of opera in order to "aid in bringing Memphis to the front as a progressive and up-to-date business center," among other things.[93] Given a choice between two theatres controlled by the same person, the businessmen selected the Lyceum and requested Hopkins to provide them with the house and a reputable opera company for the summer.

Finally, Hopkins had been involved in a legal dispute with two of the former members of the stock company in Memphis. Near the beginning of the season, the leading lady, Jessaline Rogers, and her husband, Frederick Bock, the stage manager of the company, had been summarily fired by Hopkins's representative, Charles P. Elliott, because of a dispute that he had had with Rogers. The couple brought suit against the Lyceum Theatre Company and Hopkins for payment of the entire season's salary because they were not given two weeks' notice of dismissal. The Shelby County Circuit Court found in the couple's favor, and on appeal the Tennessee Supreme Court affirmed, leaving Hopkins with a hefty bill of $3,750.[94]

Though this amount was perhaps not extremely significant to a person who was one of the leaders of a national chain of theatres, the case was very conspicuous within the theatrical profession nationwide. The *New York Dramatic Mirror* emphasized its importance, noting that the Tennessee Supreme Court had declared that a manager's abuse of an actor was grounds for a claim of breach of contract. By this decision, "the 'two weeks' notice' clause is practically annulled, and abusive language and ill treatment on the part of the employer or his representative are held to justify the employe [*sic*] in leaving." This embarrassing lawsuit may have had something to do with Hopkins's leaving off (or losing) his contract on the Lyceum, and may also

---

[93] "For Summer Opera," *Commercial Appeal*, 10 May 1899.
[94] "Cash of Col. Hopkins," *Commercial Appeal*, 1 June 1899.

have been one reason that he incorporated the Hopkins Amusement Company some time during the following year, to guard against personal liability.[95] Here was a case of an incident in the local theatre scene that rippled through the larger industry, rather than the other way around, as most often occurred.

At any rate, the location swap was made. Until the Road began to decline during the 1910s, the Lyceum would remain the premiere legitimate stage of Memphis, primarily as a Syndicate house. As the years went on and the Shuberts entered the picture, local managerial agency was more and more proscribed by the wrangling of these two national corporations. For the next several years after the turn of the century, Hopkins' Grand Opera House (billed as such, with the manager's name attached) would offer stock and vaudeville. The stories of the Grand Opera House and the Lyceum will be taken up again in Chapter Five, in association with major changes in the Memphis theatre scene.

* * *

Other groups in the city besides the white elite were also striving to build new worldviews and ways of life in the post-Reconstruction urban South, and they were using the creation of theatres to do so. African, Irish, and Italian Americans opened new theatres to serve the large African American population of the city. These theatres, too, would come under the influence of the regional and national combinations that controlled the Road. This is the subject of the next chapter.

---

[95] "An Important Decision," *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 8 July 1899. I have not been able to find any reference to the Hopkins Amusement Company before 1900.

CHAPTER FOUR

FROM BUZZARD ROOST TO BEALE STREET: AFRICAN AMERICAN THEATRES

On February 9, 1901, the following item appeared in the *Indianapolis Freeman*, a national African American weekly, contributed by a Memphis correspondent to the paper:

> It seems that the white people do not appreciate our theater patronage by this action. Miss Dressler, doing a turn with two young colored boys at the Auditorium, was forced to leave them off. We wish a gallows was at the buzzard entrance of every theater and every fool Negro who continues to force himself where he is not wanted was hung by the neck until he ceased to breathe.[1]

Coming from an African American journalist in an age of lynch-mob hysteria, this quote might seem shocking. However, it is an indication of one of many viewpoints within the Memphis black community concerning the position of African Americans in U.S., southern, and local society, the maintenance and disruption of the color line, and participation in and creation of cultural activities such as theatre.

Since the Civil War, African Americans have always made up a large portion of the population of Memphis. Throughout the period under study, the city had a greater proportion of blacks in its total population than any other city in the United States.[2] By the 1880s, a complex network of black neighborhoods, schools, churches, businesses, fraternal orders, social clubs, political associations, cultural organizations, and newspapers had developed in the city. In

---

[1] "Doings at Memphis," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 09 February 1901.

[2] The U.S. Census Bureau reported that Memphis was the city with the largest proportion of blacks in both 1900 (48.8 percent) and 1910 (40 percent). *Statistical Atlas of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1914), 38. O.F. Vedder had also made this claim in 1888; see J.M. Keating and O.F. Vedder, *History of the City of Memphis, Tennessee*, 2 vols. (Syracuse, NY: D. Mason & Co., 1888), 2:62. By 1920, at the outset of the Great Migration, the proportion of African Americans in the city had fallen a bit; however, the *number* of African Americans in the city increased more between 1910 and 1920 than between 1900 and 1910. See Henderson H. Donald, "The Negro Migration of 1916-1918," *Journal of Negro History* 6, no. 4 (October 1921): 477.

addition, unlike those in other parts of the South during this period, African Americans in Memphis voted, for the most part, and, until 1890, held municipal office.

With such a large population, African American society in Memphis was very diverse in terms of the differences within the community, based on class, social background, politics, and education, among other things. There were upper-class, free people of color who had resided in the city since before the Civil War—some of whom, after the devastating race riot in 1866, had suggested that newly freed slaves in the city should be sent back to their old plantations in order to avoid conflict. There were middle-class businesspeople and professionals—some former slaves and some second-generation freed people, many of whom espoused the accommodationist stance of Booker T. Washington, accepting "separate but equal" in order to maintain and develop financial stability. And then there were the vast waves of rural migrants—poor blacks from hinterland farms who, like their white counterparts, found their way to the city in search of a better, more exciting life. In a place like Memphis, these working-class African Americans could, as Robin D.G. Kelley has remarked, create a "social space free from the watchful eye of white authority or, in a few cases, the moralizing of the black middle class."[3]

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, as it became apparent that Reconstruction had failed with regard to race relations, upper- and middle-class African Americans attempted to

---

[3] Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 36. On African Americans in Memphis during this period, see Christopher Caplinger, "Conflict and Community: Racial Segregation in a New South City, 1860-1914" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 2003); Roberta Church and Ronald Walter, *Nineteenth-Century Memphis Families of Color, 1850-1900* (Memphis: Church-Walter, 1987); Dernoral Davis, "Against the Odds: Postbellum Growth and Development in a Southern Black Urban Community, 1865-1900" (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Binghamton, 1987); Kenneth W. Goings and Gerald L. Smith, "Duty of the Hour: African American Communities in Memphis, 1862-1923," in *Trial and Triumph: Essays in Tennessee's African American History*, ed. Carroll Van West (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 227-43, and "'Unhidden Transcripts': Memphis and African American Agency, 1862-1920," *Journal of Urban History* 21, no. 3 (March 1995): 372-94; Earnestine Jenkins, *African Americans in Memphis* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2009); Lester C. Lamon, *Black Tennesseans, 1900-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977); Gloria Brown Melton, "Blacks in Memphis, Tennessee, 1920-1955: A Historical Study" (Ph.D. diss., Washington State University, 1982); and David M. Tucker, *Lieutenant Lee of Beale Street* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1971).

set themselves apart as "respectable" from those blacks they deemed not so; but they also felt a responsibility to advocate for the rights of all African Americans and to lead the race forward.[4] The "talented tenth" of Memphis—those educated elites who saw it as their duty to, as W.E.B. DuBois had put it, "save" the race—included the Church, Settle, and Hooks families, among others.[5] These families had social and familial ties with upper-class blacks throughout the country, especially in Washington, DC, which was the "capital of the colored aristocracy," according to Willard B. Gatewood.[6] They sent their children to northern schools and married mostly within their own ranks. The upwardly mobile black middle class in Memphis included proprietors of service industry businesses—hack and dray (transportation and transfer) companies, restaurants, saloons, and barbershops, among others—as well as clergymen, physicians, and attorneys. Likewise concerned with education as a means of social uplift but often unable to afford the luxury of sending their children to more prestigious northern schools, they advocated for improvements at home.

These two groups did have their differences. Several members of the upper class, such as Robert Church and Josiah T. Settle, were light-skinned people of mixed ancestry who prided themselves on their European and African roots and continued to seek acceptance as first-class citizens from whites. Gatewood points out that aristocrats of color who "clung to the idea of 'amalgamation' or integration into the larger society…tended to place greater social distance

[4] Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 23.

[5] W.E.B. DuBois, "The Talented Tenth," in *The Negro Problem*, ed. Booker T. Washington (New York: James Pott and Company, 1903), 33.

[6] Gatewood, 38. In 1891, Robert Church's daughter Mary married Robert H. Terrell, the first black municipal court judge in Washington, DC, and became a well known public figure there. Twenty years later his son, Robert Church, Jr., married Sarah Johnson, a prominent Washington socialite. Their wedding was presided over by Francis Grimké, the uncle of Angelina Weld Grimké, a playwright often credited with starting a trend of anti-lynching works with her play *Rachel* (1916). Church and Walter, 90-93; "Church-Johnson Wedding," *New York Age*, 3 August 1911.

between themselves and the masses in the hope of achieving amalgamation on an individual basis."[7]

At times they were accused of racial treason because of their affinity for mixing with whites. When Church contributed $1,000 to the Reunion of Confederate Veterans convention fund in 1901, he was taken to task in the *Indianapolis Freedman* for this action. The Memphis journalist quoted above remarked (within the same article as the passage quoted) that Church had "given money to a class of people who could make a brush heap of the same kind of matter and burn him." Rather than giving his money to such people, the *Freeman* correspondent suggested that Church could have better spent the funds by supporting the indigent elderly and orphans of the black community.[8]

Some middle-class African Americans openly advocated for racial purity. According to Lester C. Lamon, the *Nashville Globe*, which served as the strongest voice of the black middle class in Tennessee, demanded equal rights and access but accepted separation of the races. The editors of this newspaper viewed interracial unions as detrimental to black pride and unity. For example, having praised African American boxer Jack Johnson for his win over "Great White Hope" Jim Jeffries in 1910, the *Globe* excoriated Johnson just two years later for his relationships with white women.[9]

Despite their differences, both of these groups were, for the most part, strong adherents to Washington's philosophy of subordination, solidarity, and self-help as a means to advancement in the New South. As individual members of the white male business class had been praised as exemplary in biographical sketches published in books and newspapers, so were members of the

---

[7] Gatewood, 24.
[8] "Doings at Memphis."
[9] Lamon, 16-17.

black male elite and middle class. In Memphis, G.P. Hamilton, the principal of Kortrecht (later Booker T. Washington) High School, the city's first black public high school, wrote books like *The Bright Side of Memphis* and *Beacon Lights of the Race* in order to set examples and provide inspiration for the black youth of Memphis.[10]

The majority of African Americans in Memphis at the turn of the century, however, were rural migrants. Having endured grinding poverty as sharecroppers and farm laborers in the Delta region, they made their way to the city and found work primarily as unskilled laborers and domestic servants, although some found entrance into semi-skilled and skilled trades. Many remained tied to the Delta, living a transient existence between picking cotton during the harvest season and returning to the city for whatever work they could find at other times of the year.[11] The city also offered enticements that could be found nowhere near the farms: a vibrant African American social scene and thrilling entertainments of all sorts.

Urban life for rural migrants was not easy by any means, and many found themselves no better off in the city than they had been on the farms. Like their counterparts in the black upper and middle classes, they struggled to maintain their personal dignity against the ever-growing force of white supremacy—although their efforts were more likely to be misinterpreted or, more often, to go unnoticed. However, as Kelley has pointed out, these "daily acts of resistance and survival" such as occurred in the guise of "conversations, folklore, jokes, songs, and other cultural practices," or even "theft, footdragging, [and] the destruction of property," accumulated into a "dissident political culture" that had "consequences for existing power relations."[12] Under

---

[10] G.P. Hamilton, *The Bright Side of Memphis* (Memphis: G.P. Hamilton, 1908) and *Beacon Lights of the Race* (Memphis: E.H. Clarke and Brother, 1911).

[11] For a thorough breakdown of African American labor in Memphis during this period, see Melton, 24-29.

[12] Robin D.G. Kelley, "'We Are Not What We Seem': Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South," *Journal of American History* 80, no. 1 (June 1993): 77-78.

moral, economic, prejudicial, and physical pressure and competition from all sides, black migrants' responses to each other were often violent. But on Beale Street, they found and helped create an urban space that embodied a unique way of modern African American life and culture in the U.S. It was the experiences of these people in particular that comprised the joy and suffering sung about in the music that would come to be called the blues.

Thus, African American society in the New South city of Memphis was multifaceted in terms of backgrounds and worldviews but united in its desire to make the city a place where black culture and politics could achieve significance and respect. The city as a whole, however, was a community more and more divided along racial lines during the three decades under investigation here. This tendency was most apparent in the increase of Jim Crow legislation and racial violence, and in black resistance to both.

Before the 1880s, segregation in public facilities, including theatres, was mostly handled on a de facto basis. Christopher Caplinger states that at this time "there was little need to codify the vast majority of these customs."[13] After a federal Civil Rights Act was passed in 1875, southern whites complained adamantly, focusing on the rights of property owners to dictate how their property was to be used, or claiming that the rights of citizenship did not require recognition of social equality. Caplinger also remarks that white male opponents of civil rights argued for the necessity of separation in order to protect white women from black men.[14] Within a month of the passage of the federal act, the Tennessee legislature "enacted its own law abolishing the state common law right of equal access to public accommodations and transportation," as Kenneth Mack has pointed out. Although this law could not negate the

---

[13] Caplinger, 104.

[14] Caplinger, 106-7. This viewpoint continued a longstanding appeal to the mythical opposition of the purity of the southern white woman and the sexual prowess of the black male.

provisions of the Civil Rights Act, "it could remove any parallel rights that [Tennessee's] black citizens might enjoy under state law."[15] At any rate, violations of the federal law, which was unenforced in the majority of cases, were rampant.

According to Lamon, beginning in 1881, "the Tennessee legislature determined that mores and prejudices alone would not provide the needed racial distinctions within the state's social, economic, and political institutions."[16] In this year, Tennessee became one of the first states in the South to pass a Jim Crow law, which provided for segregated first-class accommodations on railroad cars.[17] During the following decades, legal codification of existing spatial practices proliferated. Moreover, federal support eroded, as the Civil Rights Act was repealed in 1883, and in 1896, the Supreme Court decision in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation. By 1901, a state law had been passed which forced Maryville College, one of the last bastions of integrated education in Tennessee, to segregate. Four years later, a law was passed that segregated passengers on streetcars throughout the state. Lamon remarks that for several years before the law was passed, white Memphians had presented the state's loudest complaints about having to share public conveyances with black citizens.[18] Further, signs began to appear in public spaces everywhere that indicated separate facilities for white and black citizens and patrons, further encrypting and solidifying a color line which had once been more tacit and hazy.

---

[15] Kenneth W. Mack, "Law, Society, Identity, and the Making of the Jim Crow South: Travel and Segregation on Tennessee Railroads, 1875-1905," *Law & Social Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 384. See also Stanley J. Folmsbee, "The Origin of the First 'Jim Crow' Law," *The Journal of Southern History* 15, no. 2 (May 1949): 236-37, and Joseph H. Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow: Tennessee Race Relations in the 1880s* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976), 102.

[16] Lamon, 2.

[17] Folmsbee, Cartwright, and Mack argue against the often cited claim that this law was the first Jim Crow law in the South, since the law was intended to require railroad companies to provide equal first-class accommodations for African Americans, as opposed to charging them first-class fares and relegating them to second-class cars. See Folmsbee, 239-40; Cartwright, 102-8; Mack, 384.

[18] Lamon, 20.

These legislative actions did not go unchallenged. One early test of the new laws came from Ida B. Wells, who sued a railroad company after being physically ejected from a car for white people in 1883.[19] Organized protest rallies and boycotts occurred all over the state of Tennessee in 1905 when segregation was extended to the streetcars, although in Memphis such resistance was confined to the courtrooms rather than the streets.

Resistance also occurred at the theatre in Memphis. In Chapter Two, I described the efforts of three African American men to test the local validity of the new Civil Rights Act by attempting to sit in the dress circle of the New Memphis Theatre rather than being consigned to the gallery. In addition, I mentioned Julia Hooks's similar protest several years later. Her actions may also have been provoked by coincident legal activity. In March of 1881, a month before the segregation of first-class railroad cars was legalized by Tennessee statute, the four African American members of the General Assembly introduced a bill to repeal the 1875 state law that had attempted to undercut the Civil Rights Act. Between the time of this bill's first defeat and its reconsideration and second defeat at the end of the month, Julia Hooks made her stand at the New Memphis Theatre. Perhaps her protest was inspired in some way by the actions of these four legislators, who submitted their own protest at the defeat of their bill, declaring that "while four hundred thousand people of the State of Tennessee are citizens *de jure*…they are aliens *de facto*, and entitled to no rights that railroads, hotels, and theaters are bound to respect."[20]

Such demands for rights and access were often met with violence meant to intimidate African Americans into subservience and submission. Although Hooks may have received

---

[19] On this incident, see Paula J. Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 60-68.

[20] Folmsbee, 238-39. The legislators were T.F. Cassels, I.F. Norris, T.A. Sykes, and J.W. Boyd.

slightly gentler treatment because of her class and gender, one of the men who protested at the New Memphis was thrown down the stairs, as mentioned previously. Police brutality was widespread, and homicide laws were rarely enforced except against blacks, who were executed at well-attended public hangings almost yearly. In 1908, a violent European American criminal with a long record of homicides (but no convictions) entered an African American saloon on Beale Street and opened fire on its patrons, killing four and wounding several more. He was acquitted by an all-white jury and, sadly, even lauded by some white citizens as something of a folk hero in the city.[21]

Of course, the most frequent, heinous, and high-profile violence towards blacks during this period in the South came in the form of lynchings, which peaked during the 1890s. Within three years during the early part of the decade, three incidents occurred near Memphis where angry white mobs abducted and killed several black men who had been incarcerated on baseless or flagrantly exaggerated charges. After a period of relative peace in the 1910s, violence again exploded in 1917, when a black man named Ell Persons was convicted without adequate evidence of raping and murdering a white girl, Antoinette Rappel. The *Commercial Appeal* printed the story in a piece that read almost like a theatrical announcement, letting potential audience members know when and where the lynching was to take place. In a carnival-like atmosphere, Persons was tied to a post, doused with gasoline, and burned alive. Some of his charred remains were then scattered on Beale Street and thrown at African American passers-by in the area.[22]

---

[21] William D. Miller, *Memphis During the Progressive Era, 1900-1917* (Madison, WI: American History Research Center, 1957), 19-20.

[22] The lynchings of the early 1890s are described and chastised in the anonymously authored and published *Shelby County's Shame* (1895). The first of these incidents, surrounding the proprietors of the People's Grocery, and the reaction of Ida B. Wells, is described in Chapter Two. On the Persons lynching, see Miller, 191-95, and Goings and Smith, "Unhidden Transcripts," 372-75.

Kenneth W. Goings and Gerald L. Smith have shown that many African Americans in Memphis did not suffer quietly such horrifying violence intended to put them in their "place." In many instances, they resisted, and in several, they fought, hit, or shot back. Occurrences of refusing to halt or carry out orders, resisting arrest, and outright retaliation in situations with the police or other white assailants were frequent, especially among black migrants. One such incident happened in front of the Bijou Theatre (formerly the Auditorium) in 1905. A black man attempting to enter the theatre through a crowded door pushed a young white man, who in turn struck him with a cane. The black man pulled out a gun and shot the white man and his companion, one of whom died. In addition to meeting violence with violence, physical attacks were also met with political action; the gruesome lynching of Ell Persons led directly to the formation of the Memphis chapter of the NAACP in 1918.[23]

Despite the hardening of the color line, some areas of racial integration did persist for a time in the city. South Lauderdale Street, which ran perpendicular to the wealthy white portion of Beale Street, was the home of several prominent blacks including the Churches, Hookses, and Lymus Wallace, as well as whites such as future state senator Kenneth McKellar.[24] The faculty of LeMoyne College, near this same area, was integrated until the education of whites and blacks in separate facilities was mandated by the state. Likewise, everyone rode on the same public conveyances until the state segregation law affecting streetcars was passed. Further, "passing" was a common color-line-blurring practice among very light-skinned African Americans, whereby they were able to avoid some of the animosity and restrictions endured by darker-skinned people.

---

[23] Goings and Smith, "Unhidden Transcripts"; "Shot at Theatre Door," *New York Tribune*, 10 October 1905; Beverly G. Bond and Janann Sherman, *Memphis in Black and White* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2003), 86.

[24] Annette E. Church and Roberta Church, *The Robert R. Churches of Memphis: A Father and Son Who Achieved in Spite of Race* (Memphis: A.E. Church, 1974), 41-42.

But for the most part, the specter of white supremacy made everyday life increasingly difficult for most black citizens in the New South city of Memphis during this period, and many sought to band together and separate themselves, if only for self-protection and preservation. Perhaps it was a sense of both defiance and preservation that informed the comment at the beginning of this chapter, where the journalist wished the consequences of lynching upon those African Americans who continued to "force themselves where they were not wanted." At any rate, patterns of population density in the city began to shift away from their former patchwork nature, and by 1920, more than half of the city's blacks lived in southeast Memphis.[25]

With its large, diverse African American population, Memphis was destined to become a center of U.S. black culture. However, as in the social arena, segregation increasingly ruled as the nineteenth century came to a close, and the worlds of black and white theatrical entertainment rarely overlapped except under the strict regulations of the color line. Although the Auditorium at Main and Linden Streets catered particularly to the African American community as well as lower-class European Americans, blacks could not sit on the ground floor of the theatre. In addition, there was a partition dividing black and white audience members, and a separate entrance for blacks. One block north at the Grand Opera House, and at the Lyceum near Court Square, portions of the balcony were given over to blacks, and those with the money were afforded "colored chairs."[26] But before 1901, there was no theatre in Memphis where black patrons would be treated in the same manner as whites.

Different groups within the black community responded to this situation in different ways. There was a certain portion of the black community that did not approve of theatre at all if

---

[25] Goings and Smith, "Duty of the Hour," 229.

[26] These are referred to in a book of box office statements for the Grand Opera House located in the Memphis and Shelby County Room of the Memphis Public Library & Information Center, but I have not been able to find out where they were inside the theatre.

blacks were not to be treated the same as whites—or, like some in the white community, objected to it completely on moral grounds. Ida B. Wells, who was a middle-class schoolteacher, enjoyed the theatre and probably sat in the gallery in order to see plays and operettas such as *Monte Cristo*, *The Silver King*, and *The Mikado*. In 1887, she saw Edwin Booth perform in *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Richelieu* at the Memphis Theatre.[27] However, a male companion took her to task about her theatre-going, lecturing her that such activities were not appropriate for a schoolteacher. Miriam DeCosta-Willis points out that this incident was an indication of the attempts of black male proponents of "bourgeois social respectability" to proscribe black female behavior during this period.[28] Still, like Wells, many African Americans of all classes desired theatrical entertainment and either accepted or resisted the restrictions involved in order to see a show. An editorial cartoon, pictured in Figure 29, that appeared in the *Freeman* (which exhibits its own form of racism against the Irish) alludes to the frustration of middle- and upper-class African American theatre-goers during this period.

Segregation extended to the stage as well, which is also apparent from the *Freeman* quote at the beginning of this section. The unappreciative white people to whom the author refers had not objected to African Americans appearing onstage at the Auditorium; in fact, black entertainers often appeared at this theatre. The problem was that Marie Dressler, who was a popular white vaudeville star at the time, was to have appeared onstage alongside the black performers. It was the "mixing" of black and white performers onstage that was verboten in this particular public space.

---

[27] Miriam DeCosta-Willis, "Ida B. Wells's *Diary*: A Narrative of the Black Community of Memphis in the 1880s," *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 45 (1991): 44; Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *The Memphis Diary of Ida B. Wells*, ed. Miriam DeCosta-Willis (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 131.

[28] Wells-Barnett, 133.

Even when black performers did appear at the Auditorium, it would seem that they were not only to be seen just with other African Americans, but also that they were expected to fit into certain familiar minstrel stereotypes that did not offend the sensibilities of the New South creed. A couple of weeks before the Dressler incident, nationally renowned African American performers Bob Cole and Billy Johnson made their first trip to Memphis with their landmark musical, *A Trip to Coontown* (a spoof of Charles Hoyt's *A Trip to Chinatown*). Before proceeding to offer high praise to the production, the author of the review in the *Commercial Appeal* began thus: "The negro can not hope for success on the American stage." Even though the costumes were "superb" and the actors presented "one of the best performances ever given in Memphis by a colored company," the critic felt it necessary to point out that "the negro is a failure as a mimic except when he confines himself to the peculiarities of his race." Further, the critic remarked that although African Americans had an "intuitive grasp" of music, they were best when they adhered to "the simplicities of plantation melodies." Despite Cole and Johnson's national reputation, this critic did not even mention their names in his review.[29]

These kinds of backhanded compliments were common with regard to critiques of black performances in the white press. Like the evaluations of the "blacked up" white performers in *Alabama* and *Across the Potomac* discussed in the previous chapter, such comments reveal a desire to control the representation of African American characters on stage—even for actual African American performers to "confine themselves" to a predetermined racial aesthetic.

However, the black press answered back. The Memphis correspondent to the *Indianapolis Freeman* noted that the *Commercial Appeal* writer above had questioned the artistic ability of African Americans but pointed out that he had "failed to bring forth any criticism" of

---

[29] *Commercial Appeal*, 25 January 1901. The *Evening Scimitar* had announced the show, along with the names of Bob Cole and Billy Johnson, three days earlier. See "Amusements," *Evening Scimitar*, 22 January 1901.

the show itself; in fact he had praised it quite highly.[30] Later in the same year, the Nashville Students, a popular black minstrel troupe, performed at the Auditorium. The *Freeman* correspondent had this reaction to reports in the white press:

> We thank the *Commercial Appeal* for its straightforward remarks, in stating Manager Stainback was lucky in having such a strong company as this one…but for the *Scimitar* [the main evening paper in Memphis] the colored people can't stomach its remarks, as they seem to want the Negro performers to stick to old slavey time doings. Boys we say to this concern in your behalf to keep back that kind of stuff to feed a lot of ignorant fools on as we are an enlightened set and know a good company when we see one.[31]

At the Lyceum and the Grand Opera House, even though white minstrel companies who performed in blackface, such as Al G. Field's and Lew Dockstader's Minstrels, were popular fare, black performers did not appear at all as a rule. Around the same time as Cole and Johnson's visit to the Auditorium, John D. Hopkins, the manager of the Grand Opera House, booked the black musical trio Mallory Brothers and Brooks at his theatre. These artists were a top vaudeville act, "famed for their ability to imitate an entire brass band," who not only played several instruments but also sang and danced.[32] According to E.W. Saddler of the *Freeman*, when the audience at the Grand saw these performers appear on the stage, "the white people stormed and hissed them so until they were compelled to give up in disgust." Stripping away the veneer of white hypocrisy, Saddler remarked on the irony that it was fine for white men to seek the company of black women under cover of night in the tenderloin district, but when blacks sought the spotlight in a white theatre, they were "out of the path of Negro rights." In rebuttal to claims in the white press that Hopkins had "insulted Southern pride" and that the Grand Opera House "was a place where the color line must be drawn," Saddler appealed to both economy and

---

[30] *Indianapolis Freeman*, 2 February 1901.

[31] *Indianapolis Freeman*, 13 April 1901.

[32] Bernard L. Peterson, Jr., *Profiles of African American Stage Performers and Theatre People, 1816-1960* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001), 179.

religion, pointing out that African Americans spent hundreds of dollars filling the Grand's galleries every week, and that despite their enmity, whites would be compelled to stand next to blacks on Judgment Day.[33]

In all these instances, African Americans had appeared out of their "place," according to the strictures of the color line, and the reaction from the white theatre-going public appears to have been stronger than usual. It seems significant that all these events happened in 1901. Memphis had recently been proclaimed by the national census to be one of the largest cities in the South, but statistics also made clear that essentially half of that large population was African American. If population increase meant urban progress, whites were hard-pressed to deny that blacks had helped to make Memphis a New South city. However, the growing and visible presence of African Americans in the city was seen by some European Americans as a threat to white supremacy. That the Reunion of Confederate Veterans was happening in the city at the same time may have added to this tension, and is perhaps one reason that Church chose to help defuse the situation by making his conspicuous donation to their cause.

During that same year, as Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff have shown, Memphis gained at least three theatres catering exclusively to African American performers and audiences.[34] Two theatres appear to have been associated with saloons: the Rialto on Front Street in North Memphis and Tick's Tivoli at the corner of DeSoto and Gayoso, near the Beale Street district. And on Beale, Robert Church opened Church's Auditorium to the public. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the lack of extant local print sources makes it difficult to reconstruct the events surrounding the establishment of African American theatres in the city with as much detail as

---

[33] *Indianapolis Freeman*, 26 January 1901.

[34] Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, "'They Cert'ly Sound Good to Me': Sheet Music, Southern Vaudeville, and the Commercial Ascendancy of the Blues," *American Music* 14, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 426. As I will explain, one of these theatres seems to have been very short-lived.

those oriented primarily toward European Americans. However, in what follows, I will attempt to do so as much as possible.

The first of these theatres to open was the seemingly very short-lived Rialto. The absence of any mention of the Rialto in the Memphis city directory during the time of its existence leads this investigator to believe that it may have been a placeholder of sorts for the first resident company that was to appear at Church's Auditorium, Lew Hall's Ragtime Opera Company. Opening later than expected was not without precedent for newly constructed theatres in the city; when the second Lyceum Theatre was not finished on time in the fall of 1894, its manager John Mahoney had had to impose upon Ben Stainback of the Auditorium to use his stage for the first company booked to perform at the Lyceum. Although I cannot confirm it with absolute certainty, events seem to point toward a similar situation with Church's Auditorium and the Rialto.

Both the *Freeman* and the city directory confirm that James Kinnane was the manager of the building which housed the Rialto. At the beginning of May 1901, an ad appeared in the *Freeman* soliciting acts for the theatre, located at 96 Front Street, and "Manager Kinan" is mentioned in an article at a later date. Kinnane, a prominent underworld figure and the son of Irish immigrants, had owned the lot and building at this location since 1899. For several years prior to Kinnane's purchase of the building, there had been an African American saloon at this address. From the directory listings of 1901, it appears that the Rialto was connected to the Phoenix Athletic Club, Kinnane's new saloon at this address, which provided "amusement, sport,

and recreation," meaning that gambling was offered here in addition to theatrical entertainment—and most likely prostitutes as well.[35]

The Ragtime Opera Company, which began performances during May, was managed by Lew Hall, an African American performer who had toured the U.S. with his own troupe of "Georgia Minstrels" during the 1890s.[36] Serving as musical director was J. Ed Green, whom Errol G. Hill and James V. Hatch have referred to as "one of the truly versatile and gifted black performers at the turn of the century."[37] Bernard L. Peterson describes Green as a "baritone singer, actor, comedian, playwright, stage manager, director, and songwriter of the minstrel, variety, and musical stage," and states that it was he who was primarily responsible for putting together this troupe.[38] Green had not yet reached the fame that he would achieve years later as a member of the Pekin Theatre in Chicago, but he was very popular at this point, and his talent was a boon for African American theatre in the city of Memphis. Performances included Hall's Georgia minstrels, as well as *Uncle Eph's Dream*, Green's *The African Princes* and *The Medicine Man*, and others of what Abbott and Seroff refer to as "basically plotless musical comedies geared to meet the increasing popular demand for what Ernest Hogan termed

---

[35] *Indianapolis Freeman*, 4 May and 31 August 1901; Shelby County Register of Deeds, Book 272, p. 590, http://register.shelby.tn.us/, accessed 8 December 2011; *Polk's Memphis City Directory for 1901*. Kinnane is listed as president of this saloon, which appears to have had an entrance around the corner on Winchester Street. On the immortalization of Kinnane in blues lyrics, see Abbott and Seroff, 426. A relative, Margaret Skinner, writes about Kinnane's exploits in her novel, *Old Jim Canaan* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 1990).

[36] There are mentions of Lew Hall's Georgia Minstrels in the *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 21 May 1892; and 12 March, 2 April, and 14 May 1898. I am going on the assumption that there was only one well-known Lew Hall in the business of African American theatre at the time. Hall also worked with W.C. Handy in Mahara's Minstrels. See Henry T. Sampson, *The Ghost Walks: A Chronological History of Blacks in Show Business, 1865-1910* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1988), 73, 190.

[37] Errol G. Hill and James V. Hatch, eds., *A History of African American Theatre* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 196.

[38] Peterson, 102.

'vaudevillized minstrelsy.'"[39] The company played for several weeks at the Rialto before leaving for a stint in Birmingham, where Green stayed to conduct another company. When they returned to Memphis at the end of July, the Ragtime Opera Company moved to Church's Auditorium. Although it had not had its grand opening yet, this theatre was apparently open and drawing crowds during the month of August.[40]

At the end of that month, the *Freeman* stated that the Rialto had closed its season and that "Manager Kinan [*sic*] looks upon his vaudeville experiment with a satisfactory glance." Also, statements that the Rialto was the "largest place in America that employs colored talent," and that it could seat 2,000 people—which actually describe Church's Auditorium—seem to indicate some editorial conflation of the two theatres.[41] Again, I would contend that perhaps the Rialto was meant to be a temporary venture, and that the Ragtime Opera Company was intended to reside at Church's Auditorium all along. As a fellow high-profile saloon owner (who also rented to other Irish gangsters), Church may well have known Kinnane. Although Church owned several saloons in the Beale Street area, perhaps none was quite large enough for the size of crowds that such a company, catering specifically to African American audiences, would have drawn. Church could have asked Kinnane to house the company for several weeks in Memphis at his new saloon while Church's Auditorium was being finished. Or, perhaps Kinnane offered to take them on, knowing that Church's Auditorium was not yet ready and that he might stand to make a great deal of money. Of course, it is possible that neither of these scenarios is true; indeed, I am speculating here. At any rate, ads for the Rialto seem to have disappeared from the

---

[39] *Indianapolis Freeman*, 15 June and 6 July 1901; Peterson, 102; Abbott and Seroff, 426. According to Peterson, Ernest Hogan was "one of the foremost comedians of the turn of the twentieth century" and was "credited with starting the 'coon song' craze" (124).

[40] *Indianapolis Freeman*, 30 July 1901.

[41] *Indianapolis Freeman*, 4 May, 29 June, and 31 August 1901.

Freeman by September of 1901, whereas coverage of the opening of Church's Auditorium intensified.[42]

As previously mentioned, no one was more integral to the establishment of Beale Street as the center of the Memphis black community than Robert R. Church. Born in 1839, Church was the son of a wealthy white steamboat owner, Captain Charles Church, and his Malay slave, Emmeline. As a young man, Robert worked on his father's steamboats, where he gained a hands-on business education. He later opened a saloon and became successful in that business. The key to his wealth, however—as with his white counterparts, Bethell and Brinkley, if on a smaller scale—was real estate. During the yellow fever epidemics in the late 1870s, many whites fled the city or died in much greater numbers than in the black community. Calculating that Memphis would survive and thrive again, Church used his earnings and an inheritance from his father to invest in land holdings around the Beale Street area and in other parts of the city as well. When the city initiated a bond sale for the purpose of debt repayment in 1885, he had amassed enough wealth from rents to be the first person to purchase one of the $1,000 bonds. This public act of generosity and faith in the city of Memphis gained him much notoriety and favor with the entire community.[43]

Around 1899, Church purchased a large tract of land next to Beale Street Baptist Church and spent thousands of dollars beautifying it in order to open a public park for African Americans. In February 1901, the *Freeman* reported that construction of the Auditorium in the park was underway. By August, when the Ragtime Opera Company had returned to Memphis

---

[42] *Polk's Memphis City Directory for 1901* lists well-known gangsters and saloon operators George Degg and Michael Haggarty, discussed further in the next chapter, at 372 Second Street, where Church had run a saloon several years prior. The directory for the following year, 1902, lists Kinnane as associated with a saloon at 81 DeSoto, on the corner of Gayoso, the same address as Tick's Tivoli and very near Church's saloon on the opposite corner at 79 DeSoto. Church himself had been associated with 81 DeSoto several years prior.

[43] Church and Church, 3-26; Lynette Boney Wrenn, *Crisis and Commission Government in Memphis: Elite Rule in a Gilded Age City* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 77, 182 n. 22.

and settled in at Church's Auditorium, the *Freeman* remarked that Church was deserving of "the patronage of all those who appreciate theatre going, as he has spared no pains to make this the greatest place of amusement in the city." It was also stated that Church was looking to book high-profile acts "if the colored people will only lend their support, and will stop going to white theatres to be placed in the buzzard roost."[44] The article put forth that such famous acts as the comedy, singing, and dancing team of Bert Williams and George Walker—who, along with Walker's wife, Aida Overton, had created a national dance sensation with the cakewalk—might appear at Church's Auditorium.[45]

Later the following month, an article appeared in the *Freeman* that praised Church for putting more African Americans to work than any other black man in the South. It also described the new theatre in detail. The image depicted on the grand curtain of the theatre, that of a burning steamboat, was significant. As a young man, Church had escaped the flames of a devastating steamboat explosion and lived to prosper. The *Freeman* correspondent remarked that "a more striking example never was furnished that people are sometimes rescued from death for a good purpose." Again pointing out the significance of the venture, the journalist remarked that "we do not need to climb into the peanut gallery to see a play. The days of the peanut gallery are numbered."[46]

After the theatre was closed in late September to put in a balcony, the grand opening of Church's Auditorium happened in early November. The Ragtime Opera Company performed a show that included Hall, Johnnie Green, and Nettie Lewis in the musical farce, *A Society Circus*, along with several specialty acts. The *Freeman* correspondent stated that

---

[44] *Indianapolis Freeman*, 2 February and 10 August 1901.

[45] See Annemarie Bean, "Vaudeville," in *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Cary D. Wintz and Paul Finkelman, 2 vols. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2:1208-10.

[46] *Indianapolis Freeman*, 28 September 1901.

> as one sat and looked out upon the large audience he reviewed one of the grandest sights ever witnessed in this country….Every seat in the boxes, twelve in number, was taken by the elite of this and surrounding cities and as you viewed the evening costumes of the audience one could proudly say for the first time in the annals of the South or probably anywhere in America, he was seated in a grand theatre, run in every particular by one of his own race. Even every nail that was driven in the building was by a Negro.

After the show, Hall related to the journalist his pride in having "created substantially the first of its kind in the United States, a colored vaudeville house."[47]

Although the general newspaper puffery of the time needs to be taken into account, it appears that the opening of this theatre in Memphis was indeed a significant event in the history of African American theatre. Hill and Hatch allude to the importance of Memphis around this moment in time when they discuss the many smaller theatres in the South that "served as feeder stages for the 'big time' in Memphis, Chicago, or New York." However, they do not mention Church's Auditorium, or any other African American theatre in Memphis, at all. It is true that although theatres in Memphis were integral to developments in African American music, as Abbott and Seroff have demonstrated, none of them would become nearly as important to the overall development of African American theatre as those in larger cities such as the Pekin in Chicago, which did not open until 1905. Still, the opening of Church's Auditorium four years prior seems to merit more recognition in the field than it has heretofore.[48]

The last African American theatre to open in Memphis in 1901 was Tick's Tivoli at 81 DeSoto, on the corner of Gayoso. Like the Rialto, this theatre seems to have been part of, or at least associated with, a saloon. Although Kinnane is listed at this address until 1904, the proprietor of the place was Alfred "Tick" Houston. In 1902 and 1903, Houston is referred to in the *National Police Gazette* as the popular manager of the Idle Hour Saloon at this address,

---

[47] *Indianapolis Freeman*, 9 November 1901.
[48] Hill and Hatch, 216.

which was the "headquarters of the sporting fraternity" of Memphis. The *Gazette* also stated that Houston had "a large acquaintance with sporting and theatrical people throughout the country."[49] Abbott and Seroff refer to this theatre as "rough-and-ready," but they also remark that it was the "bright light" of the theatre district in this area throughout its existence. Tick's specialized in continuous vaudeville, with everything from popular comedy sketches such as *Mr. Johnson Turn Me Loose* and *Mrs. Johnson's Rent Rag Ball*, to singing male impersonators such as Estelle Harris singing "Zulu Babe." J. Ed Green also managed the company at Tick's for its first several months.[50]

Church's Auditorium and Tick's Tivoli (later called Tick's Big Vaudeville) continued to operate over the next several years and seem to have reflected certain conflicts within U.S. theatre and society at the time with regard to legitimacy and "respectability," and their supposed opposites. Church's booked nationally renowned traveling performers such as the Black Patti Troubadours—the largest African American minstrel-variety show on the road, which also included soprano Sissieretta Jones ("Black Patti") singing operatic selections—and Salem Tutt Whitney and J. Homer Tutt's Southern Smart Set (a different version of Sherman H. Dudley's Northern Smart Set), who presented musical comedies such as *George Washington Bullion*, *The Darktown Politician*, *The Mayor of Newtown*, and *His Excellency the President*.[51] In contrast, Tick's appears to have had something on the order of a resident company. In addition to theatrical performances, Church's Auditorium (located next to Beale Street Baptist Church, I

---

[49] *Polk's Memphis City Directory*, 1902-4; *National Police Gazette*, 19 April 1902; "Leading Saloonist," *National Police Gazette*, 13 November 1903.

[50] Abbott and Seroff, 413, 427, 429. These authors state that Tick's Tivoli was relocated to the corner of South Fourth Street and Gayoso and renamed Tick's Big Vaudeville in 1905. Actually, the theatre stayed put; it was the street name and numbers that changed. They acknowledge that DeSoto became South Fourth around 1907, but Abbott and Seroff seem to have been unaware that all of the street numbers in Memphis were changed in 1905, so that by 1907 what had been 81 DeSoto was now 121 South Fourth. See Abbott and Seroff, 450 n. 151.

[51] Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, *Ragged but Right: Black Traveling Shows, "Coon Songs," and the Dark Pathway to Blues and Jazz* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2007), 38-39, 111-18.

remind the reader) was also used for events catering to Memphis's black upper and middle classes, such as social club meetings and graduation ceremonies, as well as for hosting prominent visitors like Booker T. Washington and Theodore Roosevelt. Also, it appears that although Church was—at least until 1906—a saloon owner, drinking was not allowed at his Auditorium. On the other hand, theatrical activities at Tick's were directly or indirectly associated with drinking and gambling at the same address, and probably appealed to a wider range of people less concerned with being "respectable."[52] In terms of spatiality, then, these two theatres seem to have represented two different attitudes toward African American life in the New South city.

A new crop of African American theatres began to appear around 1908, and by the beginning of the following year, the situation was such that James E. Simpson of the *Freeman* attempted to put the city's theatrical activities on par with those in Chicago. He reported that "Memphis is the only city in the South that has five theatres supported by and run exclusively for colored patrons and therefore I am proud to say that I can name it the Memphis Stroll," mimicking the name of Chicago's famous black entertainment district. The five theatres to which Simpson referred were Tick's and the Lyric in the Beale Street area, and the Royal, the Gem, and the Amuse U in North Memphis.[53] Although Simpson's "Memphis Stroll" feature

---

[52] It seems that Church's Auditorium may eventually have been used more for social and political events than for theatre. The *Freeman* claimed that Tick's was "the only house in Memphis that is owned and operated by a colored man" (28 November 1908). Still, archived contract materials and advertisements point to several bookings for the Smart Set (in 1908, 1909, 1910, and 1917) and the Black Patti company (1902 and 1911). See the Robert R. Church Family Papers, Special Collections, University of Memphis Libraries.

[53] "Memphis Theater Notes," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 23 January 1909. It appears that there was also a short-lived theatre called the Dixie at 161 South Third Street in early 1908. An ad soliciting acts for this theatre appears in the *Freeman*, 15 February 1908, and there are blurbs about it on 21 and 28 March. *Polk's Memphis City Directory* for 1908 lists a saloon run by "Mergle and Levy" at this address, and these two are also indicated as the proprietors of the theatre in the first *Freeman* ad. It looks like Theodore F. Mergle and John E. Levy took over John Persica's saloon at this location (formerly 67 Hernando before the street number/name change) when he moved up the street to open the New Garden Theatre in 1905 (discussed in the next chapter). By April of 1908, Mergle and Levy's foray in the theatre business was over (as was their tenancy at 161 S. Third, it would appear), and one of the company members, J.W. Hamilton, had gone several blocks north to the "newly and completely furnished" Royal Theatre to become the stage manager there (*Indianapolis Freeman*, 11 April 1908).

continued until March, by this time both Tick's and the short-lived Lyric on Beale (which Abbott and Seroff point out was "practically next door to Pee Wee's Saloon," a famous hangout for blues musicians like W.C. Handy) had closed. Jim Kinnane's father, Thomas, ran the Royal Theatre, which was next door to his own saloon. By the fall of 1909, Memphis's own Pekin Theatre had opened near the Beale Street area, with Happy John Goodloe and his wife Ella transferring from Tick's to manage and perform. In addition to Church's Auditorium and Tick's Tivoli, the Gem and the Pekin were also owned and operated by African Americans.[54]

Shows at these theatres ran the gamut from vaudeville to melodrama to farce and musical comedy. Examples of plays given during this time included one-act farces such as *Uncle's Return from the Philippines* at the Royal, Happy Goodloe's *Scenes on Beale Street* at Tick's, and Eugene Clark's *Fun in a Chinese Laundry* at the Amuse U in North Memphis. Comedies included Carrie Hall's three-acter, *Hannah from Savannah*; Goodloe's *Too Many Wives*, *A Crap Game in War*, and *Lost Child in Africa*; and Ella Goodloe's *I Love My Husband but O You Henry!* at the Pekin; a Mr. Perry's *Champion Foot Runner of the East* at the Gem; and Janie Mullen's *Outbreak of the Indians* at the Royal. Dramas given included an Indian melodrama entitled *Rainbow* at the Gem; a western drama (title not given) presented as an afterpiece at the Royal; a three-act drama entitled *The Sultan's Daughter* at the Pekin; and a "sensational drama" in six acts called *The Octoroon* at the Amuse U Theatre No. 2 (formerly Tick's). Unlike the

---

[54] James E. Simpson, "Memphis Stroll," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 6 and 20 February, 6 March 1909; Abbott and Seroff, "They Cert'ly Sound Good to Me," 427-30; *Indianapolis Freeman*, 19 December 1908, 4 June 1910; *Polk's Memphis City Directory* for 1908 and 1909. The Gem, the Pekin, and the Savoy (interestingly enough, since this theatre was owned by Italian Americans at the time) are listed as "Real Play Houses that Are Owned and Managed by Negroes" in the *Freeman*, 21 May 1910. Tick Houston moved to Louisville after his theatre closed and opened the New Tick Houston Theatre there in 1910. See Sampson, 532, and ads in the *Freeman* from 3 September 1910 forward.

shows at the Grand Opera House and the Lyceum, many of the productions at these theatres were created in-house.[55]

In these theatres, female-to-male cross-dressing was common, and women often wrote plays for their resident companies. In addition to Estelle Harris at Tick's (mentioned above), Janie Mullen at the Royal and Florence Hines at the Savoy (a theatre discussed below) were also listed as male impersonators in the *Freeman*. At the Gem, Lulu "Too Sweet" (Susie Johnson) was the resident playwright, composing most of the plays that her husband Willie staged, including *Way Out East*, *Under the Jungle Moon*, *The Death of Bill Bailey*, *Dreams of Fairyland*, *Determination*, and *Queen of the Wild West*. As mentioned above, Ella Goodloe of the Pekin and Mullen, who moved to the Savoy after it opened in 1910, also wrote plays. In addition, Laura Smith, whom Abbott and Seroff call a "true pioneer" of the blues, wrote material for the Savoy.[56]

By the time the Savoy opened, it had become quite clear that the Beale Street area was the urban space that most represented African American life in the New South city of Memphis. After that time, theatrical activity (and many performers) that had been centered in North Memphis shifted south to Beale. All these theatres contributed to the pulsing, vibrant, thrilling yet dangerous atmosphere of Beale and nearby Gayoso. By day, shopkeepers, shoppers, professionals, and residents of the neighborhood presented a fairly tame cityscape on Beale. But at night, the area came alive. Besides theatres, there were saloons and restaurants, gambling halls, dance halls, and, on Gayoso, the brothels—and everywhere, from the street corner folk

---

[55] Abbott and Seroff, "They Cert'ly Sound Good to Me," 429; *Indianapolis Freeman*, 19 December 1908-29 January 1910. I have not been able to determine whether *The Octoroon* mentioned here has any relation to Dion Boucicault's play of the same title.

[56] Abbott and Seroff, "They Cert'ly Sound Good to Me," 429; *Indianapolis Freeman*, 19 December 1908-27 August 1910. On cross-gender impersonation in black minstrelsy during this period, see Annemarie Bean, "Black Minstrelsy and Double Inversion, Circa 1890," in *African American Performance and Theater History: A Critical Reader*, ed. Harry J. Elam, Jr. and David Krasner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 171-91.

guitar to the piano in the brothel, there was music. According to Abbott and Seroff, W.C. Handy, the "father of the blues," who had traveled throughout the South soaking up inspiration for his compositions and settled in Memphis in 1909, would "comb the Gayoso Street theater district for musical 'ideas.'" Handy eventually teamed up with Harry H. Pace to open the Pace and Handy Music Company, which published sheet music out of their office above Church's Solvent Savings Bank, just across the street from Church's Auditorium. Abbott and Seroff comment that "if Beale Street really could talk, it would speak not of a single father figure but of a groundswell *movement* in which commercial possibilities for the blues were explored by a host of aspiring entertainers" in the theatres and many other venues in the area.[57]

Abbott and Seroff have covered the trajectory of most of these Memphis theatres so well that there is no need to repeat their efforts here; suffice it to say that the business of African American theatrical entertainment was tenuous on an individual basis but thriving mightily as a whole in Memphis during this period. However, the story of the Barrassos, owners of the Amuse U and the Savoy—whom Abbott and Seroff discuss, but only to a certain point—is important to any narrative of African American theatre in Memphis. Genoroso Barrasso, a Neapolitan by birth and a tailor by trade, immigrated to the U.S. in 1890 with his wife Rosa and their children, including son Fred. After brief stays in New York and in St. Louis, where their son Anselmo was born, they moved to Memphis in 1893. Barrasso had owned property in Naples and arrived in the city with considerable cash on hand. He opened a tailoring business and also began to

---

[57] Abbott and Seroff, "They Cert'ly Sound Good to Me," 434, their emphasis. For more information on Beale Street and its connection to the blues, see also Beverly G. Bond and Janann Sherman, *Beale Street* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2006); Robert Cantwell, *If Beale Street Could Talk: Music, Community, Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); W.C. Handy, *Father of the Blues* (New York: Da Capo, 1941); George Washington Lee, *Beale Street: Where the Blues Began* (New York: R.O. Ballou, 1934); and Margaret McKee and Fred Chisenhall, *Beale Black and Blue: Life and Music on Black America's Main Street* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993).

invest in real estate including, eventually, the movie theatre on North Main that would become the Amuse U.[58]

Fred Barrasso was the manager of this theatre when it opened opposite the Gem on North Main in 1909. Like many Italian immigrants in Memphis during this period, Fred had found himself running a saloon by his early twenties, but as Abbott and Seroff remark, he would prove "to be an entrepreneur of a sort that Memphis's ephemeral black theater world had not seen before." After Tick's closed during the same year that the Amuse U opened, the Barrassos took over the theatre, remodeled it, and reopened it as the Amuse U Theatre No. 2 in November 1909. Two months later the theatre was renamed the Savoy and had a grand opening. Fred booked in several "former members of J. Ed Green's famous Chicago Pekin Stock Company" for the opening of the Savoy, one of whom was Charles Gilpin, the prominent African American actor of the early twentieth century who first gained widespread notoriety when he originated the title role in Eugene O'Neill's *Emperor Jones*. The opening performance included a minstrel show, variety acts, and moving pictures. Gilpin stayed on at the Savoy, becoming part of "the strongest stock company Memphis theatre-goers had yet seen." By the summer, "Fred Barrasso had established himself as Memphis's prince of black vaudeville," and he began to create a regional theatrical circuit, which will be discussed below.[59]

During the following two years, Memphis lost two of the most powerful forces in the local African American theatre scene. In 1911, Barrasso died of a cerebral embolism at only twenty-eight years of age, and Robert Church died in 1912. However, despite these tremendous

---

[58] The Barrassos also had three daughters: Stella, Angelina, and Nora. See Fred Barrasso's obituary, *Commercial Appeal*, 26 June 1911; "Genoroso Barrasso Is Taken by Death," *Commercial Appeal*, 8 July 1935; "Mrs. Rosa Barraso [*sic*], 79, Dies at Home," *Evening Scimitar*, 26 December 1938; "A.J. Barrasso Dies After Long Illness," *Commercial Appeal*, 28 August 1967.

[59] Abbot and Seroff, "They Cert'ly Sound Good to Me," 428-31; *Indianapolis Freeman*, 29 January 1910.

losses, both of their theatrical ventures were carried on by family members. Fred's father and brother Anselmo picked up where he had left off with the Savoy, and Robert Church, Jr. reopened his father's Auditorium after a prolonged closure of the venue.

Under the leadership of twenty-one-year-old Anselmo, the Barrasso family's theatrical ventures would reach new heights, providing venues for African American theatre and music into the 1950s and contributing to a lasting legacy of black performance in Memphis. By 1913, when Anselmo opened the Metropolitan Theatre at 336 Beale, the number of black theatres appears to have fallen well off from its peak between 1908 and 1910. Not only was Church's Auditorium closed at this time, but the Gem, the Royal, and the Pekin had all closed, and the Barrassos had also closed both the Amuse U and the Savoy to concentrate all their efforts on their new theatre. Movie theatres were beginning to proliferate, and it appears that the Metropolitan probably showed movies in addition to providing live entertainment.[60] By September of 1914, the Barrassos seem to have been successful enough to plan the reopening of the Savoy. An announcement about the new Savoy in the *Freeman* asserted that Memphis could "support two theaters, one stock and the other vaudeville," and also that "Barrasso is the king of Memphis, and treats performers right."[61] The reason that the Savoy did not actually reopen was probably because during that fall, Robert Church, Jr. reopened Church's Auditorium, which was just one block east of the Metropolitan on Beale.

Robert Church, Jr. was to become even more widely influential than his father had been. Born in 1885, he began his education in a kindergarten run by Julia Hooks, went away to

---

[60] The Gem, the Royal, the Pekin, and the Amuse U had all disappeared from the *Memphis City Directory* by 1912. The Savoy still appears in the directory until 1913, so there may have been a bit of overlap; however, I could find no ads in the *Freeman* for this theatre after 1912. Throughout its existence the Metropolitan only ever appeared under the "Motion Pictures" heading in the directory.

[61] *Indianapolis Freeman*, 12 September 1914. This article refers to the Savoy as "new," which leads me to believe that it had been closed but was planned for reopening.

military school, attended college at Oberlin, studied at the Packard School of Business in New York City, and worked for two years on Wall Street. Robert, Sr. had wanted his son to receive thorough training in banking so that he could become an integral part of the Solvent Savings Bank, an African American institution in Memphis that Robert, Sr. had set up along with Josiah Settle in 1906. While in New York, Church became a member of the Frogs Club, an organization for theatrical professionals founded by Bert Williams, which also included such stage luminaries as George Walker, Bob Cole, Sherman H. Dudley, and Sam Lucas, who is generally credited as the first black actor to play Uncle Tom on stage. The Frogs invited high-profile African American professionals from other fields, like Church, to be members, and they raised money for charity by presenting an annual vaudeville show, in which Church participated in 1912. This year also marked the beginning of Church's long and prominent career in national politics; he served as a delegate to the Republican National Convention from then until 1940. When his father died, Church returned to Memphis to take over at the bank and to manage Church's Auditorium. Besides being well-connected in theatrical and political circles, Church was also a close friend of Roscoe Conkling Simmons, the editor of New York's African American newspaper, the *Age*. Inspired by developments in Memphis's black community and the young Church's leadership, Simmons moved to Memphis in 1913 and founded a short-lived black newspaper, the *Memphis Sun*.[62]

The announcement of the reopening of the Auditorium in November 1914 described Church as "fast developing into a great leader in all the affairs his many interests touch," and reported that he proposed to "bring to Memphis all the latest and highest acts on the several circuits." Continuing his father's concern for respectability in the theatre, it was stated that

---

[62] Church and Church, 63-86; George A. Sewell and Margaret L. Dwight, *Mississippi Black History Makers* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984), 55.

Church would present "the latest acts, from which the 'rough stuff' is whacked." He also intended to show African American films.[63] For a short while, the city seems to have been able to support both Church's and the Metropolitan; announcements in the *Freeman* throughout the season of 1914-15 indicate activity at both theatres. But after this season, ads and blurbs about Church's Auditorium seem to disappear.[64]

Several factors may have contributed to the decline of Church's Auditorium as a theatrical venue. Competition from the Metropolitan, where one could easily slip out to get a "soft drink" at the bar next door, was certainly one. Perhaps Church also became aware, as time went on, that the Auditorium was really too large to run consistently as a theatre with full houses. At less than half the seating capacity of Church's, the Metropolitan appears to have fared better. Besides, Church had many other interests in addition to the theatre; by this time he had left the bank in order to manage his family's extensive real estate holdings and was more and more turning his energies toward politics. In 1916, he created the Lincoln League, a Republican organization that fought "lily-whitism" within the party, and the following year, after the lynching of Ell Persons, he instigated the formation of the Memphis chapter of the NAACP.[65] Then, too, there was the continuing proliferation of movie theatres in the city, which lured patrons away. In 1917 even the Lyceum changed its format from legitimate theatre to vaudeville and movies. As the Road declined, fewer traveling shows were booking as far south as Memphis.

By that time several other Italians had entered the business of black entertainment in Memphis, primarily by running movie houses that also featured live acts. Along with the

---

[63] "Robert Church Theatre Now Open," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 28 November 1914.

[64] The last mention of Church's in the *Freeman* that I was able to find concerns Robert Church's generous care of a theatrical company that had found itself stranded in Memphis (9 January 1915).

[65] Bond and Sherman, *Memphis in Black and White*, 86.

Barrassos, they helped turn the block of Beale between Third and Fourth into an entertainment district that would endure for more than forty years. In 1911 Samuel Zerilla and his son Paul opened the Pastime Theatre at 324 Beale Street, and they later opened a theatre at 318 Beale. Fred DeLuca, along with Mercurio Maceri and his son Joseph, opened the Daisy Theatre at 327 Beale in 1914.[66]

Italian immigrants had been present in fairly substantial numbers in Memphis for several decades at this point. Many came from central Italy to work as tenant farmers on Delta plantations in return for payment of their passage fare, and some were exploited by planters who were seeking to replace the slave labor they had lost in the wake of emancipation.[67] Eventually, some of these people and their descendants made their way to the city. But immigrants also came from elsewhere in Italy: the Barrassos were from Naples, whereas DeLuca and the Maceris were from Sicily.[68] As early as 1870, the Società di Unione e Fratellanza Italiana, a mutual benefit society, had been established in the city. Most Italians attended one of the several Catholic churches in Memphis, especially St. Joseph's, where they constituted the dominant ethnic group.[69] However, there were also a number of Italian Protestants; in fact, at the time of his death in 1935, it was reported that Genoroso Barrasso had been responsible for organizing the Italian Baptist Church in Memphis.[70] Upon moving to the city, many Italians became engaged in the restaurant, saloon, and liquor businesses; the number of Italian surnames included in the list

---

[66] In 1913, the Zerillas opened another Pastime Theatre in the same location on North Main where the Barrassos had operated the Amuse U. Joe Maceri had previously run a Daisy Theatre at 151 Beale. See *Polk's Memphis City Directory*, 1911-17.

[67] For more on this subject, see Paul V. Canonici, *The Delta Italians: Their Pursuit of 'The Better Life' and Their Struggle Against Mosquitos, Floods, and Prejudice* (Madison, MS: P.V. Canonici, 2003).

[68] "Fred DeLuca," *Commercial Appeal*, 12 September 1967. Mercurio Maceri's death certificate indicates that he was born in Terrasini; see Shelby County Register of Deeds, File no. 2618, http://register.shelby.tn.us, accessed 8 December 2011. I have not been able to determine the birthplace of Sam Zerilla.

[69] Keating and Vedder, 2:138; Wrenn, 14.

[70] "Genoroso Barrasso Is Taken by Death." This may have been a later development, as Fred's funeral services in 1911 were held at St. Mary's Catholic Church.

of saloon proprietors in city directories around the turn of the twentieth century reveals how integral they were to that business. Like the Irish, they also served in law enforcement, as well as other capacities. In 1918, Memphis elected its first Italian American mayor, Frank L. Monteverde, who had served as the Sheriff of Shelby County from 1904 to 1910.

In addition to the experience of plantation labor and exploitation that many Italians shared with African Americans, they also suffered from prejudice in the U.S. South and elsewhere—though, of course, they did not experience the same extremes as African Americans in either of these cases. Some of the prejudice was religious in nature; Italians and other primarily Catholic groups were often disdainfully referred to as "Romanists" by some members of the Protestant majority. But the bigotry went well beyond just religious difference and name-calling. In 1891, eleven Sicilians were lynched in New Orleans after having been accused of killing the New Orleans Chief of Police, David Hennessy, by order of the Mafia. Hennessy had developed a reputation during his career for prosecuting Sicilian criminals. Although the group of eleven Italians had been tried and acquitted, a lynch mob decided to take matters into their own hands, as all too often happened in the South during this period.[71] Whereas the Irish had assimilated for the most part by the late nineteenth century, the new wave of immigrants from southern Europe, many with darker skins than groups from other areas in Europe, faced

[71] For a full account of this incident, see Barbara Botein, "The Hennessy Case: An Episode in Anti-Italian Nativism," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 20, no. 3 (Summer 1979): 261-79. Botein points out that "contemporary newspapers and periodicals used the term 'Mafia' loosely in describing crime. They made no attempt to define it precisely or to differentiate between Sicilian criminals in New Orleans and a national or international organization. Many of the Italians arrested in connection with the Hennessy case had no criminal records" (263 n. 11). My own prejudices—piqued by the association of the Beale Street area with organized crime, a subject I will discuss in the next section—led me to suspect that perhaps Fred Barrasso's untimely death was the result of foul play because of competition in the business. However, his burial permit clearly indicates that his death was caused by a cerebral embolism. Shelby County Register of Deeds, File no. 21926, accessed 4 November 2011, http://register.shelby.tn.us. I found no connection between the Barrassos, the Zerillas, the Maceris, or DeLuca, and organized crime. If there were any, they, too, are buried by now.

persecution. Perhaps these experiences made for some understanding and easier relations between African Americans and Italians in the entertainment business.

Such prejudice was not always the case with Italian immigrants, however, and in the racist hierarchies prevalent in the dominant worldview of white supremacy, Italians were often seen as somehow "above" African Americans. This "inbetween" status of European immigrants with regard to "whiteness" has been the subject of much scholarly debate, and to fully explain these arguments here would be outside the scope of this chapter at present.[72] Suffice it to say that the racial status of the Beale Street Italians could certainly be viewed as ambivalent due to their close and enduring associations with the black community as well as their ability to liaise with the white community for business purposes; somehow they managed to straddle the color line.

However, their relationships with the African American community in Memphis were not without tensions. By 1917, the Zerillas were no longer in control of the theatre at 318 Beale, and Church, perhaps alarmed by the monopoly the Italians seemed to have on black entertainment, decided to open a movie theatre called the Lincoln at that location. If Church was indeed alarmed about the situation on Beale, he was not alone. Apparently a dispute erupted because Church hired an African American who was not a union member to operate the projector at the Lincoln. An article appeared in the *Chicago Defender* about the fallout, complaining that the Italians had thrown fits and provoked "labor agitators" who in turn provoked the city administration and the local press—that "organ of the lynching organization in Memphis"—to lash out at Church. The author of the article acknowledged Church as the "wealthiest Race man

[72] See, for example, James R. Barrett and David Roediger, "Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality, and the 'New Immigrant' Working Class," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16, no. 3 (Spring 1997): 3-44; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); and, for an opposing view, Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

in the country and the unquestioned political leader of his people." Viewing this situation as an example that "the white race means to drive the Race into industrial slavery," the author vented his frustration that the Lincoln was the only black-owned theatre in the city and that "the dagoes and Greeks have pushed the Race off of Beale Street, and the Race seems willing to be pushed." Coming less than three months after the Ell Persons lynching, the anger present in this article is not surprising.[73]

In spite of these tensions, by 1921, Church's days as a theatre manager were over. He had closed the Lincoln and sold Church's Auditorium to the city, and he turned all of his energy towards politics. In the decade that followed, he would become the most prominent African American political figure in the country—so much so that *Time* magazine referred to him as the "roving dictator of the Lincoln Belt."[74] It is possible that the issue of respectability that surrounded the theatre, especially in the Beale Street area, kept other members of the African American upper and middle classes from helping Church out with regard to his theatre or investing in other theatres themselves. Or perhaps the Italians did use their influence and their ambivalent "whiteness" to corner the market in African American entertainment in Memphis. At any rate, the fact that the most prominent black theatres in Memphis came to be run by Italians did not seem to keep the patrons away. Changes in the Memphis African American theatre scene continued without Church, as the theatres on Beale Street became more and more connected to other theatres on the Road through the development of circuits in this segment of the theatre industry.

---

[73] "Conditions Are Bad in Memphis, Tenn.," *Chicago Defender*, 11 August 1917. Up to this point, I have not been able to find anything in the local newspapers regarding this dispute.

[74] Lamon, 228.

African American Circuits in Memphis and the South

For a year prior to his death in 1911, Fred Barrasso had been engaged in the creation of his Tri-State Circuit which, according to Abbott and Seroff, was "the first attempt to establish a black theater chain or booking agency in the South," as well as "the first outward manifestation of Memphis's identity as the 'Home of the Blues.'"[75] Based at the Savoy Theatre in Memphis, this circuit also included, at one time or another, theatres in Jackson, Vicksburg, Greenville, and Clarksdale, Mississippi; Hot Springs, Arkansas; and Mobile, Alabama. Although it was small and short-lived, Barrasso's circuit was significant not only because of the reasons cited by Abbott and Seroff, but also because it was really the only theatrical circuit for which Memphis ever served as the hub. In the legitimate arena, the regional Southern Circuit had been based in Atlanta, whereas the national circuits had their home offices in New York. Until the decline of the Road, it would seem that Memphis was a more important part of this spatial concept for African American theatre than it was for mainstream legitimate theatre or vaudeville.

The early development of the Tri-State Circuit is often cited but much misconstrued. Several sources claim that the Theatre Owners' Booking Association (or an earlier organization with the same name) got its start in Memphis when Fred Barrasso created it in 1907, or when his brother Anselmo did in 1909. However, this is highly unlikely, given that the Barrassos had only just entered the theatrical business in 1909, and Fred's Tri-State Circuit was a much smaller venture than the actual T.O.B.A., which was not formed until 1921. Similar to the establishment of Church's Auditorium, this development in black theatre, taking place in the most African

[75] Abbott and Seroff, "They Cert'ly Sound Good to Me," 434.

American city in the U.S. at the time, does merit recognition. However, Barrasso's circuit was only one of several that eventually made up the T.O.B.A.[76]

Barrasso's circuit was, however, like all other black theatrical circuits during the first decade of the twentieth century, owned and run by white men. Since the end of the Civil War, when African Americans first entered the theatrical profession in numbers, black theatre had developed into a burgeoning business in the U.S., and much of the field consisted of road shows. But until the turn of the century, traveling African American troupes performed in European American-run theatres that presented primarily European American material for mostly European American audiences. Throughout the South, and even in the North, blacks—regardless of class—were permitted to sit only in the segregated balconies and galleries of these theatres. In many smaller southern cities, they were not allowed entrance at all. There were also no black-owned booking agencies, so black troupes were often booked by white agents.[77] Prior to the construction of Church's Auditorium on Beale in 1901, African American companies appearing in Memphis performed primarily at the Auditorium at Main and Linden, at least since 1896.

By 1900, things were beginning to change in the region. Church's was one of the first theatres in the U.S. built, owned, and managed by and for African Americans, as mentioned previously. Around the same time that Church purchased the land for his park and theatre, African American performer Pat Chappelle and his brothers leased an existing building in the La

---

[76] Michael Miklos notes the scholarly confusion over this issue in his entry on the Theatre Owners' Booking Association in *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Cary D. Wintz and Paul Finkelman, 2 vols. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2:1172. From what I have been able to glean, the error may stem from Paul Oliver's *The Story of the Blues* (1969; reprint, Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 77.

[77] Sampson, 140-41.

Villa neighborhood of Jacksonville, Florida, and opened the Excelsior Concert Hall there.[78] Throughout the next decade, theatres catering specifically to black audiences proliferated, especially in the South, where a large black population was hungry for theatrical entertainment. By October 1910, Salem Tutt Whitney, a well-known black performer who had worked with both the Smart Set and the Black Patti Troubadours, noted in the *Freeman* that "colored playhouses are springing up in the South like mushrooms, and doing good business." He also warned traveling performers that African American audiences in the South were harder to please than in the North, and that they had better be versatile and "have something original."[79]

Although many of these theatres were still owned or leased and managed by white men, several were under black proprietorship. Thomas L. Riis has noted that of fifty-three theatres owned by blacks that were listed in the *Freeman* during the same year as Whitney's comments, forty-two were located in southern cities.[80] Henry T. Sampson points out that in addition to opening up the world of popular theatrical entertainment to a wider black audience, some of these theatres also "gave birth to resident black theatrical stock companies where many of the top stars of later years received their first professional experience." Despite these advancements, both black and white company managers still sometimes refused to play in the South because of the continuing problems caused by white supremacy and racial violence there.[81]

The merits and perils of presenting African American theatre on the Road in the South were hotly debated by top members of the profession. In addition to being one of the first black

---

[78] Sampson, 197; Abbott and Seroff, *Ragged but Right*, 249.

[79] Salem Tutt Whitney, "'The Show's the Thing': Southern Playhouses," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 1 October 1910.

[80] Thomas L. Riis, "Pink Morton's Theater, Black Vaudeville, and the TOBA: Recovering the History, 1910-30," in *New Perspectives on Music: Essays in Honor of Eileen Southern*, ed. Josephine Wright (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 1992), 235; "Where You Find Colored Theatres," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 21 May 1910.

[81] Sampson, 197-98.

theatre managers in the country, Chappelle was also one of the first to successfully manage a traveling show, the Rabbit's Foot Comedy Company, "without the help of a single white man."[82] On a trip to London in 1911, he encountered prominent African American performer Billy McClain, a comedian who, along with Ernest Hogan, had originated the Smart Set Company in 1902. McClain was working abroad at the time, and Chappelle encouraged him to come to the South, where he could make a lot of money. However, McClain replied that "it is not all money with me, for I like liberty and freedom." He objected to working in a region where lynching was common and African Americans did not seem to be able to stick together to fight injustice.[83]

Baby F. Seals, "piano player, all-around comedian and straight man, and composer of what is arguably the earliest published vocal blues song, 'Baby Seals Blues,'" sided with McClain.[84] Seals complained about the ignorance of some southern blacks, the tendency of southern black professionals to keep to themselves, and the horrors visited upon blacks by white southerners. Seals agreed with Chappelle that there was a mint to be made in black entertainment in the South but questioned the worth of the money against what performers had to go through in order to make it, even though Seals did continue to work in the South.[85]

Ivy Hubbard, a female vaudevillian, complained of the unreliability of managers, including African Americans, in the region, as well as the special hazards faced by women in the South, such as propositions from managers and audience expectations of dirty jokes and lewd behavior onstage.[86] Earlier in the same year as Hubbard's comments, however, Whitney had championed southern black audiences, claiming that they were "prodigal with their hospitality."

---

[82] *Indianapolis Freeman*, 27 December 1902, quoted in Abbott and Seroff, *Ragged but Right*, 253.
[83] "The One Billy M'Clain in Europe," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 15 July 1911.
[84] Abbott and Seroff, "They Cert'ly Sound Good to Me," 415.
[85] "Discussing Billy M'Clain's Letter," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 12 August 1911.
[86] "Ivy Hubbard Sounds Warning: The South as a Show Field," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 28 October 1911.

He acknowledged that "everything is 'Jim-Crowed' but the air you breathe" in the South but thanked the audiences for their support and, echoing Booker T. Washington, offered hope that adversity would lead to a "unity of purpose" and "self-reliance."[87]

Some performers who came from the South had a hard time gaining legitimacy within the field. Sylvester Russell, the "dean of black entertainment critics" during this time, often voiced disdain for all things southern.[88] Based in Chicago, Russell wrote for both the *Freeman* and the *Chicago Defender*. When Chappelle was first starting out on the Road, Russell criticized him, stating that he was "green from the South" and not quite up to par. Chappelle countered with a letter insulting Russell and complaining that "there is an insane idea of the people of the North, East and West that the people in the South have no sense."[89] Sherman H. Dudley, a performer from Texas who was to have a major impact on black theatrical circuits in the U.S., also had tensions with Russell. Dudley had started out in minstrelsy and continued to perform in blackface. For years Russell, who considered minstrelsy illegitimate, constantly denigrated Dudley in the press for these aspects of his career and also for his Texas dialect and rural proclivities. Finally, in 1911, when Russell made a remark about Dudley's son in the press, Dudley had had enough. He met with Russell and physically assaulted him, for which Russell had him arrested.[90]

With the proliferation of black theatres and traveling troupes in the South, and the reigning trend toward consolidation and streamlining in the theatrical business in general, it was

---

[87] "Seen and Heard While Passing," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 4 March 1911.

[88] Lynn Abbot and Doug Seroff acknowledge Russell's contributions to their seminal work and refer to him as the "dean of black entertainment critics" in *Ragged but Right: Black Traveling Shows, "Coon Songs," and the Dark Pathway to Blues and Jazz* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2007), 5. They quote William Henry Davis, "A Historic Account of Sylvester Russell," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 1 January 1910.

[89] Sylvester Russell, "A Review of the Stage," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 15 February 1902, quoted in Abbott and Seroff, *Ragged but Right*, 251; "Pat Chappelle Grows Caustic," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 1 March 1902.

[90] Abbott and Seroff, *Ragged but Right*, 89-91.

inevitable that black theatres, too, would begin to coalesce into circuits run by enterprising managers and booking agents. As early as 1902, Chappelle announced plans to form a circuit comprising theatres in Savannah, Georgia, and Jacksonville and Tampa, Florida; however, this circuit apparently did not come to fruition.[91] Several years later, just over a month after the first ad for Barrasso's Tri-State Circuit appeared in the *Freeman*, L.D. Joel, a white booking agent who billed himself as the "Theatrical King," announced the formation of the Southern Vaudeville Circuit. This circuit included African American theatres in Atlanta, Montgomery, Mobile, and Pensacola—all owned by white men—and was allegedly capitalized at $100,000.[92] Ads began to appear regularly in the *Freeman* for both the Tri-State and Southern Vaudeville Circuits, enticing performers with the prospect of up to twenty-four consecutive weeks of steady work and pay without long railroad jumps.

In the midst of these developments, an article about Tick Houston's new theatre in Louisville urged the public to support black-owned theatres and admonished managers not to "stand idly by and see the white neighbor reap the results of entertaining the colored people with theaters built for them."[93] It is quite possible that Houston felt he had been pushed out of Memphis by white managers there. However, Russell, in his annual theatrical review that year, asserted that it would be better at the time for experienced whites, rather than inexperienced blacks, to own the theatres, so long as the white owner was "a square, cordial, unbiased man…willing to employ a colored manager as a preference."[94] Regardless of business acumen, though, many white agents and owners "had little if any knowledge of the black community's

---

[91] *Indianapolis Freeman*, 21 June 1902; Peter Dunbaugh Smith, "Ashley Street Blues: Racial Uplift and the Commodification of Vernacular Performance in La Villa, Florida, 1896-1916" (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 2006), 45-46.

[92] "Of Much Importance," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 5 November 1910.

[93] "Tick Houston Theater, Louisville," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 1 October 1910.

[94] "Eleventh Annual Review," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 24 December 1910.

tastes in entertainment," as theatre scholar David Krasner has pointed out.[95] Strides were being made with regard to black theatre ownership and management in the U.S., but much remained to be worked out, especially where the Road was concerned.

By late spring of the following year, Barrasso and Joel had consolidated their circuits. With the addition of Charles P. Bailey, manager of the Central Theatre in Atlanta, the new Joel-Bailey-Barrasso Circuit claimed to be able to offer sixty weeks of bookings at twenty of the principal theatres throughout the South. An ad for the circuit in the June 10 issue of the *Freeman* carried photos of all three managers and continued to refer to Joel as the "Theatrical King," whereas Bailey was the "Vaudeville Prince" and Barrasso the "Performers' Friend." Barrasso died two weeks later, but ads for the circuit continued to run for another two weeks following his death, and no announcement was made of any change. Not until the end of July was there mention of the "Joel and Bailey Southern Vaudeville Circuit," and it was September before an ad appeared stating that Genoroso Barrasso would be taking over the business of his late son's Tri-State Circuit. Two months later, an ad revealed that Fred's brother Anselmo was managing the family's theatre in Vicksburg and running a stock company produced by African American performer James Ransom, but it does not appear that the Barrassos continued the association with Joel and Bailey.[96]

Right around this time, the first black-owned and -operated theatrical circuit in the U.S. was beginning to appear on the horizon. Dudley, the minstrel performer who had had a run-in with Russell, began buying and leasing theatres with the fortunes that he had made from performing. He wrote a letter, published in the *Freeman* in January 1912, that issued a challenge

---

[95] David Krasner, *A Beautiful Pageant: African American Theatre, Drama, and Performance in the Harlem Renaissance, 1910-1927* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 271.

[96] *Indianapolis Freeman*, 6 May-18 November 1910.

to prominent African Americans interested in promoting and investing in theatre. Dudley claimed that there was more money to be made in theatrical entertainment than in any other field and declared that "the day is now ripe, the time has come." He encouraged those with the money to buy up theatres, which were easily obtainable at the moment "due to the passing of the 'pistol drama' for the whites, which has seen its best days, thereby leaving a vast amount of theatrical property practically valueless for immediate usages." The field of cheap melodrama in ten-twent'-thirt' theatres was indeed being superseded by the movies at this point, and Dudley saw an opportunity for the advancement of black theatre through property ownership. He proposed a chain of African American theatres, "controlled and operated exclusively by business men of the race," and offered his own finances and professional experience to help make it a guaranteed success.[97]

Dudley's proposal was met with both enthusiasm and skepticism. Soon after his letter was published, another letter appeared which praised Dudley and encouraged businessmen to "jump at the proposition" that he had presented.[98] Athelia Knight has noted, however, that Russell was one of the first to sound a note of pessimism in the matter, stating "that he would reserve his judgment until Dudley had proved it could be done and had raised $500,000 to establish a corporation with stockholders to oversee the venture."[99] Further doubt came from Andrew N. Johnson, a successful black businessman in Nashville who had just recently opened a theatre there. Johnson claimed that

> the race has not developed to the corporation point. You just can not get any two men together to build a theater, to say nothing of a joinst [*sic*] stock company. Mr. Church, of Memphis, and Mr. Motts, of Chicago [who had opened the Pekin

---

[97] "Dudley Wants to Know," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 20 January 1912.

[98] "Says Chain of Colored Theaters Should Be Established," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 3 February 1912.

[99] Athelia Knight, "In Retrospect: Sherman H. Dudley: He Paved the Way for T.O.B.A.," *The Black Perspective in Music* 15, no. 2 (Autumn 1987): 159.

> Theatre in 1905], were pioneers in the line. They didn't have an outside dollar invested with them…White men can form stock companies, but the Negro can not. He is mentally afraid he will lose.[100]

It should be noted that Johnson's lack of confidence was probably affected by his own new theatre's inability to draw a sufficient number of African American patrons away from the balconies of Nashville's predominantly white theatres.[101]

Despite the naysayers, Dudley's venture proved to be quite successful, so much so that by summer of that year the *Freeman* began publishing a regular feature entitled "What's What on the Dudley Circuit." In December 1912, the paper listed all fourteen houses that comprised the circuit, which were mostly located in midwestern and southeastern cities but also included the Savoy in Memphis. Atlanta was not among the cities represented in Dudley's circuit at this time.[102] By the end of the following year, the S.H. Dudley Amusement Enterprise, based in Washington, DC, was expanding, and Dudley was serving as Secretary of the Colored Consolidated Vaudeville Exchange (CCVE), of which Anselmo Barrasso's new Metropolitan Theatre in Memphis was a part.

In the Christmas number of the *Freeman* in 1913, a huge ad appeared for the CCVE, containing the photos of many of the theatre managers on the circuit, including Barrasso, who was referred to as "the wealthy southern manager…who has made it possible for colored acts to receive the same salary South as in the East or West."[103] A week later, the Barrassos took out a

---

[100] "Mr. Dudley Answered," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 9 March 1912.

[101] Lamon, 168.

[102] Knight notes that the "What's What" feature began on 20 July 1912 (160). She also lists the cities from the *Freeman* article ("Dudley's Enterprise!" 28 December 1912) in which Dudley circuit theatres were located, but she mistakenly cites Philadelphia twice and does not mention Memphis. The inclusion of the Savoy—an Italian American-owned theatre—in Dudley's circuit, as well as its inclusion among the black-owned theatres cited two years earlier in the *Freeman* ("Where You Find Colored Theatres"), provokes questions regarding the perceived racial status of the Barrassos (an issue discussed briefly above), but this seeming incongruence does not ever seem to be discussed in the primary sources.

[103] *Indianapolis Freeman*, 20 December 1913.

full-page ad in the *Memphis Sun*, an African American newspaper, in which they touted their theatre as an "important link" in the CCVE's chain of theatres. Further, they announced their intentions to "fetch every actor and actress who has won distinction to the people of the city," and assured the public that "no theatre in Memphis is conducted with more order and dignity, and none appreciate more than the Metropolitan the support of the people for whom it was opened and is still maintained." Calling Memphis "the unquestioned home of the moving beats of modern music," they proclaimed that they had "no higher ambition than to become a Memphis institution."[104]

On the same day, a puff piece appeared in the *Freeman* about the Metropolitan, referring to it as "Memphis' Great Theater" and recognizing it as one of the most prominent in the South, the "pleasure center of Memphis," and "something of a star house on the Dudley circuit." One reason given for the theatre's notoriety was that "here may be seen for ten cents what other theatres in the city, with jim crow [*sic*] surroundings, charge twenty-five and fifty cents for without, indeed, measuring up to the slightest offering of the Metropolitan."[105] In both the *Sun* and the *Freeman*, Fred Barrasso's memory was alluded to, and Genoroso and Anselmo were described as genial, professional, fair, and cognizant that their success was dependent upon the satisfaction of the African American theatre-going public.

Besides the obvious desire to win crowds with such advertisements and feature articles, the Barrassos may also have wanted to make clear to the African American public where they stood with regard to their position as Italian American proprietors of an African American theatre in the South. Two years previously, Russell had written a piece in the *Freeman* entitled "Warning to Southern Managers," in which he condemned managers in the South, white and

---

[104] *Memphis Sun*, 27 December 1913, located in the Church Family Papers.

[105] "Memphis' Great Theater," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 27 December 1913.

black, who did not play fair with black performers with regard to pay. Such managers needed reminding that performers should be treated like human beings, especially when having to travel in "heathen lands against their will to earn a living. I say heathen lands because, unfortunately for America, the South is a lawless country, where actors have no redress in the courts if they go to law in order to force managers to give them their money."[106]

Despite the harsh conditions that performing in the South presented to African American artists, this area of the U.S. apparently experienced a boom in black entertainment around this time, at least according to Whitney in his *Freeman* column, "Seen and Heard While Passing." In the same issue that featured the article about the rise of the Metropolitan Theatre, Whitney again extolled the virtues of playing in the South over the dry prospects then prevailing in the North, pointing to the fact that "in towns where the colored population warrants the venture," of which Memphis was certainly one, theatres were being erected "with a view to playing colored road shows," a category into which the Metropolitan also fell. Having traveled throughout the region, he reported that if a company was able to travel "in its own private car, it will suffer little more inconvenience from race prejudice than is encountered in the North," and that he had been welcomed and decently treated by white managers, stage hands, and citizens. Looking ahead, Whitney concluded that "unless there is a change for the better in the North, regarding colored shows, a couple more seasons will find the South the only possible field for the exploitation of a colored show."[107] Of course, to put things in perspective, Whitney was at the top of his profession, and not all traveling performers could afford the luxury of a private railroad car. Further, all this activity in the South was happening on the eve of the Great Migration of African Americans to the North, which peaked just a few years later, between 1916 and 1918.

---

[106] Sylvester Russell, "Warning to Southern Managers," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 23 December 1911.
[107] Salem Tutt Whitney, "Seen and Heard While Passing," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 27 December 1913.

By 1918, even Russell had to admit that Dudley had built a "successful and stable circuit."[108] As had happened in the European American legitimate theatre, the consolidation of circuits inevitably led to conflict within the business of African American theatre. Perhaps because of the lack of wider coverage in the press for events within this sector, the trajectory leading up to the formation of the all-encompassing Theatre Owners' Booking Association in 1921 is a bit sketchy. The CCVE, cited above, appears to have been overlooked by theatre scholars.[109] Knight, Krasner, and Riis all make reference to a Southern Consolidated Circuit (SCC), in which Dudley was also involved, but they do not make clear when this entity was formed.[110] Perhaps the SCC was a regional offshoot of the CCVE: Knight mentions that Chintz Moore, who owned and ran a theatre in Dallas, was a principal of the SCC, and a blurb in the *Chicago Defender* in 1919 confirms that Moore had recently been put in charge of the southern district of the CCVE.[111]

Another important African American circuit in the South, the United Vaudeville Circuit (UVC), was formed in 1919 when Dudley teamed up with Martin Klein, a prominent Chicago booking agent, and Sam Reevin of the Liberty Theatre in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Klein had also been involved with Dudley in the CCVE years earlier, when he served as that circuit's manager and treasurer. In addition to their new circuit, Dudley and Klein continued to book for the SCC, but they do not appear to have been involved with the group as principals.

---

[108] *Indianapolis Freeman*, 12 January 1918, quoted in Knight, 164.

[109] Knight, Krasner, and Riis do not mention this company. On its formation, see "In Chicago and Suburbs," *Chicago Defender*, 28 June 1913. Ads for the company began to appear in the *Freeman* soon after, on 5 July 1913.

[110] Knight, 165; Krasner, 273; Riis, 237.

[111] Knight, 165; "A Note or Two," *Chicago Defender*, 10 May 1919. Moore was an African American theatre owner in Dallas.

According to Knight, a rift developed between the SCC and the UVC at the beginning of 1920, when Reevin nominated Dudley for president of the SCC. Charles Bailey, the Atlanta manager with whom Fred Barrasso had briefly been associated just before his death, protested furiously against the nomination of Dudley. Apparently, Bailey had developed a reputation for doing business much like the mainstream circuits, where blacklisting and money-grubbing were common. Not only was Dudley an opponent of such activities, but race also appears to have been an issue in the dispute. Soon after, Dudley, Klein, and Reevin sold their interests in the SCC and competed directly with them for several months. Tempers had cooled by the summer, however, and the SCC and UVC consolidated their circuits. In January of 1921, the T.O.B.A. was formed, which in essence consolidated the entire African American theatre business.[112]

During the time of these conflicts and consolidations, the Beale Street theatres were undergoing change as well. The lack of extant local primary sources obscures events somewhat, but it appears that the reverberations along the Road of African American theatre, at least as they manifested in Memphis, were much less rancorous than in the other sectors of the entertainment business. Of course, this trend may have had much to do with an imbalance of economic and social power in favor of the Italian Americans who owned all the theatres. In 1918, the Zerillas opened a new theatre, the Grand, at 332 Beale. Later that year, Anselmo Barrasso severed his connections with the Metropolitan Theatre, and Sam Zerilla took it over. Acts at Zerilla's theatres were booked by the SCC.[113] Eventually, Zerilla either tore down the Metropolitan, or it burned. Whatever the case, a new theatre named the Venus was built in the same location. Barrasso appears to have been without a theatre during 1919, but by 1920 he had opened the

[112] For a detailed account of this conflict, see Knight, 165-72.
[113] "A Note or Two," *Chicago Defender*, 14 September 1918.

Palace at 324 Beale, which became part of the UVC.[114] According to *Chicago Defender* columnist Frank Montgomery, Barrasso and Zerilla worked in harmony and made things pleasant for performers working at either theatre, which was easier since the UVC and the SCC had consolidated.[115] In early 1921, the year the T.O.B.A. was organized, Montgomery reported that Barrasso had assumed control of the Venus.[116] The Venus remained open into the 1920s, and the Grand into the 1930s, while the Palace endured as the bright light of the Beale Street entertainment district well into the 1950s.

---

[114] Display ad for Dudley, Klein, and Reevin's United Vaudeville Circuit, *Chicago Defender*, 5 June 1920.

[115] "Frank in South," *Chicago Defender*, 6 November 1920.

[116] Frank Montgomery, "Frank in South," *Chicago Defender*, 20 November 1920; "Frank's Dope," *Chicago Defender*, 30 April 1921.

CHAPTER FIVE

"FROM PROVINCIALISM TO THE WILD WAYS OF A CITY": TRANSFORMING MEMPHIS THEATRES

This chapter explores the changing relationship of the city and its theatres as Memphis transformed into a more modern U.S. city in the years leading up to 1920. Like the African American population, the European American population of Memphis came from multifaceted social backgrounds and economic circumstances, and supported varying worldviews. In addition to the white urban elite and middle classes, rural migrants made up a large portion of the white population of the city, along with a much smaller group of European immigrants who were generally—though not always—accepted as "white" by the majority. However, class and race were not the only means by which this urban society's striations were drawn. Adherence to, or defiance of, codes of morality also figured into the mix, as was discussed briefly in the previous chapter. In Memphis, as in other New South cities experiencing the fervency of life in the industrial age, social and cultural responses to theatre from the religious and the secular, the moralizing and the immoral, cut across categories of class and race. Moreover, pressures from outside the local sphere to conform to nationalist notions of mass culture with regard to theatrical entertainment were met with a certain level of ambivalence.

Heaven and Hell in the Streetcar Barns: The Auditorium/Bijou, the Garden, and the Memphi

In this section of the chapter, I will examine how two particular cultural phenomena of the New South city—evangelism and crime—underscored the establishment of certain theatres in Memphis. In order to do this, it is necessary to backtrack a bit with regard to chronology.

Events in the fall of 1893 surrounding the opening of the Auditorium at Main and Linden, one block down from the Grand Opera House, reveal a conflict of interests among certain

portions of the Memphis community during this period with regard to interpretations of legitimacy and respectability in certain urban spaces. Whereas some types of theatrical entertainment might be deemed appropriate for a theatre that purported to be legitimate, such as the Lyceum, apparently no performance with even the slightest hint of the secular was considered appropriate for the Auditorium, at least according to some people at this early date in the building's history.

In February 1893, Sam Jones, the most famous and popular evangelist in the South, had inspired the creation of the Auditorium during a visit to Memphis. For almost ten years this firebrand Methodist preacher had been coming to the city and holding revivals that lasted for weeks. The religious community during this time was fairly diverse for a southern city (at least within the confines of the Judeo-Christian tradition), but a majority was Protestant. Disturbed by Memphis's longstanding and deserved reputation as a rough-and-ready river town where drinking, gambling, prostitution, and violence were ubiquitous, a large portion of those Protestants were inspired by Jones's particular brand of evangelism. He shocked some with his calculated use of profanity, but his home-spun moral wisdom and, ironically, his passionate theatricality won over people, black and white, in droves throughout the South. At his revivals, he filled the largest church auditoriums in Memphis to the bursting point, and many who desired entrance could not get in. The city had no hall at the time capable of holding a crowd of 5,000 people or more, and Jones hinted that his return would be predicated upon the arrangement of a space large enough to hold the crowds.[1]

---

[1] Despite his fire and brimstone, Jones did not attack Catholics or Jews or incite hostility against these religious groups. For general background on Sam Jones, see Kathleen Minnix, *Laughter in the Amen Corner: The Life of Evangelist Sam Jones* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010); David B. Parker, "'Quit Your Meanness': Sam Jones's Theology for the New South," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 77, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 711-27; and Mrs. Sam P. Jones, *The Life and Sayings of Sam P. Jones* (Atlanta: Franklin-Turner Co., 1907). "Mr. Jones' Farewell," *Appeal-Avalanche*, 20 February 1893.

Taking advantage of the passionate public feeling left in Jones's wake, prominent citizens quickly organized a building fund committee to raise money for the establishment of a tabernacle. Jacob S. Menken and the omnipresent Napoleon Hill, who had both been among the founders of the Grand Opera House, were also charter members of the Auditorium Association.[2] The committee formed a company and garnered a lease on a gargantuan old mule barn owned by the Memphis Street Railway Company. The barn had been rendered useless by the advent of electric cars, and the Auditorium Association planned to refurbish the space and outfit it with a stage and seating. Whether it was purposeful or merely ironic that the location of the building bordered on the red-light district below Linden Avenue does not appear to be indicated in the historical record.

At some point Benjamin M. Stainback was engaged to manage the building. He had come to Memphis from Mississippi around 1875 with his father, George Tucker Stainback, another prominent preacher who was called to the city to head the First Cumberland Presbyterian Church. As a young man, Ben Stainback had held positions as a clerk, bookkeeper, and undertaker in various firms around the city. The job as manager of the Auditorium was his first theatrical employment. Like Frank Gray (discussed in Chapter Three in connection with the first season of the Grand Opera House) and A.B. Morrison (discussed below), Stainback would remain a fixture in the local theatrical scene well into the twentieth century.[3]

The crowds present for the opening and dedicatory ceremonies in October seemed to bode well for the Auditorium's future. For weeks before the opening, announcements appeared

---

[2] "The Auditorium Fund," *Appeal-Avalanche*, 4 October 1893. See this article for a list of other charter members of the Auditorium.

[3] For information on Ben Stainback's father, see Cumberland Presbyterian Church website entries on "George Tucker Stainback," http://www.cumberland.org/hfcpc/minister/StainbackGeorgeTucker.htm, and "Stainback Family Information," http://www.cumberland.org/hfcpc/minister/Stainback.htm, accessed 6 December 2011. For Stainback's occupations, see Memphis city directories, 1876-94.

in the newspaper requesting amateur singers to attend rehearsals for a concert of religious music to be given at the opening ceremony. When this event occurred, the crowd of over 7,000 people was touted as "the largest gathering ever assembled in Memphis."[4] A dedication of the structure was scheduled around Jones's return to the city at the end of the month, just over a week after the opening concert, and another crowd as large as the first assembled. Unfortunately, the man of the hour failed to appear at the dedication, his train having been delayed in another part of the state.

Menken, ever the philanthropist, spoke at this event about the development of the building, alluding to arguments that had been made against investing in such projects during the troubled times caused by the Panic of 1893—arguments that were "of no force when faith, knowledge and confidence control human actions, and this edifice was reared in the face of the most disastrous financial catastrophe that our country has seen for generations." Acknowledging that the Auditorium was "a public institution for the promotion of morality and religion, for the cultivation of the best in our nature," he also pointed out that the charter provided for a broad range of activities such as "literary and educational purposes, public worship and lyceum purposes, concerts, lectures, fine arts, sciences, music and such like themes, as well as for social enjoyment, political meetings, and any other gatherings that are not of an immoral tendency." Menken himself might have made an argument for theatre as a fine art, but an incident soon occurred which made it clear that theatrical entertainment did not cultivate the kind of morality sought by most of the Auditorium's founders.[5]

It was just one week after the opening of the new tabernacle that the first Lyceum Theatre burned down. There was an outpouring of sympathy for that theatre's popular manager, John

---

[4] "Grandly It Is Opened," *Appeal-Avalanche*, 21 October 1893.

[5] "Dedication of the Auditorium," *Appeal-Avalanche*, 30 October 1893.

Mahoney, whom the *Appeal-Avalanche* referred to as the "prince of Southern managers." Fred Orgill, hardware magnate and board member of the Lyceum, along with John J. Hogan of the *Appeal-Avalanche*, approached Stainback about renting the Auditorium to conduct a benefit for Mahoney. Stainback agreed and even went them one further, offering the space free of charge. However, after the benefit was advertised in the newspapers, Sam Jones received communications from several people complaining that such a performance, which might incline toward the theatrical, would not be appropriate for the Auditorium and would go against the charter that governed activities in the building. Orgill and Hogan explained that the benefit they planned to present "could have been given under the auspices of any church or society in the city without offending the strictest church member," and that "nothing in the line of a theatrical performance would be attempted," but to no avail. With the guidance of the famous evangelist, the Auditorium's executive committee rescinded Stainback's generous offer. After some correspondence, however, an agreement was finally worked out whereby the benefit planners would submit for approval an explanation, in writing, of the presentation they intended to give, and would pay for the use of the space.[6]

Economic realities would soon temper religious fervor; perhaps Jones's failure to appear at the dedication could have been taken as a sign. In the fall of 1894, when Mahoney needed the Auditorium for the Marie Tavary Grand English Opera Company, which was supposed to have opened the yet unfinished new Lyceum with a week-long engagement, the Auditorium's board did not protest against the presentation of secular entertainment on their stage. Such a large space had not been in constant demand during its first year, and they could not afford to be

---

[6] "Manager Mahoney's Benefit," *Appeal-Avalanche*, 14 November 1893.

choosy. Rent had to be paid. By 1896, finances were sufficiently in arrears that the Auditorium was auctioned off and converted for use as a popular-priced theatre.[7]

Since the Memphis Theatre had burned down five years earlier, there had been no such theatre in the city that catered to working-class audiences. Also, the timing of Auditorium's conversion to a popular-priced theatre coincided with the pitch of the battle for first-class bookings between the newly formed Syndicate at the Grand Opera House and Henry Greenwall's American Theatrical Exchange at the Lyceum. The *Evening Scimitar* announced in September 1896 that Stainback had engaged a stock company to present "standard dramas with a nightly change of bill" at ten-, twenty-, and thirty-cent admission prices. "Specialty" acts were to appear at intervals, a feature which seems to have presaged John D. Hopkins's venture at the Lyceum two years later.[8]

The Auditorium Stock Company, managed by a Mr. Swain, opened the theatre with Dion Boucicault's melodrama *The Streets of New York*. While this play may have been chosen to appeal to the urban sensibilities (and pockets) of a large, working-class crowd, apparently the company was not very good: within a week, Stainback had fired them because of the poor quality of their productions. In their stead, he retained J.C. ("Fattie") Stewart and his company, who had just finished an engagement at the Grand Opera House. Stewart, whose real name was John Stewart Crossy, was a Dublin-born comedian and playwright.[9] He had been seen in Memphis theatres several times in his most popular farces, *The Two Johns* and *The Fat Men's Club*, and Stainback hired him to present these and others of his farces at the Auditorium with a

---

[7] Hugh Higbee Huhn, "When the Bijou Theatre Burned: A Monument of Morality and Immorality Now in a Ruin of Ashes," *Commercial Appeal*, 11 June 1911; "The Auditorium Sold," *Commercial Appeal*, 10 May 1896; "Amusements," *Commercial Appeal*, 21 September 1896.

[8] "Theatrical Tidings," *Evening Scimitar*, 19 September 1896.

[9] "Famous Fat Man Dead," *New York Times*, 24 May 1905.

weekly change of bill. Stewart and his company remained at this theatre for some time, sharing the stage with concerts of classical music, minstrel shows, and a variety of other forms of entertainment. It would appear that if Stainback had had long-term plans for the theatre to house a permanent stock company, this was not to be the case.

Although the Grand Opera House and the Lyceum also offered a variety of theatrical fare other than plays, musicals, and operas from time to time, the Auditorium was to become synonymous with this kind of wide-ranging fare. In addition to melodramas, farces, minstrel shows, and concerts, everything from prize fights to chicken shows to grand opera was presented at this theatre, and it came to be known as the "Madison Square Garden" of Memphis. The Metropolitan Opera Company performed here several times, and it was here that Edison's Vitascope was first displayed in the city. At one point it contained a skating rink; at another it housed a circus. Around the turn of the century, it was the scene of an annual Mardi Gras ball. Despite its connections to a bygone world of mule-drawn streetcars, in some regards the Auditorium, more than any other theatre in the city, represented the chaos of modern urban life in the U.S.[10]

Perhaps one of the Auditorium's most important contributions to Memphis was in the area of African American theatre. Before the opening of Church's Auditorium on Beale in 1901, the Auditorium at Main and Linden was the only place in town where large numbers of blacks could attend the theatre. Prices were prohibitive at the other theatres, and often African American performers did not appear on stage there, as I mentioned in the previous chapter. African American patrons still had to enter separately from whites and sit above the ground floor, and there was a partition dividing the seats for blacks and whites. However, a sizeable

---

[10] "Bijou Theater Is Burned to Ground," *Commercial Appeal*, 5 June 1911.

portion of the 5,000-seat theatre was given over to black theatre-goers. Most importantly, at the Auditorium, black audiences had opportunities to witness the revolutionary changes in African American theatre that were happening around this time. Black performers were beginning to step away from some of the old minstrel stereotypes that had first been created by white performers in blackface, and to make further strides in theatrical forms outside of minstrelsy. It was at the Auditorium that Cole and Johnson's *A Trip to Coontown*—the first full-length musical comedy to be "conceived, produced, directed, and managed entirely by blacks"—was introduced to Memphis.[11] Other important African American performers, such as the Black Patti Troubadours, the Nashville Students, and Isham's Octoroons appeared here as well.

Like other theatres in Memphis, the Auditorium's place on the Road eventually became corporatized. In 1904, Jake Wells, who operated a regional circuit out of Richmond, Virginia, took over general management of the theatre, absorbing it into his chain of popular-priced houses. The last performances on the stage of the Auditorium were of Weber and Fields's burlesques and Adelina Patti's concert tour. Wells financed a major overhaul of the theatre and renamed it the Bijou to conform with the other so-named theatres in his circuit. He kept Stainback on board but hired the firm of Stair and Havlin, national leaders in the popular-priced theatre business, to book all the shows at the new Bijou. Concerning this change, which echoed contemporary local-to-global, streamlining corporate trends, Memphis theatre critic Hugh Huhn remarked that "the Wells-Stainback combination brought order out of chaos" for this theatre.[12]

Thus, the old mule barn had been transformed once again, this time into Memphis's primary home of "pistol drama," as Sherman H. Dudley would later refer to popular

---

[11] Bernard L. Peterson, *Early Black American Playwrights and Dramatic Writers: A Biographical Directory and Catalogue of Plays, Films, and Broadcasting Strips* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990), 8.

[12] "Changes at Auditorium," *Commercial Appeal*, 17 January 1904; "When the Bijou Theatre Burned."

melodrama.[13] The Bijou opened in the spring, two months after the closing of the Auditorium. During the first season, plays such as Hal Reid's *A Working Girl's Wrongs*, along with other titles like *The Curse of Drink*, *For His Sister's Honor*, and *More to Be Pitied than Scorned*, seem to indicate the general fare offered at this theatre. A generous helping of comedies and musicals filled out the Bijou's bills, which changed weekly, as "lightly garbed maidens and daring Jack Daltons" graced its stage "with alternating regularity."[14]

When this building, too, met its end in flames in 1911, Hugh Huhn related the history of the Auditorium in his characteristic lyrical, moralizing, and racist manner. He portrayed as a sharp decline the time between the theatre's evangelical beginnings and its last days of moral degradation before being reincarnated as the Bijou. He referred to the prize fights of the late 1890s as events where "beer and whiskey could be had for the asking" and "bets were broadly and boldly made." The Mardi Gras balls had been where "men prominent in political and commercial circles touched arms with the 'other half.'" Huhn also, myopically, seemed to place the African American shows at the nadir of the theatre's fortunes. At any rate, using this particular urban space as a moral object lesson, he asserted that the reason for Reverend Sam Jones's failure to transform Memphis from "a city of soulless sin" to a "city of eternal purity" was that, "having graduated from provincialism to the wild ways of a city, Memphis never will be completely redeemed."[15]

* * *

One event did take place in the Auditorium that was unlike anything that ever happened in any of the other theatres in Memphis during this period. At the Mardi Gras ball in February

---

[13] "Dudley Wants to Know," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 20 January 1912.

[14] *Commercial Appeal*, 11 September 1904-6 March 1905; quote is from "Bijou Theater Is Burned." "Jack Dalton" was a common, generic reference to the hero character type in cheap melodramas.

[15] "When the Bijou Theatre Burned."

1899, a man was murdered as a result of a petty dispute between two white men. According to the *Commercial Appeal*, the revelers at the ball simply continued to dance around the corpse, "as though nothing in the nature of tragedy had occurred."[16] Violent crime was a fact of urban life in Memphis then, as it is now.

Although the press and mainstream opinion laid much of the blame for this reputation at the feet of the black community, whites played a major role in this drama as well. Frank Poston, the prominent attorney who had delivered the dedicatory address at the first Lyceum in 1890, was shot and killed on DeSoto Street between Gayoso and Beale in the broad afternoon light of Christmas Day in 1905. The newspaper reported that he had attended Christmas dinner at his sister's home on Beale (in the rich, white eastern end) and was on his way to an engagement at his office in the Equitable Building at Main and Jefferson. Supposedly he had not been able to find a car to take him uptown and decided to walk instead. The story of Poston's death, which bore the race-baiting title, "Frank Poston the Victim of a Negro's Wild Bullet," began with a statement that he was "a man of sterling worth and fixed integrity." However, the author failed to question why Poston might have had a business meeting on Christmas, or why, walking west down Beale, he chose to turn north on DeSoto toward the most notorious blocks in the city, rather than continue on to Main Street to make the turn. At any rate, Poston's murder, whether or not he was "touching arms with the other half," was one of four that occurred that same day. Three years later, "Wild Bill" Latura walked into a saloon near Beale and started shooting, claiming at least three African American victims, as mentioned in the last chapter. For the first

---

[16] "Tragedy at a Dance," *Commercial Appeal*, 15 February 1899.

decade of the twentieth century, the Prudential Life Insurance Company labeled Memphis as the murder capital of the U.S.[17]

Several things contributed to the emotional powder keg that Memphis could sometimes be: the unmitigated clash of rural, urban, and foreign worldviews, made so through the near impossibility of cultural exchange predicated on the color line; the deeply hypocritical and inhumane social system of white supremacy; abject poverty induced by and enforced through uneven economic development; a corrupt political and administrative system that concentrated power in the hands of a few who overlooked—and at times, in the pursuit of profit, even engaged in and encouraged—out-of-control indulgences in vice; and an imperialistic national system that made all bow in deference to the god of northern capital.

Blaming these problems on ungodliness, Sam Jones had attacked what he considered the flagrant immorality of Memphis during his visits in 1893. Many thousands listened and acted, participating in the progressivism of the era. Others, however—in particular, some first- and second-generation Irish and Italian Americans thwarted by the economic and social systems of the New South city, which favored multi-generation Anglo-Saxon Protestant citizens for the most part—made their way through the urban chaos using more unorthodox methods, which involved the establishment of variety theatres.

In the previous chapter, I described James Kinnane's association with the Rialto and also mentioned his connection to the address at which Tick's Tivoli was located. Kinnane was one of several notorious figures in the Memphis underworld during this period, but his power was on the wane by the time these theatres were in operation. In his stead, John Persica had become the

---

[17] "Frank Poston the Victim of a Negro's Wild Bullet," *Commercial Appeal*, 26 December 1905. For a detailed discussion and statistics of crime in Memphis during this period, see William D. Miller, *Memphis During the Progressive Era, 1900-1917* (Madison, WI: American History Research Center, 1957), 87-103.

undisputed kingpin of organized crime in the city. Like Kinnane and many other European immigrants in Memphis at this time, Persica, who came from Italy by way of New Orleans, was a saloon operator. During the 1890s he opened a saloon called the New Orleans House at 56 Hernando Street, just around the corner from the brothels on Gayoso. The city did not want for drinking establishments around the turn of the twentieth century; whereas Atlanta had ninety saloons in 1903, and Birmingham 125, Memphis supported 504.[18] Many saloons, including Persica's, were associated with gambling and prostitution. On several occasions throughout the first decade of the twentieth century, editorials appeared in the newspapers denouncing such establishments and practices, but they continued unabated.

One such editorial in late 1901 complained about the proliferation of "dance halls and so-called variety theaters in connection with saloons in Memphis," suggesting that such places were merely fronts for illegal gambling and should be closed down.[19] Of course, these kinds of variety theatres were nothing new in Memphis. During the same year as this editorial, a listing for a short-lived theatre called the Trocadero appeared in the city directory at the same location where Persica's New Orleans House had been. By this time, however, Persica had moved across and up the street to 67 Hernando and was operating a saloon there, along with a variety theatre called the Garden. Perhaps goaded on by his rival Kinnane's brushes with show business success, though, he had his eyes on an even bigger space: the empty streetcar barn located at the corner of Hernando and Gayoso.[20]

---

[18] Miller, 89. His source is U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistics of Cities, 1902-1903* (Bulletin 20, 1905), 76.

[19] "A Heavy Hand Needed," *Commercial Appeal*, 12 December 1901.

[20] *Polk's Memphis City Directory for 1901*; *New York Clipper*, 31 August 1901 and 28 February 1903; "Variety Theater," *Commercial Appeal*, 17 September 1903.

Whatever the reason, Persica obtained a lease on the barn, which had been left vacant by the consolidation of the city's streetcar companies, and he began making plans to convert it into a theatre. Soon the New Garden Theatre was in operation, right in the heart of the tenderloin district, and just one block west of Tick's. This theatre developed an infamous reputation because of its direct affiliation with a saloon and dance hall. Brief mentions in the *New York Clipper* reveal that acts such as blackface comedians, singers, and belly dancers appeared on its stage.[21]

Around the same time that Persica was converting the streetcar barn, his lieutenants, Michael Haggarty and George "Bud" Degg, opened their own variety theatre, the Memphi, at Second Street and Gayoso, one block west of Persica's New Garden Theatre. Haggarty and Degg had run the Turf Saloon—the "nerve center of the Fourth Ward," according to William D. Miller—at this location for several years before they opened the theatre. Like the Garden, it had a dance hall. This "noted playhouse of the underworld" did not last long; not even two years after it opened, it became yet another to be destroyed by fire during the night.[22]

Again, the paper reported that arson was not suggested, but circumstances lead to skepticism. During the year that both Persica's New Garden and the Memphi opened, a maelstrom of controversy erupted over the prevalence of crime in the city. In July 1904, a violent confrontation in a gambling den on DeSoto Street, involving Haggarty and Degg, among others, resulted in the shooting deaths of two police officers. The perpetrators, including the managers of the Memphi, were incarcerated, and outraged citizens held a mass meeting at the Lyceum Theatre. The setting of this protest, along with the association of Haggarty and Degg

---

[21] *New York Clipper*, 3 December 1904, 19 August 1905, and 15 September 1906.

[22] Ad for the Memphi Theatre, *Commercial Appeal*, 17 January 1904; *Polk's Memphis City Directory for 1904*; "Memphi Theater Gutted by Fire," *Commercial Appeal*, 30 September 1905.

with their own theatre, throws into bold relief the position of theatres with regard to the spatial representation of very different segments of Memphis society.

Crowds at the Lyceum spilled over into Court Square, where resolutions were adopted calling for the resignations of the mayor, the vice-mayor, and the chief of police—all of whom, it was thought, had let this kind of crime and violence go on in the city for far too long. In the short-lived wave of progressive reform that followed, changes were made to the city charter to suppress gambling, and the ban was being enforced by April of the following year—inclusive of tenderloin dives, upper-class social clubs, and everything in between. With no gambling and mandatory closing at midnight, the Memphi had not been profitable, according to the *Commercial Appeal*, and there had been talk of closing it down. The day before the fire, the employees of the theatre and saloon, who lived on the floors above, had conveniently vacated so that their rooms could be redone.[23]

Because of Persica's connections and continued laxity toward vice in the city, his establishment remained open—protected by the police and overlooked by city officials—until shortly after his death in an automobile accident in 1913. Five years earlier, as the drumbeat for statewide prohibition was sounding louder and louder, Persica had announced his retirement, ironically remarking that he saw no reason why "any line of business should violate the laws in Memphis." There would be no need to close, however, because the aggressive new mayor, Edward Hull Crump, who had ridden in on another wave of progressive reform, had no intention of enforcing the prohibition law that passed the General Assembly during the summer of 1909. Crump, who had once rankled upon seeing Mayor J.J. Williams flanked by corporate executives of the streetcar and light companies at a performance at the Lyceum—and the cronyism that this

---

[23] *Commercial Appeal*, 12-15 July 1904; Miller, 135-42; "Memphi Theater Gutted by Fire."

amalgamation implied—would become the head of a political machine that controlled the city of Memphis for the next several decades.[24]

Big-Time Vaudeville Comes to Memphis: East End Park and the Orpheum

During the first decade of the twentieth century, transformations took place which seem to indicate that the local orientation of several major Memphis theatres was changing more and more to accommodate outside interests. I have cited above the takeover of the Auditorium by Jake Wells, who changed that theatre's name to the Bijou in 1904. Likewise, the Grand Opera House was to be renamed the Orpheum three years later by big-time vaudeville impresario Martin Beck. I will come back around to this renaming, but first I want to flesh out some wider developments in the field of vaudeville as they pertain to the consolidation of the Road.

In 1897, the year before John D. Hopkins took over the Lyceum Theatre in Memphis and changed the programming at that theatre to a combination of stock and vaudeville, he had been integral to the formation of a new vaudeville syndicate, the Western Circuit of Vaudeville Theatres, which mirrored the efforts of the Theatrical Syndicate to streamline practices and centralize the booking process for this segment of the entertainment business in the Midwest and West. The theatres of the Hopkins Western Circuit were combined with those run by Charles Kohl and George Middleton, among others, which gave the new association control over vaudeville theatres in Chicago, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Milwaukee. They were soon joined by the emerging Orpheum Circuit, run by Morris Meyerfeld, which consisted of theatres in San

[24] "John Persica to Retire," *Commercial Appeal*, 28 December 1908; "John Persica Meets Death in Joy Ride," *Commercial Appeal*, 11 November 1913; Miller, 223 n. 26.

Francisco, Los Angeles, and Portland. Unlike the Theatrical Syndicate, however, the central booking office for this association was located in Chicago rather than New York.[25]

Meanwhile, in the Northeast, Benjamin F. Keith and Edward F. Albee had been working together to obtain and lease vaudeville theatres throughout the region, and had formed a circuit based in Boston. Concerned that the new western association might undertake to extend their ambitions eastward, Albee eventually convinced Hopkins and the others to join with him in forming a national organization. The Association of Vaudeville Managers was formally created in May 1900, with Keith as its president. According to Albert Wertheim, this organization "represented sixty-two theaters and summer parks from New York to San Francisco" by 1902.[26]

It would appear that Hopkins was primarily responsible for bringing syndicated vaudeville to the South for the first time. Although individual southern cities like Memphis no doubt hosted local variety and vaudeville houses, there does not seem to have been any systematized regional combination of theatres on the order of the Southern Circuit in the legitimate arena. In addition to the Grand Opera House in Memphis, Hopkins controlled theatres in New Orleans and Nashville, and by 1902 in Atlanta and Birmingham as well.

That he seems to have operated most or all of his theatres in the South as stock and vaudeville combinations may indicate that the variety form had a harder time being granted legitimacy in the region. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the Memphis public seems to have needed a bit of coaxing with regard to the idea of vaudeville appearing on a legitimate stage. Further, although Hopkins could feasibly have reopened the Academy of Music in New Orleans, which was damaged but not destroyed by fire while he was running it as a vaudeville-only house,

---

[25] "Vaudeville Syndicate War," *New York Times*, 29 July 1897; Albert Wertheim, *Vaudeville Wars: How the Keith-Albee and Orpheum Circuits Controlled the Big-Time and Its Performers* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 61-62.

[26] Wertheim, 99; 103-4. Quote is from 104.

he decided against it. Also, the region's cities were not home to as large a population of urban working-class citizens and foreign immigrants as those in the Northeast and Midwest, where these people made up a significant portion of the audiences for vaudeville.

In Memphis, Hopkins was integral to making vaudeville a viable, popular form of entertainment on a grand scale, particularly when he revamped and reopened East End Park in the summer of 1904. This park had first been opened in 1889 by the Citizens Street Railway Company as a pleasure resort for people wishing to escape the stifling atmosphere of the dog days of summer in the city. The pavilion theatre there had been used in previous seasons for performances of opera, and local theatre managers like Stainback had managed summer entertainment ventures in the park. However, when Hopkins signed a lease on the park in December 1903 under the auspices of the Hopkins Amusement Company, East End's place as the city's most popular amusement park, offering "high-class vaudeville" all summer long, was fixed for the next decade.

East End was not the only summer park that Hopkins managed. He was also the owner and manager of the Forest Highlands Parks in St. Louis and Kansas City and Fountain Park in Louisville. The new park in Memphis was to be modeled on Hopkins's parks in these larger cities. Since it was joining a regional circuit of summer parks—one that pulled it into a midwestern rather than a southern orbit—East End Park would offer the same "high-class" entertainments as would appear in those cities. It was to be run in conjunction with the Grand so that the shows would not overlap. Also, the Railway Company agreed to build a new station near the entrance and to provide more frequent and easily accessible transportation to the park during the summer.

The *Commercial Appeal* noted that this development was an important one for Memphis in that it placed the city "on the same footing as many Eastern cities in having a summer garden or park operated on a metropolitan basis." Further, the paper remarked that the success of the park was ensured, since the Hopkins Amusement Company had "an unlimited credit, being backed by one of the largest brewing concerns in St. Louis."[27] Although this last remark might have hinted to citizens that alcohol would be served at the park, the notice of its dedication in May 1904 remarked that there was "not a drop of anything intoxicating to be found on the grounds." In addition, this notice contained ample words and phrases such as "high class," "elevated," "clean and wholesome," and "refinement" to indicate to potential audiences that every paying customer—man, woman, and child—could enjoy her or himself there. It seems to have been understood, however, that the African American population was not included in this welcome.[28]

Vaudeville in East End Park was so popular that plans for a new, larger theatre in the park were hatched the following year.[29] Meanwhile Hopkins's Grand Opera House, where he had continued the stock and vaudeville combination that he began at the Lyceum, became an exclusively vaudeville house by 1905. The Grand was, however, on the verge of changing hands again, as developments in the business of big-time vaudeville strayed further and further away from local concerns.

---

[27] "East End Park under a Lease," *Commercial Appeal*, 2 December 1903. Although Hopkins had offered to buy East End Park, the Memphis Street Railway Company, as it was now called, would only agree to a conditional lease. At some point, the park did begin serving alcohol, because this was one of the reasons for its closure in 1914. Hopkins was also indirectly associated with Dreamland at Coney Island in New York City, which his brother-in-law, Samuel Gumpertz, opened the same year as East End Park in Memphis. Gumpertz had helped Hopkins manage his theatres in the Midwest for several years prior to 1904.

[28] "East End Park Is Dedicated," *Commercial Appeal*, 23 May 1904.

[29] "Another Theater," *Commercial Appeal*, 22 October 1905.

At this point, the Association of Vaudeville Managers, which included managers in all sections of the country, was riven by internal conflicts over a number of issues. The organization was a loosely knit one, and the result of the clashes was a return to an east-west split between the Western Vaudeville Managers' Association and B.F. Keith's Theatres and Vaudeville Booking Circuit. The western group still included midwestern theatres along with the Orpheum circuit, which had started in California and was now extending its reach into the South. By this time Beck had joined Meyerfeld in the management of the Orpheum circuit. Also, William Morris, a prominent booking agent who had remained steadfastly independent in spite of Albee's efforts to force him to join the vaudeville combine, was gaining power in the industry.[30]

In the spring of 1906, however, consolidation was again on the horizon, and this time it appears that Klaw and Erlanger were looking to get into the vaudeville business. Announcements appeared in the press indicating that the Syndicate partners had begun talks with the most powerful managers in vaudeville—Keith and Albee, Meyerfeld and Beck, Kohl and George Castle, among others—in order to negotiate a combination that would supposedly be financed with capital of $30,000,000 and cover the entire country. The announcement in the *New York Times* included the lip-service caveat (this time from Albee), which seemed to be a

[30] Wertheim, 117. Wertheim suggests that some of the conflict between the two major circuits may have resulted from mutual mistrust based on ethnic prejudice, since Meyerfeld and Beck, along with many of their associates, were Jewish immigrants, and Keith and Albee, and many of theirs, were multi-generational ("native," in Wertheim's terms) European American gentiles (121). That Albee's strong-arm tactics differed little from those of the Syndicate should have proved to anti-Semitic critics of the latter that vicious business dealings in the theatre industry were not restricted to Jews. On William Morris and his struggles with Albee, see Danielle Herget, "The Vaudeville Wars: William Morris, E.F. Albee, the White Rats, and the Business of Entertainment, 1898-1932" (Ph.D. diss., Tufts University, 2004).

requirement by now in the context of such mergers, that the object of the combination was increased efficiency and economy rather than an attempt to subjugate independent managers.[31]

The prospect of a vaudeville combine that included Klaw and Erlanger was met with mixed reactions by managers outside the proposed conglomerate. Lee Shubert, who along with his brothers was waging his own war against the Syndicate by this point in time, declined to comment, but the *New York Times* quoted someone "close to the firm" as stating that this development would leave the Shuberts standing practically alone against a behemoth combination of vaudeville and legitimate interests, "which will be in theatrical circles what the Standard Oil Company is in the industrial world." Others, especially those in the vaudeville business, were more skeptical. William Hammerstein, an independent manager and father of the famous twentieth-century librettist, dismissed the prospect as "a lot of empty sound." He remarked that it was all part of an attempt by Albee to draft Erlanger into his fight against William Morris, concluding that "the vaudeville combine is not a combine, but an inquest, with Mr. Erlanger acting as coroner."[32] Morris himself weighed in on the subject, predicting the failure of the merger because of the strength of the independents in the vaudeville business and remarking that there would be "no John D. Rockefeller in vaudeville circles to form a vaudeville counterpart of Standard Oil."[33]

If the threat of a gigantic conglomerate that combined legitimate and vaudeville interests was indeed the brainchild of Albee in an attempt to intimidate Morris, events transpired over the next few weeks in May that would tilt the scales in Albee's favor, even as the involvement of

---

[31] "New Syndicate Afoot in Theatrical World," *New York Times*, 1 May 1906. See also "Plan $30,000,000 Theater Trust," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1 May 1906, and "With the Men and Women of the Twice-a-Day," *New York Times*, 6 May 1906.

[32] "New Syndicate Afoot."

[33] "A New Vaudeville Merger?", *Baltimore Sun*, 2 May 1906.

Klaw and Erlanger appeared to fade from view. Albee was able to coerce his rival Frederick F. Proctor, who operated several theatres in New York City, along with Morris's good friend Sylvester Poli, with his theatres in Connecticut, into abandoning Morris and coming over to his side.[34]

The following month, Albee's employer Keith instigated the formation of a new transnational merger of vaudeville interests which, although it did not include Klaw and Erlanger, encompassed practically all vaudeville managers around the U.S. and parts of Canada, except for Hammerstein and his fellow New Yorker, Percy Williams. According to the *New York Dramatic Mirror*, the agreement provided for the establishment of "a new corporation to be known as the United Booking Office of America, with headquarters in New York and Chicago." Hopkins appears to have dropped out of the high ranks of what was by now a nasty game, but the Grand Opera House in Memphis was included among those covered by the new combine. By February of the following year, Hammerstein had been forced to eat his words, as he and Williams joined the United Booking Office.[35]

Although Klaw and Erlanger seemed to have fallen off the radar for a moment with regard to vaudeville, it soon became clear that their interests had not waned; in fact, they were even more global in nature than previously indicated. In an effort to undercut the competition in the legitimate field that they had been receiving from the Shuberts for some time now, the Syndicate proposed entering into a vaudeville partnership with their rivals that would stand in opposition to the newly formed vaudeville combination. They were joined in their efforts by the

[34] "Keith Joins with Proctor," *Boston Daily Globe*, 13 May 1906; Herget, 79-81. On Poli, see Kathryn Oberdeck's excellent article, "Contested Cultures of American Refinement: Theatrical Manager Sylvester Poli, His Audiences, and the Vaudeville Industry, 1890-1920," *Radical History Review* 66 (1996): 40-91.

[35] "Vaudeville Men Form Big Merger," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 June 1906; "Vaudeville Under One Head," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 June 1906; "The Big Merger Completed," *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 23 June 1906. On Hammerstein and Williams, see "Vaudeville Merger," *New York Tribune*, 13 February 1907.

booking agent who had suffered most from the creation of the United Booking Office, William Morris. In April 1907, the Syndicate and the Shuberts formed the United States Amusement Company, purporting to present "Advanced Vaudeville," which would supposedly comprise even "higher-class" acts, booked through Morris, than those offered by the United Booking Office.[36]

At first, the Advanced Vaudeville scheme appeared to presage success. Klaw and Erlanger were confident enough by July, especially after they had been cleared of all charges of operating a monopoly by the New York Supreme Court during the previous month, that they proposed the formation of an international syndicate. The *New York Times* announced that the Theatrical Syndicate was prepared to capitalize such a venture with $100,000,000, and that it would include, in addition to U.S. concerns, both vaudeville and legitimate interests in England and its colonies, France, Germany, and possibly Switzerland and Austria.[37] This announcement was, of course, met with some skepticism by the other side. Martin Beck—who was now the head of the Orpheum circuit—along with other associates of the United Booking Office, attended a conference in Paris to discuss international vaudeville business during the week following Klaw and Erlanger's announcement. Beck was quoted in the press as saying that the Syndicate was merely throwing numbers around, while the members of the United Booking Office were actually overseas making business deals, and that Klaw and Erlanger's machinations were "all bluff."[38] The Syndicate's plan for a world syndicate that would encompass both legitimate and vaudeville—a plan, it would seem, to carry out global domination of the theatre business—did not come to fruition.

---

[36] Herget, 90-91; Lippman, 121-24; Wertheim, 139-41. According to Erlanger, it was Morris's idea to call their venture "Advanced Vaudeville." See *Daily Magazine*, 25 May 1907, quoted in Herget, 90.

[37] "World Merger in Theatricals," *New York Times*, 17 July 1907.

[38] "World's Theatre Trust Real," *Baltimore Sun*, 25 July 1907.

Likewise, their vaudeville venture turned out to be a failure. The United Booking Office used the same tactics that the Syndicate had used on the Shuberts and other managers and artists, blacklisting those performers who appeared at the theatres of the United States Amusement Company. This intimidation effort worked, and Morris found it difficult to sign many of the most popular performers, who were afraid of the recriminations of the United Booking Office. Further, in late October, just over six months after the formation of the Syndicate-Shubert vaudeville combine, members of the United Booking Office countered by announcing plans to enter the legitimate theatre business themselves. They would offer their theatres to independents in the legitimate field such as Belasco and the Fiskes, who had had difficulties booking theatres while they fought against the Syndicate.[39]

The venture also faced major financial problems. According to Wertheim, the Advanced Vaudeville scheme lost money because the Syndicate had overestimated the potential number of venues to which they would have access, so Morris had overbooked performers whose large salaries would still need to be paid. Danielle Herget points out that the reason for the inadequate number of theatres was that the seemingly unlimited credit afforded to the United States Amusement Company, which the Shuberts were to have used to finance the building of new theatres, quickly dried up when a financial panic hit the country. Klaw and Erlanger met with Beck and tried to get him to take over the concerns of the United States Amusement Company, including theatres and performers' contracts, but he refused. However, a compromise was finally reached on November 6, 1907, whereby the United Booking Office took over these

---

[39] Wertheim, 141; Lippman, 126-27; "Theatrical War All Along the Line," *New York Times*, 31 October 1907.

concerns, and the Syndicate and Shuberts agreed to stay out of the vaudeville business for at least ten years. Morris was basically left out in the cold without a contract.[40]

On the same day that this agreement was reached, a representative of the Orpheum circuit arrived in Memphis to take possession and begin remodeling of the Grand Opera House. After an eight-year run in Memphis, Hopkins had decided to turn his interest in the theatre over to Beck. The theatre was to be completely stripped, updated, and renovated, and to be renamed the Orpheum Theatre. Appealing again to the upwardly urban sensibilities of the public, the *Commercial Appeal* reported that the theatre would be "stocked with the newest and most artistic equipment which is now being built in the Chicago studios;" that there would be a ladies parlor and reception room "which cannot be found in many places outside of New York;" and that the Orpheum "in every respect will be made a Broadway theater in a Southern city."[41] With the transformation of the Grand Opera House into the Orpheum Theatre, the place of Memphis on the big-time vaudeville Road was fixed—at least for a while.

"A Home Theatre in Every Respect"…or not

Thus, both the Auditorium and the Grand Opera House were given entirely new names by companies based outside of the city. Further, in 1908, Albert Weis, who was Henry Greenwall's partner in, and general manager of, the American Theatrical Exchange, purchased the Lyceum Theatre in Memphis from the estate of Hu Brinkley.[42] It was the first time in the city's history that a theatre building came under the ownership of a person who had no connection to the city other than a business interest in theatre. To be sure, theatres in Memphis

[40] Wertheim, 141-42; Herget, 95-97.

[41] "A New Grand to Be Opened," *Commercial Appeal*, 7 November 1907. Hopkins may have relinquished the theatre because of his health; he died two years later in St. Louis after a protracted illness. See "Col. John Hopkins Showman Is Dead," *Chicago Tribune*, 25 October 1909.

[42] Shelby County Register of Deeds, Book 426, p. 101, http://register.shelby.tn.us, accessed 14 December 2011.

had all been leased and managed by companies based outside the city; however, they had all been established and owned by current or former residents of the city—members of the community who had some other vested interest in Memphis besides just making a profit from theatre. Although Greenwall and the Syndicate had built new theatres in other southern cities, they had not done so in Memphis.

In addition, Frank Gray—a local citizen who had become familiar to Memphis theatre-goers as the manager of the New Memphis throughout the 1880s, had been the first manager of the Grand Opera House in 1890, and had managed the Lyceum since 1899—either left or was let go after Weis bought the theatre, and Weis placed his son Clarence in charge.[43] A similar fate had visited Anderson B. Morrison, another local citizen who had started his theatrical career as treasurer of the Grand Opera House in 1894 and managed that theatre from 1900 until it became the Orpheum in 1907. Beck placed Max Fabish, who had managed Orpheum circuit theatres in Denver and Louisville, at the helm of the Memphis Orpheum.

Owing to this trend of global over local interests, plans were laid for a theatre that would be a completely local venture rather than a Road theatre: the Jefferson. The guiding spirit behind this project was Morrison, late of the Grand Opera House, who enlisted the financial and political aid of prominent citizens such as Frank L. Monteverde, the Sheriff of Shelby County; John W. Schorr, president of the Tennessee Brewery Company and Second Vice President of the Mercantile Bank of Memphis; and William A. Bickford, a well-known local real estate agent. The Jefferson Theatre Company was incorporated in November of 1907, very shortly after the arrival in Memphis of the Orpheum management. The *Commercial Appeal* remarked that Morrison would surely have the community's sympathy and support, since not only was he

---

[43] Gray also appears to have leased the theatre himself from 1904 to 1907. See *Polk's Memphis City Directory*, 1904-7.

already popular, but also "the recent ingracious treatment of the Orpheum people has had the effect of cementing this relationship with the public." Moreover, stock in the company was "to be subscribed by local people only," and the theatre would also "from time to time present the independent attractions of Harrison Grey Fiske and David Belasco." Clearly, fear of the faceless, grasping national corporation had worked its way into the theatrical arena in Memphis.[44]

Some of this fear may again have been associated with the maintenance of public morality and the loss of local representation in this effort. Resident managers like Gray, Stainback, and Morrison were familiar faces to the theatre-going public, who trusted them to make choices that would be in their best interests—especially when it came to morality. Upon his death, Frank Gray was particularly remembered for his stand "against the exploitation of immorality or sexual lubricity for the benefit of box office receipts" and his intolerance for "suggestiveness and double meaning comedy."[45] Although he was a critic and not a manager, Huhn was another force for this particular brand of morality in the theatre. In a piece written just a few months before the opening of the Jefferson, he lambasted New York City as a den of iniquity for its recent craze over "Salome dances" in the theatre, claiming that that city had been "growing degenerate in the matter of its entertainments" and was "badly in need of a censor."[46] If theatrical corporations based in New York were to begin replacing local managers with their own representatives, then how was Memphis to maintain its own sense of morality?[47]

---

[44] "New Stock Company," *Commercial Appeal*, 17 November 1907.

[45] "Frank Gray," *Commercial Appeal*, 29 June 1922.

[46] Hugh Higbee Huhn, "Salome Craze Crowds Out *Merry Widow* in New York," *Commercial Appeal*, 16 Aug 1908.

[47] In 1911, the city commission created a Board of Censors that later came under the leadership of Lloyd T. Binford, who gained national attention for his strict stand on morals—which was strongly inflected with white supremacy—in the censoring of popular culture in Memphis. See Beverly G. Bond and Janann Sherman, *Memphis*

This question was already beginning to be tested on a certain level with regard to theatre in the fall of 1908, but while some in Memphis sought to differentiate the city from New York in matters such as "sexual lubricity," they also sought to distinguish Memphis from Nashville in others. As the Jefferson was preparing to open, Memphis theatre managers began to defy city ordinances against theatrical performances on Sundays. Fabish, the new manager at the Orpheum, was to become central to the battle that ensued. One judge even went so far as to threaten audience members with indictment before the court for desecrating the Sabbath by attending the theatre. However, the police were reluctant to arrest anyone for such infractions.[48] By the following January, it seemed that a state law might be passed against Sunday performances in the General Assembly in Nashville, which had already abolished horse racing and was in the process of creating legislation for the statewide prohibition of alcohol. At this point, Huhn actually weighed in on the side of the theatre managers, seeing the law as another attempt by Nashville to dictate morality in the larger city of Memphis:

> Memphis has always been liberal in such matters. No one can see the harm in Sunday baseball or in Sunday vaudeville…Memphis is no longer a village, although the fifty-sixth general assembly seems to have this idea. Memphis has passed from the stage of infancy. It is a big, healthy, prosperous city, and petty laws passed for the purposes of injuring the commercial prosperity look like the results of jealousy.[49]

Besides concern for the city's right to maintain its own moral identity, a certain element of nostalgia was also at work in the planning of the new Jefferson Theatre. Aside from the intermittent star independent attraction, the primary fare was to be contemporary and classical plays presented by a resident company. In addition to this return to a traditional format, the

---

in Black and White (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2003), 104; and G. Wayne Dowdy, "Censoring Popular Culture: Political and Social Control in Segregated Memphis," *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 55 (2001): 98-117.

[48] "Audience May Be Indicted," *Commercial Appeal*, 17 October 1908.

[49] *Commercial Appeal*, 24 January 1909.

proposed location for the new theatre was the site of the New Memphis Theatre on Jefferson Avenue that had burned down sixteen years earlier and been replaced in the interim by the Germania Building.[50] Before the Orpheum circuit had even come to town and treated Morrison ungraciously, the company that owned the Germania Building had been in negotiations with him to lease the building and convert it into a theatre. In fact, the structure still retained the stone foundation and lower walls of the New Memphis Theatre, which had not been destroyed by the fire. The newspaper remarked that there was "a historic interest in the return of a theater to a site associated with many of the most important theatrical memories of the past."[51]

In his book, *The Haunted Stage*, Marvin Carlson discusses the recycling of memories as part of the process of theatrical reception, a phenomenon which he refers to as "ghosting." With regard to theatre buildings themselves, he states that "associations and memories that regular theatregoers develop over time in relationship to particular theatres naturally are on the whole even more specific and focused" than those that relate to specific sections of the city. Moreover, all of the aspects of theatre which he discusses with regard to this ghosting effect, including texts, bodies, and productions, "tend to be reinforced by their association with specific physical buildings."[52] In essence, the new Jefferson Theatre was to be a resurrection of an old one that had borne the city's name and would now bear the name of the local street rather than one shared with a myriad other theatres around the country. If the theatre had actually been built on this site, the ghosts of performances past might certainly have been palpable for those audience members with a long history of theatre-going in Memphis.

---

[50] The Germania Building, like many other such named buildings in cities around the country, had served as a center of German culture for immigrants and their descendants in Memphis.

[51] "New Stock Company." Schorr was also on the board of directors of the Germania Company.

[52] Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 143.

However, all did not work out quite as planned. At some point between the incorporation of the Jefferson Theatre Company and the opening of the theatre a year later, the proposed location was moved to Madison Avenue. That the corporation created to finance the building of the theatre, the Madison Avenue Theatre Building Company, was composed of a different group of businessmen than the Jefferson Theatre Company, may indicate that this other group made a better offer than the Germania company. Another reason could have been that Madison Avenue was a more up-and-coming location at this time than Jefferson Avenue. It was also better situated for transportation. East End Park, which Morrison was still managing for the Hopkins Amusement Company, was also located on Madison, just a three-mile streetcar ride east, straight down to the entrance.[53] Patrons of the theatre during the regular season could simply continue riding on the same streetcar down to the park during the summer, and residents of the eastern suburbs could ride the same car direct to the doorstep of the Jefferson. At any rate, the proposed location was changed, and the theatre company leased the Jefferson from the Madison Avenue building company. Morrison was president of the theatre company and a director on both boards.

In anticipation of the theatre's opening, the newspaper reported that the Jefferson would be "a home theater in every respect."[54] On the opening night, Mayor James H. Malone reiterated this sentiment in his dedicatory address, assuring the audience that they were "in every sense of the word patronizing home industry." Further emphasizing the local origins of the Jefferson Theatre, the mayor praised Morrison, stating that he was "born in Memphis, reared in Memphis,

---

[53] After Hopkins's death in October 1909, Morrison formed a corporation that took over the operation of East End Park. See Judge J.P. Young, *Standard History of Memphis, Tennessee* (Knoxville, TN: H.W. Crew & Co., 1912), 494-95. When the park opened for the summer of 1910, the *Commercial Appeal* remarked on the renewal of its local orientation, stating that "Foreign interests have disappeared. Memphis men are now in control with Manager A.B. Morrison directing the future destinies of the best park in Dixie land." See "East End Park Opens Today," *Commercial Appeal*, 15 May 1910.

[54] "Jefferson Opens Tomorrow Night," *Commercial Appeal*, 15 November 1908.

and has spent his life in Memphis in the theatrical world, and he is known to every man, woman, and child in Memphis, and has stamped on his face, and on his genial character the trademark 'Made in Memphis.'"[55] This focus on the native qualities of the theatre and its manager, and Malone's use of the language of manufacturing to do so, seems to further indicate some anxiety at the current changes in the city's theatrical scene made by corporations based outside of Memphis.

The Jefferson opened with Justin Huntly McCarthy's *If I Were King*, a romantic melodrama in which E.H. Sothern had starred on Broadway several seasons earlier but that had never been seen in Memphis. The stock company was well-received, but the Jefferson was not to remain a fully home-oriented theatre for long. At the beginning of the next season, in September 1909, the theatre became part of an independent vaudeville chain run by William Morris. Betrayed by both the Syndicate and the United Booking Office, Morris decided to compete with the latter by opening vaudeville theatres in every city where the Orpheum circuit had one, which by this time encompassed all the major cities in the South, including Memphis. Having had a bad experience with the Orpheum management himself, Morrison may have been glad for the opportunity to allow Morris to use his theatre to compete with them. However, the power of the blacklist used by the United Booking Office was too strong, and Morris withdrew from the field in Memphis only six weeks after he had started. According to Stainback, stock resumed for the remainder of the season at the Jefferson.[56]

William Morris's use of the Jefferson in his attempt to combat the power of the Orpheum circuit was not the last time that this theatre established under local purposes would find itself in

---

[55] "Brilliant Scene at New Jefferson," *Commercial Appeal*, 17 November 1908.

[56] Stainback quoted in Young, 495; Wertheim, 144; "Wm. Morris Withdraws from Memphis," *New York Times*, 19 October 1909.

the midst of a battle in the corporate theatre wars. The next year would see further conflicts, negotiations, and changes in management at the Jefferson, as well as—and involving—the Lyceum and the Bijou.

This was the year that brought the Syndicate-Shubert conflict to Memphis for the first time. For two seasons since Albert Weis had purchased the Lyceum, he had been running Syndicate shows at that theatre.[57] In early May 1910, the National Theatre Owners' Association was formed, which represented about 1,200 theatres and declared itself on the side of the open-door policy. Weis was named treasurer of this organization, and Jake Wells, general manager of the Bijou circuit, was a director. At a meeting in Atlanta the following week, the Association of Southern Theatre Managers confirmed their support for the open-door policy and applied for membership in the national organization. The southern group then elected Wells president and Weis vice-president of their association.[58]

While the meeting in Atlanta was in session, Klaw and Erlanger, who had had a contract with Weis for exclusive booking rights to his theatres since the previous June, brought suit against him in the Supreme Court of New York. The action required Weis to show cause as to why his theatres should not be placed in the hands of a receiver due to his breach of their

[57] Despite Greenwall's earlier conflict with Klaw and Erlanger, it appears that by 1903 his business partner Weis was co-managing the American Theatre in New York with them, a theatre which Greenwall had controlled for the previous three seasons. Claudia Beach posits that Weis's "association with Klaw and Erlanger appeared to be a separate venture" from his interest in the American Theatrical Exchange. It is possible that Weis also purchased the Lyceum as a separate venture. It is additionally possible that at this point, it was impracticable for any manager to book star attractions without cooperating with the Syndicate on some level. In 1909 Greenwall, his career winding down, sold his share in the American Theatrical Exchange to Weis, making him the head of a large chain of theatres throughout Texas and other locations in the South besides Memphis. See Claudia Anne Beach, "Henry Greenwall: Theatre Manager" (Ph.D. diss., Texas Tech University, 1986), 203, 212.

[58] "1,200 Theatres Are Independent Now," *New York Times*, 8 May 1910; "South Is Ready for 'Open Door,'" *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 May 1910.

contract. Although it appears that nothing came of the suit, this incident revealed that the Syndicate was not going to give up without a fight.[59]

In his Sunday column in the *Commercial Appeal*, Hugh Huhn related the events of the wider struggle and explained their repercussions at the local level. At first, he reassured the public that the arrival of the theatrical conflict in Memphis would not mean disaster, but rather that "every man will have his opportunity. This is as it should be." Although he acknowledged its faults, he praised the Syndicate for restoring order to the theatrical business; however, he rejoiced that "the Shuberts with their wonderful galaxy of stars will be at last admitted through the open door into the South."[60]

One week later, however, after the Syndicate's announcement that they would not capitulate to the demands of the vast majority of U.S. and Canadian theatre managers to book as they pleased, Huhn penned a forceful and eloquent condemnation of theatrical trusts. He drew metaphoric parallels between the Syndicate and Halley's Comet, which had just brushed past the planet during the previous week. In a satirical mode, he claimed that the comet was perhaps a cosmic catalyst to both the Syndicate's mania and the managers' declaration of independence. Adopting a more serious tone, Huhn likened the theatrical trusts to other corporate trusts that currently dominated the U.S. economy. He complained that in past seasons the Lyceum, the "high-priced theatre" of the city which was "supported by the most wealthy and aristocratic playgoers of Memphis," had been forced to present inferior productions, which was an insult to the city. He also protested against a situation which had barred many of the best attractions from playing in Memphis. Moreover, he asserted that the Syndicate regarded theatre patrons everywhere as "mere necessary adjuncts to fill certain coffers with coin." When questioned

[59] "Battle Opened by Syndicate," *Atlanta Constitution*, 12 May 1910.
[60] Hugh Higbee Huhn, "Memphis Joins in the Open-Door Movement," *Commercial Appeal*, 15 May 1910.

about these problems, the Syndicate's response had been that people should be glad of what they got. Concerning this attitude, Huhn observed: "This is what the beef trust says, what the cold storage trust says and what other trusts say." He also predicted that if the Shuberts were in the same position, they would be no better. "They will be as arbitrary and as dictatorial. They will be as indiscriminate and as unfair. The public will be ignored just as it has been ignored heretofore."[61]

In Huhn's view, this conflict was nothing less than a fight for independence that struck at the very heart of the founding principles of the U.S.:

> In darkest Russia is there a more despotic rule? In the country of the heathen is the mighty monarch more restrictive in his judgments? Is any business method, in this or any other country, more binding or unfair? Can…the managers who own their own theatres or pay exorbitant leases for them, be blamed for shaking off [such] shackles and acting as our forefathers did, for freedom?

Pointing to recent events in the political arena, where the Republican party was utterly split by conflicts over antitrust legislation, Huhn paraphrased the remarks of Senator Albert B. Cummins of Iowa, who had recently commented that current public dissatisfaction was because "public representatives in Washington listened too much to the representatives of great corporations instead of listening to the voices of the people who elected them." Huhn compared the political situation with the theatrical state of affairs, remarking that "Congress has learned that the people must rule. The people will rule. The people may suffer for a while, they may be denied some of the best attractions. They may have to exist on moving picture shows, but the people will dominate."[62]

Finally, Huhn defended Weis's decision to join the independent movement, declaring that "the course of Albert Weis and all other managers in the country is in keeping with our high

---

[61] Hugh Higbee Huhn, "Comet Effect on the Theatrical Situation," *Commercial Appeal*, 22 May 1910.
[62] Ibid.

dictates of American freedom and independence." Two weeks later, Huhn praised Weis's keen judgment and business sense and attributed his beneficence to the fact that he was "a Southern man, and his heart beats true as all Southern hearts do beat, and he will see that the Lyceum is not overlooked." Despite his customary elitism and cultural shortsightedness, Huhn's editorials during this theatrical crisis were a valiant championing of individual and local agency against the globalizing forces of capitalism.[63]

Almost immediately after the independents broke with the Syndicate, rumors began circulating about the outcome of the conflict with regard to who would control which theatres. Huhn reported early on that Wells had combined with the Shuberts for a lease on the Jefferson. It was also hinted that Klaw and Erlanger were securing a site to build a new theatre in Memphis. However, on June 1, 1910, it was announced that the Syndicate had obtained a lease on the Jefferson, dispelling this earlier rumor.[64]

Complications continued during the following season, making it clear that true independence was next to impossible in the current environment. In late September, Al G. Field's Minstrels, a very popular company that had played the Lyceum in the opening weeks of the past eleven seasons, arrived in Memphis. The company was under contract to Klaw and Erlanger, but when the latter surrendered control of the Lyceum earlier in the year, Field made a

---

[63] Ibid.; Hugh Higbee Huhn, "Competition in Theatrical Amusement this Year," *Commercial Appeal*, 5 June 1910. Born in Germany, Weis immigrated to the U.S. with his parents when he was three years old. By the 1870s he had entered the dry goods business in Galveston, Texas, where he became associated with Henry Greenwall. Like many other southern Jews, Weis fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War (as had Greenwall's brothers, according to John S. Kendall). See "Col. Albert Weis Dead," *New York Times*, 3 May 1918; Louis Schmier, ed., *Reflections of Southern Jewry: The Letters of Charles Wessolowsky, 1878-1879* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1982), 83; Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, "Galveston, Texas," *Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities*, http://www.isjl.org/history/archive/tx/galveston.html, accessed 17 November 2011; John S. Kendall, *The Golden Age of the New Orleans Theater* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), 584.

[64] Huhn, "Memphis Joins in the Open-Door Movement"; "Klaw & Erlanger Get Memphis Theatre," *New York Times*, 1 June 1910. The rumor of the Syndicate's plan to build had been printed in the *Scimitar*, 29 May 1910, which was quoted in the "The Theatrical Situation," *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 11 June 1910.

special contract with Clarence Weis to perform there anyway. Since Klaw and Erlanger had subsequently obtained a lease on the Jefferson, they insisted that Field's Minstrels play there. When Field decided to honor his original contract with Klaw and Erlanger, Weis brought the matter to the local courts, requesting an injunction to prevent the company from appearing in Memphis at all. According to the *New York Dramatic Mirror*, "the local court denied the injunction and will settle damages after the performance at the Jefferson makes possible a pecuniary computation of the injury sustained by the Lyceum."[65]

Also, it quickly became clear that the Shuberts were indeed no better than the Syndicate when it came to the will to power, and several managers of larger chains, including Albert Weis, did an about-face and went back to their associations with the Syndicate.[66] In early April 1911, an announcement appeared in the *New York Clipper* which indicated that Weis, Charles Frohman, and Klaw and Erlanger had formed a combination called the Memphis Theatre Company, and that this entity was to take charge of both the Lyceum and the Jefferson as of May 1. Additionally, this combination was in negotiations with Wells to transfer his popular-priced Bijou (Stair and Havlin) attractions to the Jefferson, whereas Klaw, Erlanger, and Frohman would return their bookings to the Lyceum. Meanwhile, Wells would maintain his interest at the Bijou, where the Sullivan and Considine circuit would provide cheap vaudeville.[67]

Announcements appeared soon after in the *Commercial Appeal* indicating that Wells and Stainback would close the Bijou for the summer and begin a spring and summer season of stock

---

[65] "Al G. Fields [*sic*] in the Courts," *New York Dramatic Mirror*, 5 October 1910. A similar incident occurred in October in Little Rock, Arkansas, where the Al H. Wilson company also found itself in the midst of a struggle between Weis and the Syndicate, who controlled opposing theatres in that city as well. See Larry T. Menefee, "The Syndicate War in Little Rock," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 40-43.

[66] Robert Grau, *The Stage in the Twentieth Century*, 3 vols. (New York: Broadway Publishing Co., 1912), 3:43. Others included John Cort, Moses Reis, and Julius Cahn. Cort and Reis had been elected president and vice-president, respectively, of the National Theatre Owners' Association upon its founding in May 1910.

[67] "Important Changes Planned for Memphis," *New York Clipper*, 8 April 1911.

at the Jefferson, which was to be renamed the Lyric Theatre. On April 23, they opened their new theatre with Lillian Russell's latest success, *Wildfire*. Ironically, just over a month later their old one, the Bijou, burned to the ground. The newspaper stated that the cause of the fire was a mystery; however, the author of the article posited the seemingly thin assertion that it had been "accidentally set on fire by burglars" in the saloon next door. Yet again, several factors contribute to uncertainty. The property, with its frontage on Main Street, was considered valuable; indeed, it was reported that the owners had just a few months prior turned down a hefty offer of $250,000, although from whom the offer came was not revealed. The theatre building itself, however, "according to one of the owners, was of very little value." Even though the cavernous building had undergone several renovations since its opening as a tabernacle for Sam Jones, and Wells had spent $20,000 refurbishing it in 1904, it was still, in its bones, a mule barn. Some vague references to earlier talks about a new theatre for the site were mentioned, but nothing had come of it. Moreover, with the 2,200-seat Orpheum Theatre still providing big-time vaudeville just a block up the street, the Bijou would probably have been a hard sell as a cheap vaudeville house twice that size. Besides, such entertainment could be had elsewhere in the city.[68]

With the Bijou gone, for the next several years, the Lyric Theatre would offer Stair and Havlin's attractions under Ben Stainback's management. A.B. Morrison, whose Jefferson Theatre was "the finest castle built on air," according to Huhn, had been bought out and paid a handsome bonus. He continued to manage East End Park during the summers. Meanwhile the

---

[68] "Amusements," *Commercial Appeal*, 15 April 1911; "Cast of Lyric Stock Company Is Announced," *Commercial Appeal*, 16 April 1911; "Bijou Theater Is Burned." Although the *Commercial Appeal* indicated that the theatre would be rebuilt, this did not happen. The site of the Auditorium/Bijou became the location of the Chisca Hotel, which opened in 1913. Other local theatres providing cheap vaudeville at this time included the Palace (not the one owned by the Barrassos) and the Star on North Main, and John Persica's New Garden Theatre on South Third.

Lyceum continued, under the Weises and the returning Frank Gray, to be the place for upscale legitimate theatre. But the Road was changing.

The "Big Small Time" Comes to Memphis

In most U.S. cities during the years leading up to the 1920s, motion pictures began to take over a significant portion of the business that had previously been the domain of theatres presenting live entertainment. By 1915 there were already twenty-seven movie theatres in Memphis, many of them located along Main Street. Theatres for blacks and whites were separate for the most part, though larger theatres such as the Princess and the Majestic had balcony or gallery seating for black patrons. Several of these movie theatres included vaudeville acts between shows, but the writing was on the wall regarding the decline of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century spatial concept of the Road, as fewer and fewer traveling companies set out from the metropolitan centers of theatrical production toward the hinterlands.[69] In what follows, I will briefly sketch the beginnings of this transition as it occurred in Memphis.

One of the most influential figures in the proliferation of theatres offering a high-quality combination of movies and vaudeville at cheap prices on a national scale was Marcus Loew. Loew saw early on that audiences for live theatre, even big-time vaudeville, were dwindling rapidly in favor of motion pictures, and he capitalized on this trend. According to Albert Wertheim, by 1921 the huge crowds at Loew's State Theatre in New York were a major cause of concern for Edward F. Albee, as patrons were being enticed away from his nearby Palace

[69] For an overview of the early growth of the movie industry, see Douglas Gomery, "The Movie Palace Comes to America's Cities," in *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure into Consumption*, ed. Richard Butsch (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990) and Gomery's *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992). For more on the decline of the Road, see Alfred L. Bernheim, *The Business of the Theatre: An Economic History of the American Theatre, 1750-1932* (1932; reprint, New York: Benjamin Blom, 1964), 75-92; Jack Poggi, *Theater in America: The Impact of Economic Forces, 1870-1967* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), 28-45; and Larry T. Menefee, "A New Hypothesis for Dating the Decline of the Road," *Educational Theatre Journal* 30, no. 3 (October 1978): 343-56.

Theatre. At Loew's, they could see a show for one-fourth the ticket price at the Palace. Taking advantage of new business practices, Loew obtained financing to build his circuit from Wall Street bankers, and he listed his company's stock publicly on the New York exchange. Although his segment of the vaudeville business was referred to as the "small time," Loew—along with William Fox and Alexander Pantages, who were running theatre circuits on a similar scheme—was giving the big time a run for their money.[70]

In 1917 it was announced that Loew intended to establish a southern circuit based in Atlanta. It was to be the first large, mainstream vaudeville circuit headquartered in the region; other circuits with theatres in cities throughout the South, such as the Orpheum and Hopkins's Western Vaudeville Managers Association, were based in New York or Chicago. Having taken over DeGive's Grand Opera House in Atlanta the previous year and renamed it Loew's Grand, Loew proceeded to lease theatres that had formerly been legitimate houses in several cities throughout the South—including the Vendome in Nashville, the Crescent in New Orleans, and the Lyceum in Memphis—and reopen them with the film and vaudeville format.[71] Loew also leased the Princess Theatre in Memphis, which had already been running on this scheme since its opening in 1912.[72] A.B. Morrison, the manager who had been unceremoniously released from the Orpheum and had instigated the Jefferson Theatre in 1908 in defiance of that organization, and who had operated East End Park from 1909 until it was closed in 1913, became the manager of Loew's Princess in 1918.[73]

---

[70] Wertheim, 239-44.

[71] "Schiller Here to Open Loew's Headquarters for Southern Circuit," *Atlanta Constitution*, 23 April 1917; "Loew Will Build Theater in City," *Atlanta Constitution*, 22 July 1917; "Loew Opening in the South," *Baltimore Sun*, 26 August 1917. Albert Weis had sold the Lyceum in 1915 to the locally organized Lyceum Realty Company. See Shelby County Register of Deeds, Book 635, Page 634, http://register.shelby.tn.us/, accessed 27 January 2012.

[72] *Commercial Appeal*, 1 and 6 August 1912.

[73] *Polk's Memphis City Directory for 1918*.

It seems that Loew leased the Lyceum and the Princess just so that he could gain a foothold in the city while he built two grand movie palaces in the style for which he was becoming famous. In the spring of 1919, he incorporated the Loew's Memphis Theatre Company and obtained leases on two prime sites in the city on which to build the new theatres.[74] The Loew's State Theatre, which opened in 1920 on Main Street just over a block north of the Orpheum, was the first major theatre in Memphis to be built by outside interests. By 1921, the Loew's Palace, which showed movies exclusively, had opened on Union Avenue at Main. Ben Stainback, who had started his theatrical career at the Auditorium in 1894 and moved to the Jefferson (renamed the Lyric) in 1911, became the publicity manager for Loew's theatres. Loew had offered to pension him, but Stainback remained in Loew's employ until his death in 1927, just over a month after Loew's own passing.[75]

Wertheim states that while Albee was starting to feel the crunch from Loew in the late teens and early twenties, the Orpheum Circuit was experiencing pressure from Alexander Pantages, another magnate in the burgeoning field of small-time vaudeville. Based in Seattle, Pantages opened his Grecian-style, palatial theatres in almost all the same cities as the Orpheum circuit. During the same year that the Loew's State Theatre opened in Memphis, a new Pantages Theatre was built on Main Street one block north of Union. At some point—perhaps as Loew left the Princess to open the Loew's State—Morrison moved over to manage the Pantages, where he remained until his retirement in 1942.[76]

Loew's two theatres, along with the Pantages, were a serious drain on business for the Orpheum. This was a trend that was happening not only locally, but all around the U.S., as big-

---

[74] *Commercial Appeal*, 23 April and 30 May 1919.

[75] "'Uncle Ben' Stainback Answers Last Curtain," *Commercial Appeal*, 19 October 1927.

[76] "Lyric Theater Sold for Home of Grotto," *Commercial Appeal*, 15 March 1929. The Pantages became the Warner Theatre some time around 1930.

time vaudeville began to see the beginning of its end. Morris Meyerfeld, who had run the Orpheum Circuit since its formation, retired in 1920, and Martin Beck left the company in order to turn his energies toward producing in 1923. Later that same year, the Orpheum Theatre in Memphis burned to the ground.

Meanwhile, the Lyric (formerly the Jefferson), deprived of a steady stream of road shows, carried on by hosting stock companies from time to time. Frank Gray, who had managed the Lyceum until it was taken over by Loew, moved over to the Lyric and remained there until his death in 1922. By the early 1920s, a new era of theatre in Memphis was dawning.

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this dissertation I have attempted, as Michael McKinnie has done for Toronto in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, to discover how theatrical activity—primarily in the forms of theatre building, establishment, and management, but also with regard to theatrical performance itself—played a role in the creation of the urban geography of Memphis during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[1] In doing so, I have focused on providing detailed social and cultural contexts within which to position—in time *and* space—the development of Memphis theatres and their relationships to, in Edward Soja's words, the "social production of space and the restless formation and reformation of geographical landscapes."[2] I have also attempted to show how the urban surroundings of period Memphis served, as Marvin Carlson has stated, "to reinforce within audiences certain ideas of what theatre represents within their society and how the performances…are to be interpreted and integrated into the rest of their social and cultural life."[3]

But again—why Memphis? Besides my own placement in this city as a working teacher and scholar of nineteenth-century theatre, what reason could there be for investigating theatre in Memphis during this period? In this regard, I have been inspired by the work of Felicia Hardison Londré and Jo Robinson on provincial theatre history of the time. Although I am a bit wary of Londré's theoretical formulation, I wholeheartedly agree with the spirit of her statement that "the story of 'the road' is remarkably rich, colorful and complex…[and] should be told repeatedly in all its regional variations." Such a project would serve to challenge what she calls the "New

---

[1] Michael McKinnie, *City Stages: Theatre and Urban Space in a Global City* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 6.

[2] Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (New York: Verso, 1989), 11.

[3] Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1989), 2.

York-centric" view of U.S. theatre during this period and to broaden our ideas of what constitutes this field.[4] In terms of theoretical perspective, this dissertation has been informed by Robinson's claim that aiming for a more global view requires us to examine the connections between the local and "other moments, other objects, other locals."[5]

Extending Robinson's idea, and in an effort to avoid the narrowness that is often associated with local history, I have conducted this kind of examination by framing the detailed contexts that I have presented within Henri Lefebvre's spatial dialectic of perceived, conceived, and lived space. In mapping out the city of Memphis in Chapter Two, I have located the places of performance within the urban landscape and attempted to provide a sense of the spatial networks involved in theatre-going at the time. In essence, I have engaged here in an act of spatial representation, or conceptualization of space (mapping) in order to decipher the spatial practices, or perceived space, of Memphis during the period. In developing the stories of the theatres themselves, I have used two specific, time-bound conceptions of space—one local/regional (the New South city), and one national/transnational/global (the Road)—in order to reveal the connections and tensions between local and global actions and events. I make no pretentions to having provided an absolutely complete vision by this dialectical process, but if I have succeeded in some part, the reader will have a better idea of the relationship of theatre and urban space in Memphis during this period as it was directly, palpably lived.

* * *

[4] Felicia Hardison Londré, *The Enchanted Years of the Stage: Kansas City at the Crossroads of American Theater, 1870-1930* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 2.

[5] Jo Robinson, "Becoming More Provincial?: The Global and the Local in Theatre History," *New Theatre Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (August 2007): 238.

McKinnie remarks that the building of cultural institutions such as theatres "often affirms the economic dominance of capitalist urban development within the city."[6] But this shaping of the city comes in many forms and from many corners—from those in control of the primary means of production as well as those operating within the interstices of economic power in the city. In Memphis during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the impulse to make the establishment of theatres an integral part of city-building manifested in several communities.

The white elite built theatres to declare the significance of the city and to participate in theatrical display by sitting in their boxes and exhibiting their economic power to the citizenry. One of these theatres, the Lyceum, found its way to the very center of commerce in the city, symbolizing the significance of legitimate theatre to this particular group of citizens. Further, Robert Church, Sr., in his desire to provide social and cultural uplift to the black community of Memphis, built a theatre to rival the efforts of the white elite. The appearance of Church's Auditorium, located right next to Beale Street Baptist Church, further affirmed the prominence of African American culture in the South Memphis area. African Americans such as Tick Houston, Willie and Lulu "Too Sweet," and Happy and Ella Goodloe, along with Italian American families like the Barrassos and the Zerillas, furthered Church's efforts by creating a thriving black theatre scene in the city. This theatrical activity, at first dispersed in North and South Memphis, eventually coalesced into an entertainment hub on Beale Street that lasted for generations, and whose legacy continues today. The religious passions of citizens both black and white, caught up in the whirlwind that was Sam Jones, led to the conversion of a mule barn into a tabernacle that through economic necessity, along with working-class citizens' desire for cheap entertainment, became a theatre. And, finally, the denizens of the underworld established havens

---

[6] McKinnie, 29.

of vice that incorporated theatrical entertainment under the same roofs, thereby confirming their presence in the city and contributing to the licentious reputation of the tenderloin district. By these actions, all of these local groups, in their own ways and for their own reasons, played a part in the development of Memphis as a New South city.

But as much as local efforts undergirded the creation of theatres in the city, the perpetuation of many of these theatres became dominated by more global forces of capitalism. Theatres with independent local managers gradually came under the auspices of one of the several national corporate bodies that controlled the various segments of the theatre business in the U.S. during this period. At times these moves from above seemed beneficial, offering shows that might not otherwise have been seen in Memphis. On the other hand, the almost total domination of the industry by these companies sometimes left little choice to the local manager. Moreover, at times the bickering among the captains of the industry made theatres in cities like Memphis into pawns in a vicious game.

Throughout the development of theatre in Memphis during this period, a tension was maintained between the desire to be associated with metropolitan cities in the northern U.S. and, at the same time, to preserve regional and local identities. Those in power wanted Memphis to be larger than Atlanta or Nashville in order to draw industrial investment from northern capitalists. In tandem with this desire was a need to out-do rival southern cities in the adornment of the urban landscape, including the building of theatres—to have an elaborate, new Grand Opera House to eclipse the Vendome in Nashville, for example. These actions did eventually result in the interest of northern investors—e.g., Klaw and Erlanger and the American Theatrical Exchange—but as time went on, anxieties began to grow over what the association with larger cities meant in terms of the maintenance of local traditions and mores.

Much of this fear had to do with the rigidly controlled social boundaries required by the dominant system of white supremacy in the South. When Chicago-based manager John D. Hopkins booked the nationally popular African American vaudeville team, Mallory Brothers and Brooks, into the Grand Opera House in 1901, the local manager and white audiences reacted as if an extreme violation had occurred. Of course, the Memphis correspondent to the *Indianapolis Freeman* pointed out the irony of this system by comparing the furor over this particular crossing of the color line to white society's ambivalence about some white men's seeking out of black women for clandestine sexual encouters in the tenderloin district, as noted in Chapter Four. In an urban society defined by official racial segregation—that is, by social boundaries made patently manifest in urban space by a color line that was rigid for all except those in power—perhaps the very idea of any kind of boundary-crossing was particularly fraught with danger.

Social anxieties related to the theatrical breaking of boundaries during this period were also concerned with stage portrayals of lewd behavior and activities that were sometimes either combined with theatre spectatorship or engaged in nearby, such as drinking and gambling. For many Memphians, variety theatres such as Persica's New Garden served as extreme examples of immorality in the theatre. Critic Hugh Huhn, in his writings around the time of the Jefferson Theatre's opening quoted in the previous chapter, may have been insinuating that the kinds of entertainment one might see at Persica's—for example, Salome dances—were going mainstream in New York City. If this were the case, then perhaps some citizens felt, like Huhn, that metropolitanism offered prosperity and growth at the cost of a local sense of public morality. The establishment of the Jefferson seems to have been an attempt to regain some level of control over this situation, although market forces eventually won the upper hand.

Perhaps the association of some theatres with drinking and gambling complicated any desire to maintain ownership and control over black theatres in the city among many members of the African American upper and middle classes in Memphis who would have had the money to do so. Some members of this society, like Ida B. Wells's companion who had scolded her for going to the theatre after she attended the New Memphis to see Booth perform *Hamlet*, were particularly concerned with the social advancement of the black community. In the face of white supremacist opposition, and inspired by Booker T. Washington, they felt a strong obligation to hold themselves to the highest moral standards in order to succeed in this venture. For some, this apparently included an antitheatrical prejudice. After the turn of the century, African American theatre in Memphis was often associated with drinking and gambling because of the neighborhood in which many of the theatres were located. Whether or not they were directly related (which they sometimes, but not always, were), this conflation of theatrical performance with illicit activities may have been compounded by the geographical association of theatres with bars and gambling dens.

Morever, aside from the occasional amateur performance of Shakespeare at Church's Auditorium, there does not appear to have been much sustained effort at promoting more "legitimate" forms of theatre on the part of the African American elite.[7] Again, the discovery of currently absent primary sources might challenge this assumption. But if it is indeed the case, it is not surprising: without a repertory of standard plays written by African Americans to encourage new writers, such efforts toward the creation of legitimate theatre in the black community might have had to rely consistently on plays written by white authors at this early

---

[7] A description of an amateur performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, put on by a group of black students and attended by the African American elite, is described in the *Memphis Sun*, 27 December 1913, located in the Robert R. Church Family Papers, Special Collections, University of Memphis Libraries.

stage of black theatre in the U.S. Although Julia Hooks ran a music conservatory at Church's Auditorium during the period and black audiences were regularly exposed to the operatic singing style of Sissieretta Jones, there does not appear to have been any effort to cultivate opera in the African American community either. Instead, aside from the obvious exceptions of Robert Church Senior and Junior, the black elite of Memphis seems to have steered relatively clear of active monetary support of theatre, leaving the field wide open for more popular forms to thrive.

The Italians who took over the presentation of African American theatre in Memphis did not seem to be terribly concerned with moral issues. They may have also had the advantage of being able to straddle the color line in terms of social and professional negotiations. They certainly catered to white tastes with their introduction of "midnight ramble" nights for whites-only audiences. These events were not attempts to bridge the racial divide in any way, but merely to make a profit. Of course, it could be that the Italians deliberately drove black theatre proprietors out of business, as the writer at the *Chicago Defender* (quoted in Chapter Four) seemed to believe. However, it would seem that if this situation were known among the black community, they would not have continued to patronize these establishments with regularity for decades.

At any rate, it is ironic (or not, given the history of European and U.S. theatre since the end of the nineteenth century) that the highest level of innovation and creativity with regard to production took place in the most marginal of Memphis theatres during this period. Although it was the music—the blues—that would come to represent Memphis to the rest of the world, it should be remembered that much of the development of this musical form took place in the theatres of Beale Street.

* * *

As a stopping point, 1920 serves well because of several occurrences. The T.O.B.A. was formed the following year and began its wider influence over the shows at the Beale Street theatres. Also during that year, Robert Church, Jr. sold Church's Auditorium to the city—perhaps a symbolic transition, but one in which the most prominent African American citizen of Memphis discontinued his active support of black theatre culture in the city. With the advent of T.O.B.A., there was no need for resident theatre companies of the kind that had created so much original material in the earlier years of the twentieth century—some of which had inspired blues artists such as W.C. Handy. After the Loew's State opened in 1920, the opening of the large Pantages and Loew's Palace Theatres in 1921 confirmed the dominance of motion pictures in the city. This year also saw the formation of the Memphis Little Theatre Players. Comprised mainly of upper-class white citizens, this group was inspired by the Little Theatre Movement that was spreading across the country at this time. They began to create theatrical productions on their own, rather than relying on the touring shows that were becoming fewer and farther between. This organization would eventually become Theatre Memphis, which is still in operation today.

Of course, many developments have happened in Memphis theatre in the intervening years between 1920 and now.[8] Ellis Auditorium, built on Main Street and Poplar Avenue in 1924, became the place where touring shows were performed, along with concerts and other events. After the Orpheum burned down in 1923, it was rebuilt as a movie house and opened in 1928. It maintained a minimal level of live performances, along with the movies shown, into the 1930s.

---

[8] Information about the years between 1920 and the present was garnered from Eileen Sheahan, "Theatre in Memphis: Its History" (1978), an unpublished manuscript in the Memphis and Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library & Information Center; *Theatre Memphis: Celebrating 75 Years* (Memphis: Memphis Little Theatre Players Association, 1994); and my own knowledge of the local theatre scene.

The latter decade also saw further developments in local theatre production. One group formed during the 1930s was the Garden Players, which produced a young Tennessee Williams's first play, *Cairo! Shanghai! Bombay!*, when he was in the city visiting his grandfather in the summer of 1935. Two years later, the Memphis Open Air Theatre began presenting summer seasons of light opera and musicals at the Overton Park Shell, which occurred annually from 1937 to 1951. A group called the Tri-States Civic Repertory was also formed in 1937. This company was apparently interested (well ahead of their time) in integrating the theatre in Memphis. However, they seem to have barely gotten off the ground, which is no wonder; although the 1930s brought a focus on social change to some parts of the country, Memphis, like many other southern cities, remained steadfast in its conservatism and perpetuation of white supremacy. Aside from the Tri-States group, these local theatrical ventures—including the Memphis Little Theatre Players—were beginning to move their operations east of the downtown area into midtown Memphis.

The next big change in the local theatre scene came during the late 1950s with the advent of resident professional theatre. The Front Street Theatre began operations in the King Cotton Hotel downtown in 1957, and then moved to a midtown movie theatre during the early 1960s. By 1968 it had fallen on hard financial times. Operations moved to Memphis State University (now the University of Memphis) that year, and the next year the theatre folded. In 1967, Jackie Nichols organized the Circuit Playhouse company, which is still active today and has several theatre spaces in midtown. It is presently the only year-round, resident professional theatre company in the city. The majority of plays produced by this theatre company are recent successes from Broadway and off-Broadway stages. The Tennessee Shakespeare Company was organized by Dan McCleary in 2008 to present seasonal productions of classical theatre and is

currently the only theatre in the area offering Equity contracts to professional actors. It is based in Germantown, Tennessee, an eastern suburb of Memphis.

With regard to African American theatre, activity continued for several years in the theatres on Beale Street, particularly the Palace, but the focus seems to have shifted toward musical entertainment presented without the loosely constructed musical comedy frame prevalent during the early years of the twentieth century. In 1972, a group of African American students at Memphis State started a company called the Beale Street Players, whose first production was a play based on the life of Malcolm X. This company was reorganized by Memphis actor and playwright Levi Frazier as the Beale Street Repertory Company in 1975. Four years later, Frazier and his wife Deborah Glass Frazier founded the Blues City Cultural Center (BCCC), which was the only professional African American theatre company in the city.[9] The BCCC continues operations today, primarily as a community arts and social service organization. In 2006, Ekundayo Bandele opened the Hattiloo Theatre in the area between midtown and downtown. The Hattiloo is currently the city's only year-round theatre dedicated to the presentation of African American plays.

Revival of the downtown area has been going on for over thirty years now, but there has been practically no effort to support theatre production as part of this process. After years of dilapidation, the Orpheum was renovated and reopened during the 1980s. It is currently the only theatre in the downtown area that presents plays; however, the vast majority of productions at the Orpheum are touring musicals. In the 1990s the stage was enlarged to accommodate the increasingly elaborate and complicated sets of touring productions such as *Phantom of the Opera*. Non-musical plays are rarely presented at this theatre any more. Recently the Circuit

---

[9] Miriam DeCosta-Willis, *Notable Black Memphians* (New York: Cambria, 2008), 129-31.

Playhouse company opened a beautiful, brand new building in midtown for its main theatre, Playhouse on the Square, and plans are currently in the works to move the Hattiloo Theatre to a location nearby. This consolidation of theatrical activity in midtown is a positive development and takes advantage of Memphis theatre-goers' familiarity with locally produced theatre in that neighborhood and points further east. However, it would seem that similar support for theatre production in the downtown area could only raise the city's urban profile, working in tandem with efforts at downtown renovation which are ostensibly for the purpose of drawing industry and young, innovative workers to Memphis.

Throughout all this development, one aspect of the local theatre scene that continues is a relative dearth of locally written dramatic material. Although there has been plenty of locally produced theatre in the city since the 1920s, plays originating here are rather scarce. This is one reason why Beale Street during the early twentieth century stands out as an island of innovation in a sea of imported shows. Very few companies have been interested in creating material that would depict local events and situations or deal with issues of particular concern to Memphians. As a result, the majority of citizens are likely to see theatre merely as entertainment, rather than, as Mark Fearnow suggested, "a showcase and forum for the community's working out its idea of itself."[10]

There are, of course, exceptions. Frazier continues to write plays, as do several other Memphis theatre artists. But aside from those of Bandele, who has his own theatre, audiences are unlikely to see full productions of many new plays by local writers. For a short while recently there was a theatre group called Playwrights' Forum, which supported the development

---

[10] Mark Fearnow, "Theatre Groups and Their Playwrights," in *The Cambridge History of American Theatre, Vol. II: 1870-1945*, ed. Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 345.

of new plays in the city, but that company is now defunct. A couple of theatre groups remain that focus on local work, such as Our Own Voice and Voices of the South, both of which are located in the midtown area. Perhaps the biggest exception to the lack of focus on local work is the latter company, which is primarily dedicated to the production of original work by playwrights in the area. But these writers and theatre groups lack the full community and monetary support that they need in order to make the creation of locally focused theatre a central aspect of the arts environment of Memphis. The situation is such that a playwright like Katori Hall, who was born in Memphis and writes about Memphis, must go to London and New York to be produced. Why should this be?

The roots of this problem go back a long way and seem to have to do with a community's sense of its own "platiality" (to borrow Una Chaudhuri's term) and the relationship of that sense to the art of theatre.[11] Throughout the nineteenth century, and especially during the period investigated in this dissertation, the production and consumption of U.S. theatre became alienated and dis-placed in many communities, as production became more and more geographically centralized in New York. To be sure, since the earliest days of theatre in the U.S., plays produced everywhere tended to be those that had premiered somewhere else, primarily in London at that point. However, as time went on, with the proliferation of resident companies throughout the country in the early nineteenth century, more plays were being written by local writers.[12] The centralization of theatre did "change all that," as Fearnow suggested, and Gerald Bordman is right that where written drama was concerned, particularly in southern cities,

---

[11] Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 5.

[12] For a history of southern playwrights in particular, see Charles S. Watson, *The History of Southern Drama* (Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 1997).

the light of "independent creativity…flickered out with varying rapidity but dismaying permanence."[13]

Throughout this dissertation, I have sought to show that this was not necessarily the case where all aspects of theatre were concerned. But because of the continuing dominance of New York (and, currently, other cities that have revived local playwriting traditions), theatre-goers in cities like Memphis are not accustomed to seeing their city represented onstage—unless, of course, it is filtered through the mind of a New York playwright and/or validated by production in that city. A recent example is the musical *Memphis*, which presents a rather generic image of the city as a backdrop for its story and blues- and rock-and-roll-inspired songs. Although the Orpheum in Memphis received the privilege of launching the national touring production of this show, it was envisioned and created in New York. Memphis has a strong tradition of excellent production in its local professional and community theatres. However, until it has a stronger, well-supported tradition of locally written plays, the relationship of theatre and the city in Memphis will not be as truly vibrant as it could be.

* * *

This dissertation has been concerned with broadening the geography of theatre through a case study of performance in a city other than those normally discussed in U.S. theatre studies. It has shown that although this city was affected by larger developments happening at the time, such as the corporate takeover of theatres and the eclipse of theatre by the movies, how and why that worked out is perhaps different from any other specific emplacement of such trends in U.S. theatre. In particular, I have tried to provide a more comprehensive view of theatre in the city by

---

[13] Fearnow, 345; Gerald Martin Bordman, *American Theatre: A Chronicle of Comedy and Drama, 1869-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 3.

combining discussion of both European American and African American theatre, which a narrower geographical focus has allowed me to do.

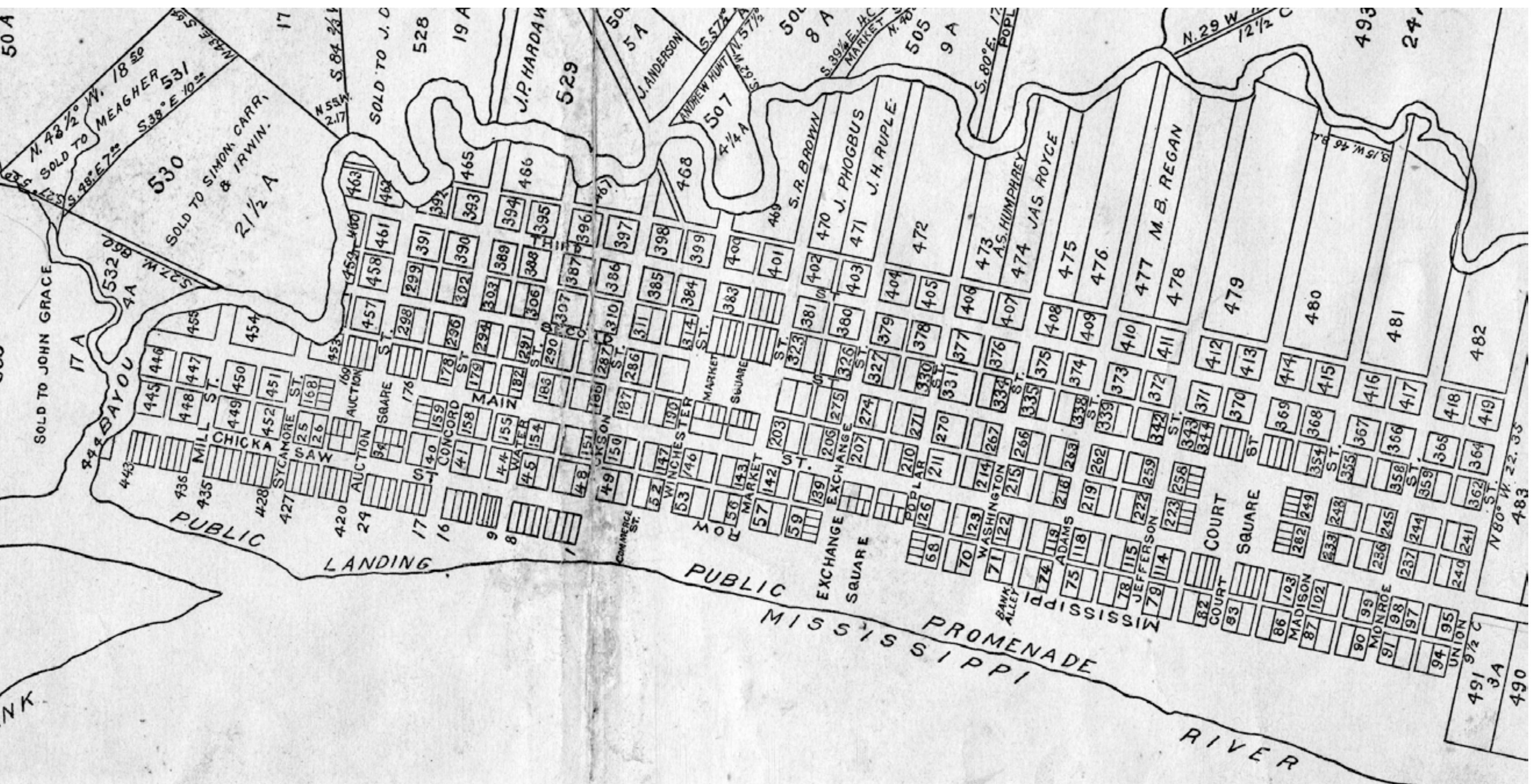
Much work remains to be done in terms of the geography of theatre at the local, regional, and national levels. This dissertation has only begun to scratch the surface with regard to African American theatre in Memphis. If somehow copies of the black newspapers published in the early twentieth century in this city emerge, it would be a major development—not just for theatre studies, of course, but for African American history in general. Also, a collection of the writings of Sylvester Russell and others like him would be a boon to African American theatre scholarship. In general, the South has gotten short shrift when it comes to scholarly attention—at least in theatre studies. No history of theatre in the region like James Dormon's *Theatre in the Ante Bellum South*—written forty-five years ago—exists for the period that I have investigated here.[14] Perhaps the general feeling that U.S. theatre was all the same at this time has led to this omission. On a larger, national scale, perhaps it is time for a revival of interest in local studies of theatre in the U.S. Such studies that are connected to a broader theoretical perspective, and that seek to find the connections and tensions between local and global trends, will aid in the creation of a more complex and detailed picture of U.S. theatre.

---

[14] James H. Dormon, *Theater in the Ante Bellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967).

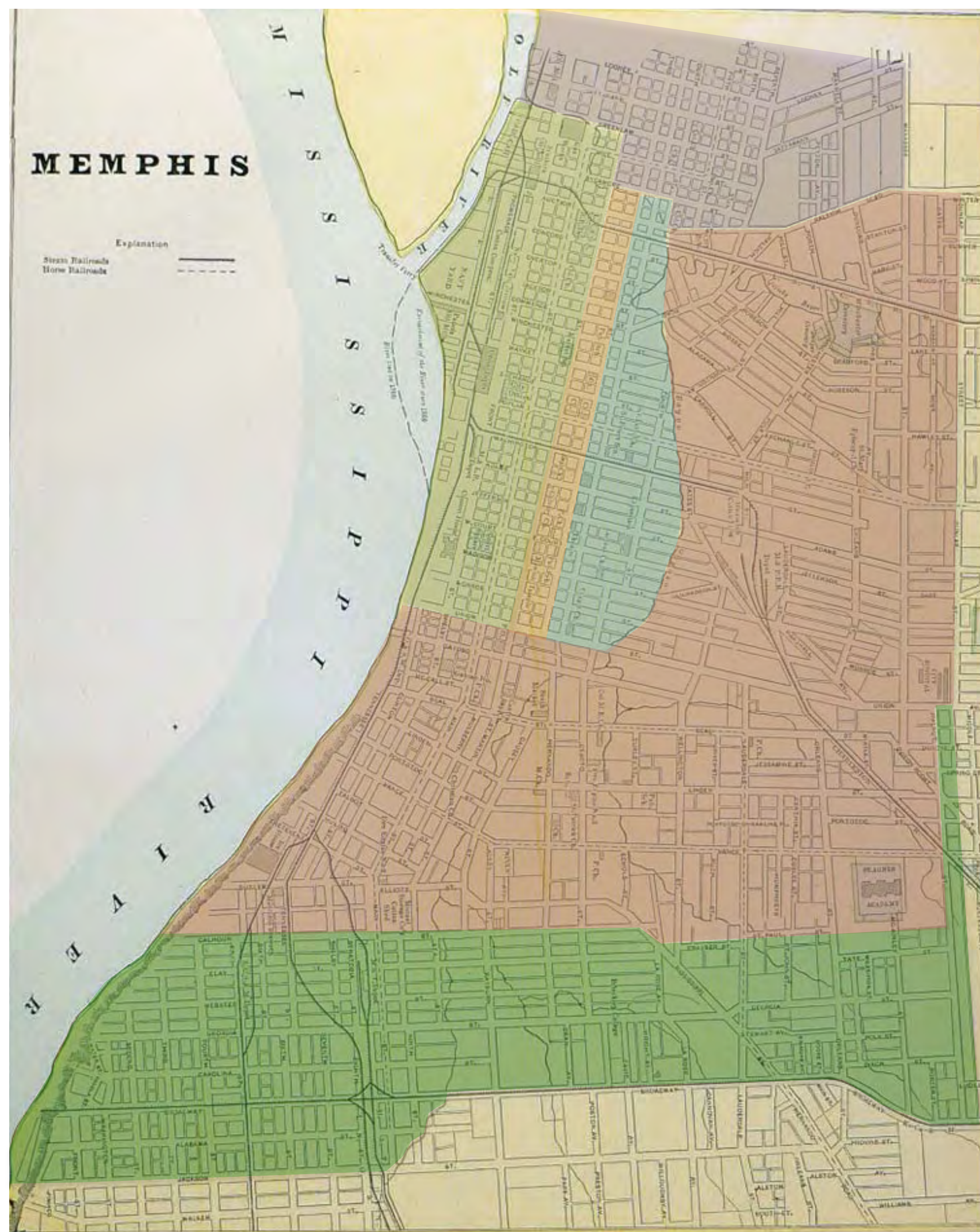
FIGURES

Figure 1: Map of Memphis as originally laid out by William Lawrence in 1819



Source: Memphis and Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library & Information Center.

Figure 2: Annexations to Memphis, 1832-1876



Original City Plan, 1819

Annexations:

1832 1849 1876

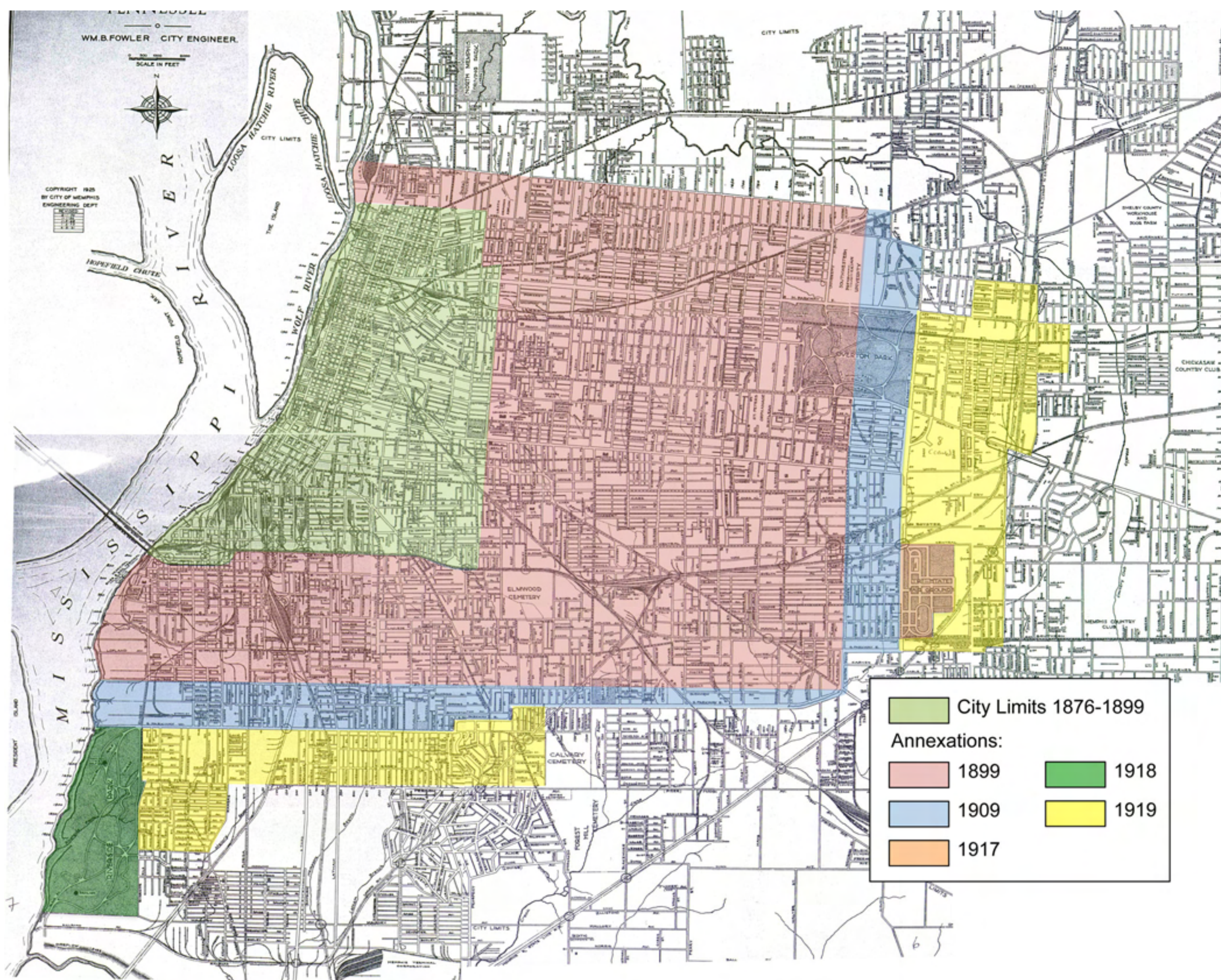
1842 1870

Source: Map (1891): http://memphismemories.org/Areas/Downtown/Early_Downtown/Early_Memphis_Maps, accessed 30 January 2012. My modifications.

Figure 3: Memphis, 1870

Source: Library of Congress Map Collections, http://memory.loc.gov.

Figure 4: Annexations to Memphis, 1899-1919



Source: Map (1925): Special Collections, University of Memphis Libraries. My modifications.

Figure 5: Ad for Yiddish Theatre, 1905

HOPKINS GRAND OPERA HOUSE | FOLLOW THE STAR | WEEK OF MARCH 6

Hopkins New Stock Co. Presenting for the First Time in Stock

CLYDE FITCH'S GREAT COMEDY DRAMA

As Played by Nat Goodwin and Maxine Elliott

"COWBOY AND THE LADY"

דער יודישער קעניג ליער,
עס ערוועקען זיך אין איהם זיסע ערינערונגען,
אין דעם ציון מארטש

AS AN ADDED ATTRACTION LOUIS SAKEN

Direct from Jewish Theatre, New York City

LaVINE and WALTONE

The Count and the Maid

FLO ADLER

Charming Comedienne

GREAT BIOGRAPH

Source: *Commercial Appeal*, 5 March 1905.

Figure 6: Historic Downtown Memphis Places of Performance

Source: Map (1911): *The New Encyclopedic Atlas and Gazetteer of the World* (New York: P.F. Collier & Son. 1917), Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin, http://www.lib.utexas.edu, accessed 29 January 2012. My modifications.

Figure 7: North Memphis

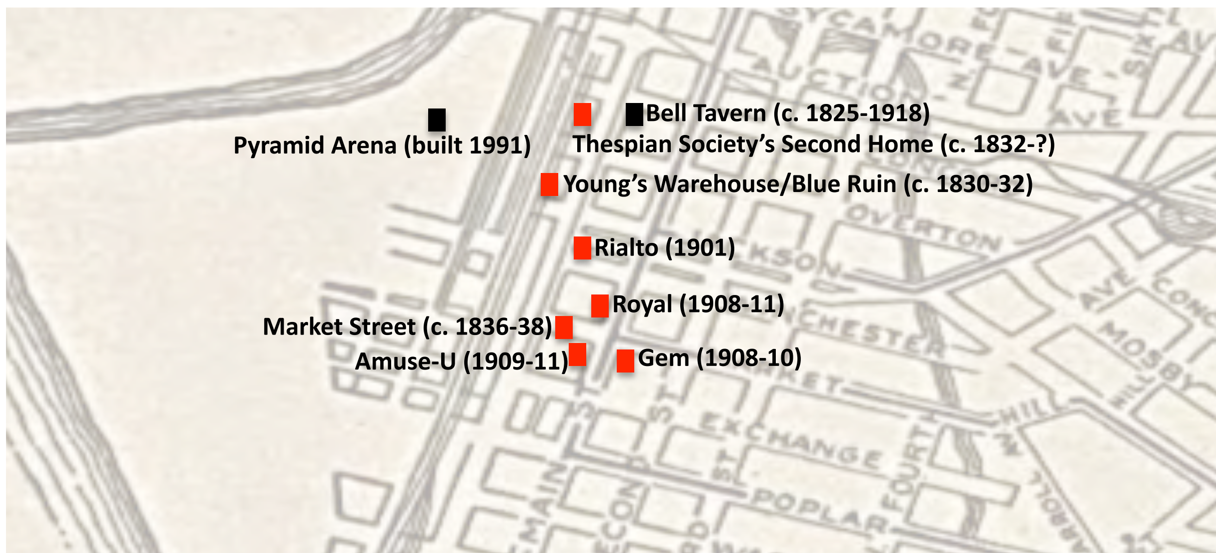


Figure 8: Central Business District

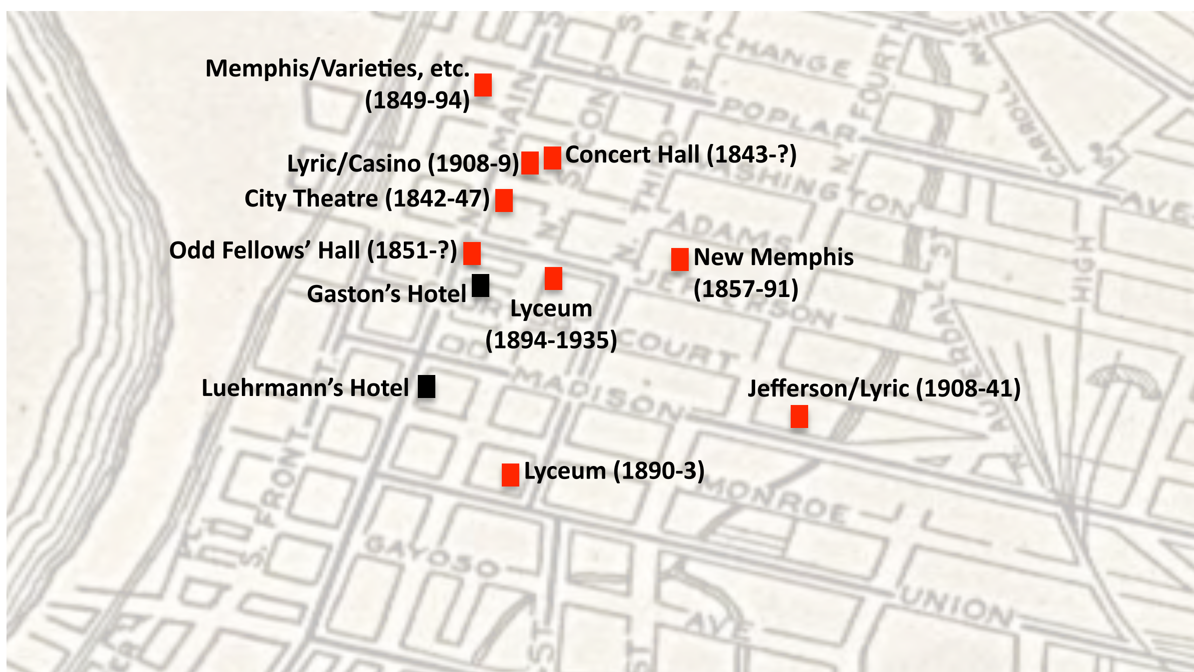


Figure 9: Advertisement for Luehrmann's

Source: *Memphis Herald*, 25 March 1908.

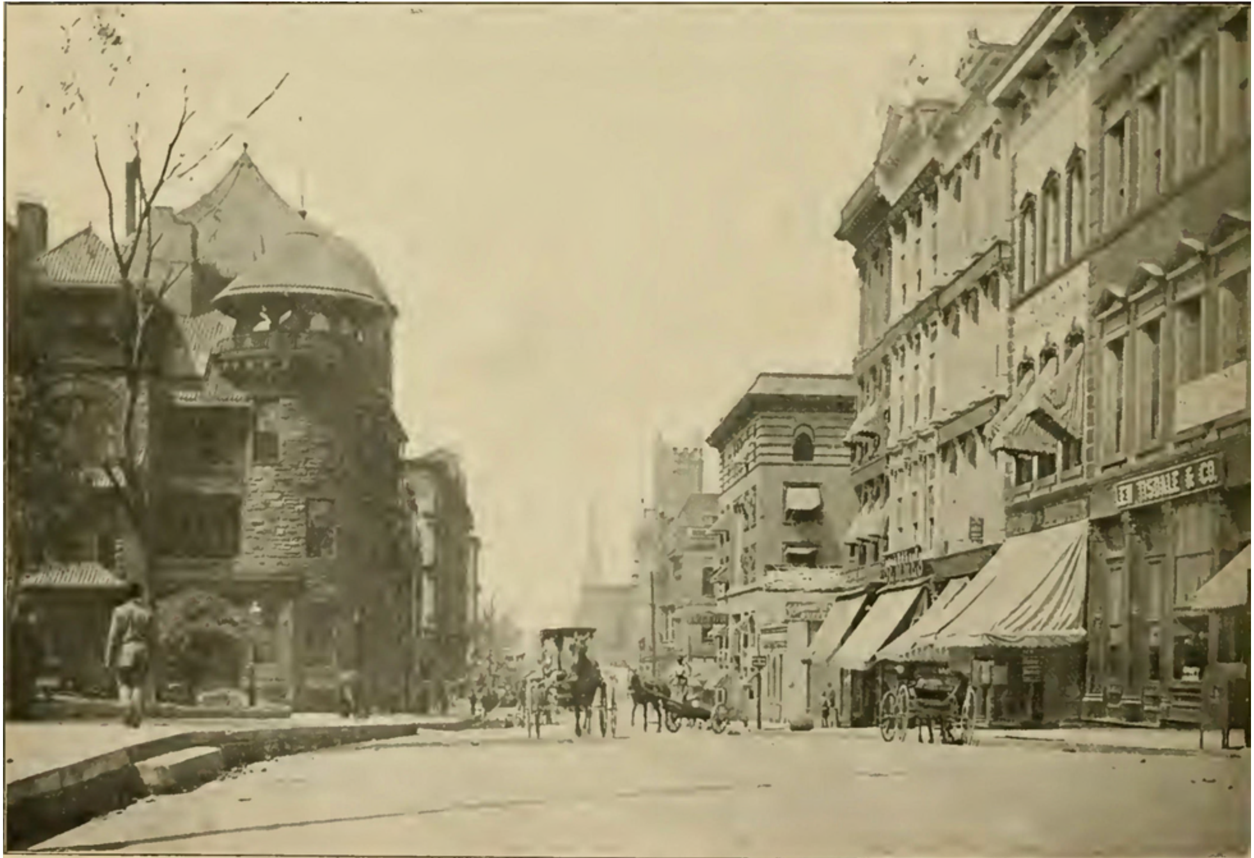
Figure 10: Amateur Athletic Association Building (Home of the first Lyceum Theatre)

Source: Memphis and Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library & Information Center.

Figure 11: Second Lyceum Theatre

Source: Memphis and Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library & Information Center.

Figure 12: Lyceum Theatre (right middle ground), with Tennessee Club across the street (left)



Source: Business Men's Club, *Memphis: Yearbook 1908* (Memphis: Business Men's Club, 1908), 10.

Figure 13: Jefferson Theatre

Source: Memphis and Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library & Information Center.

Figure 14: South Memphis

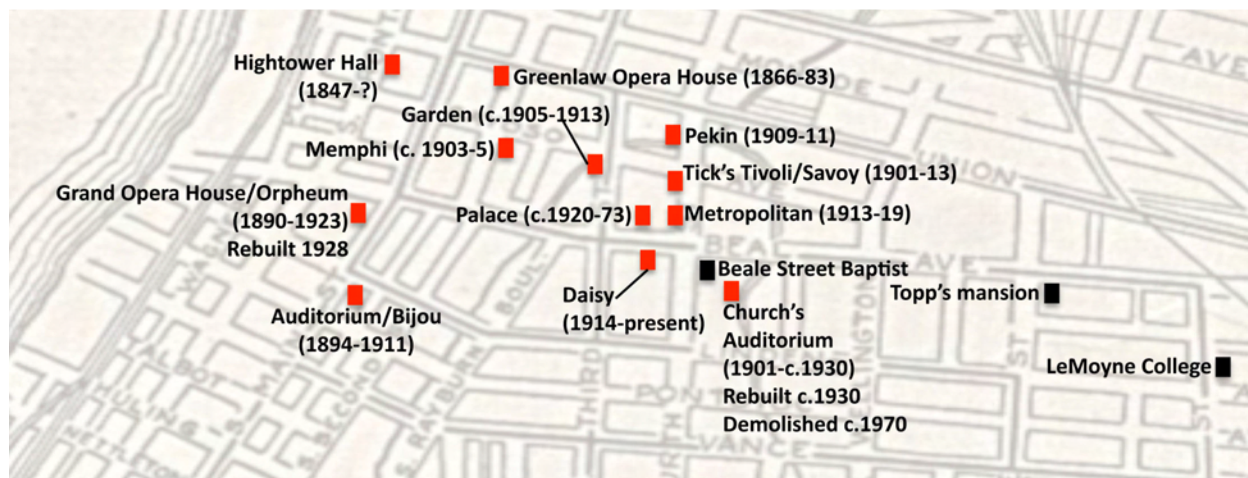


Figure 15: Grand Opera House

Source: Memphis and Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library & Information Center.

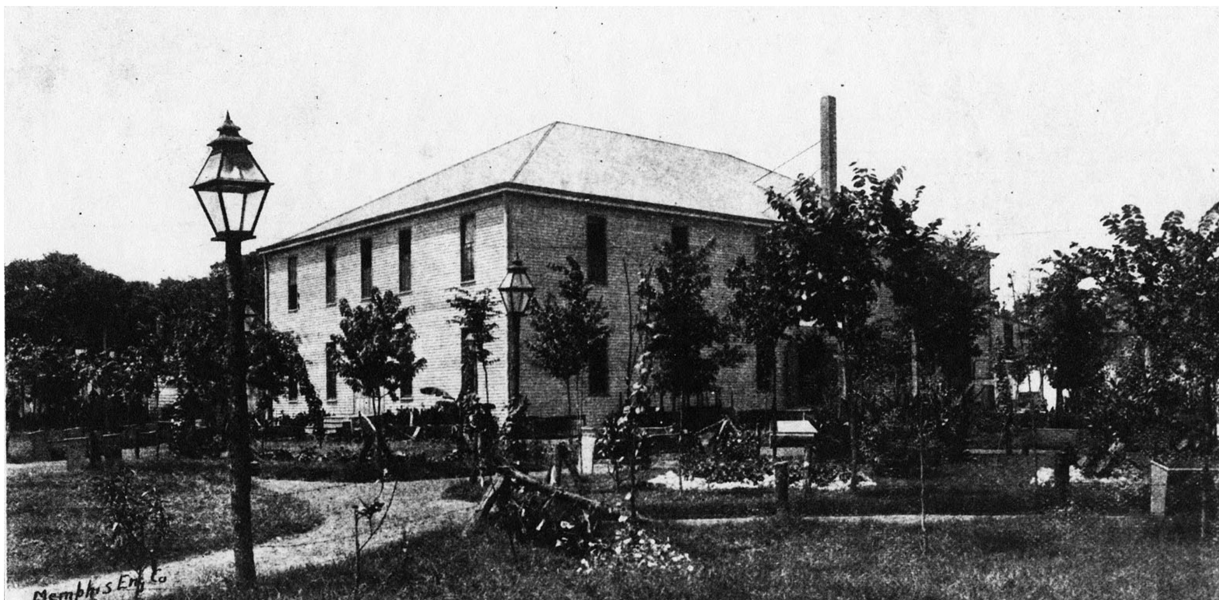
Figure 16: The Auditorium, 1890s

Source: Mrs. Sam P. Jones, *The Life and Sayings of Sam P. Jones* (Atlanta: Franklin-Turner, 1907), 120.

Figure 17: The Bijou, after 1904

Source: Memphis and Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library & Information Center.

Figure 18: Church's Auditorium



Source: Memphis and Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library & Information Center.

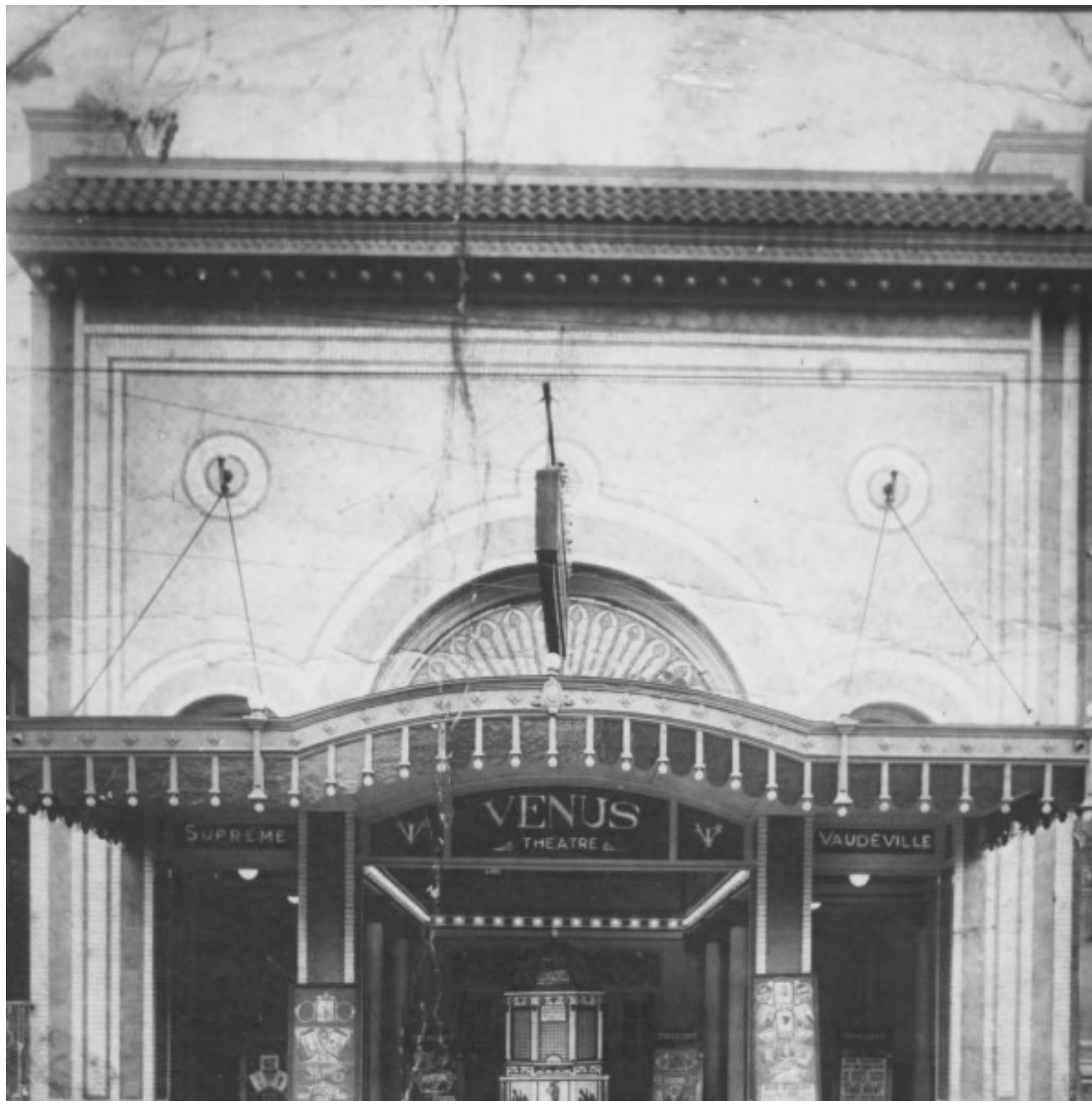
Figure 19: Church's Auditorium memorial

Source: Photo by author.

Figure 20: Metropolitan Theatre

Source: Special Collections, University of Memphis Libraries.

Figure 21: Venus Theatre



Source: Memphis and Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library & Information Center.

Figure 22: Daisy Theatre, with the top of the FedEx Forum looming in the background

Source: Photo by author.

Figure 23: On the Outskirts

East Memphis

South Memphis

Figure 24: East End Park

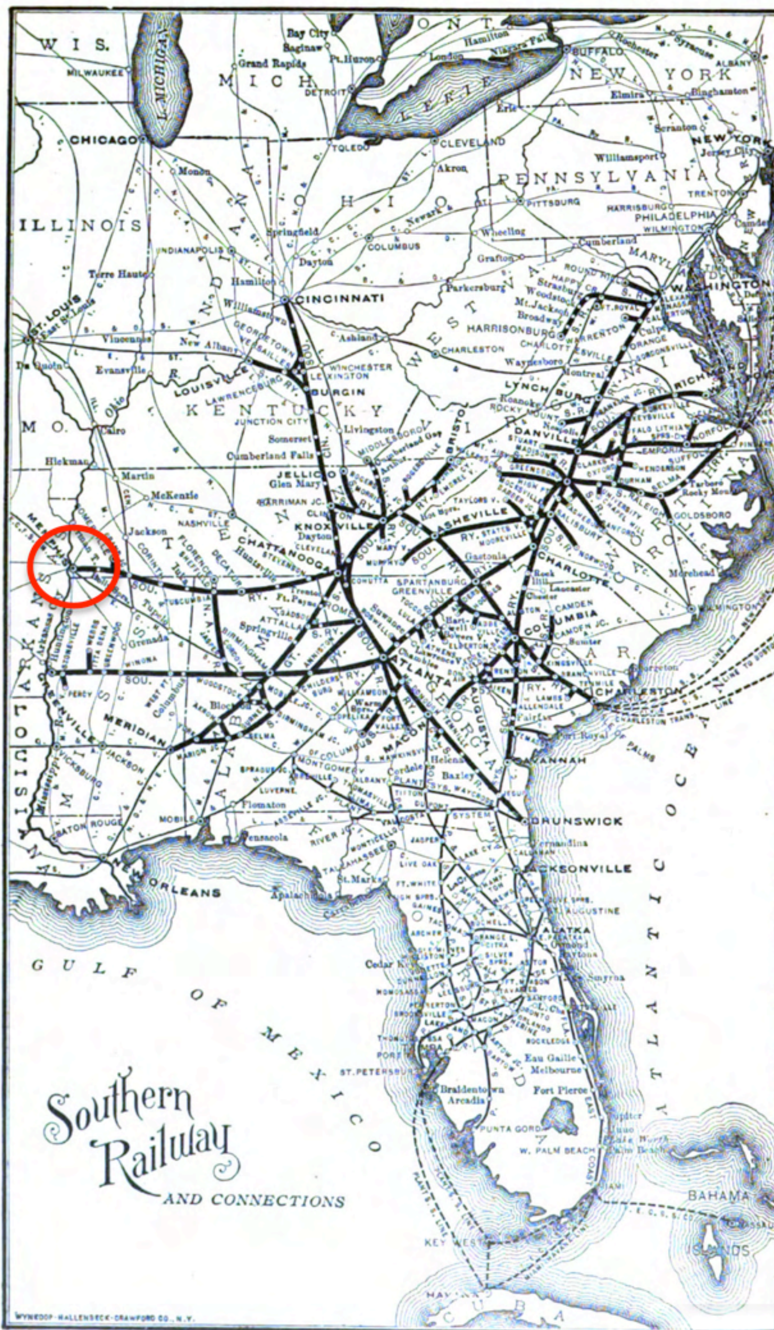
Source: Memphis and Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library & Information Center.

Figure 25: On the announcement of the census results in 1900

MEMPHIS—"THESE ARE MY CHILDREN."

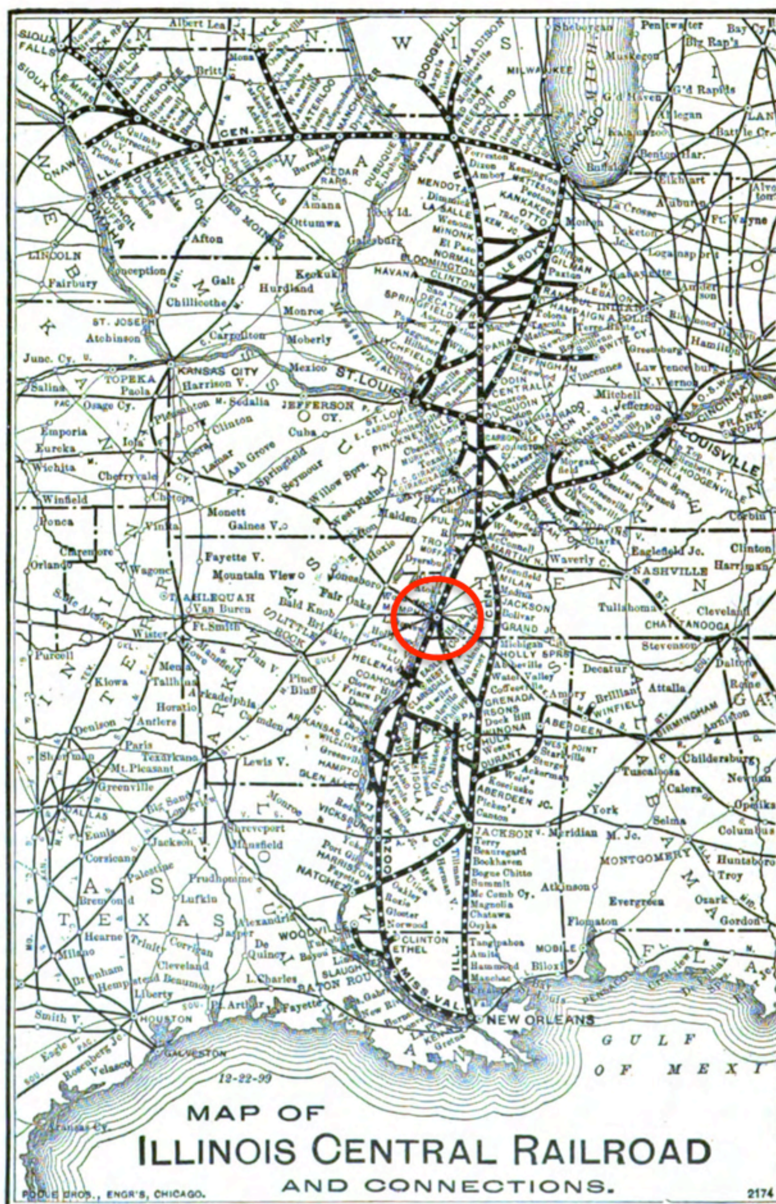
Source: *Evening Scimitar*, 28 September 1900.

Figure 26: Southern Railway Map



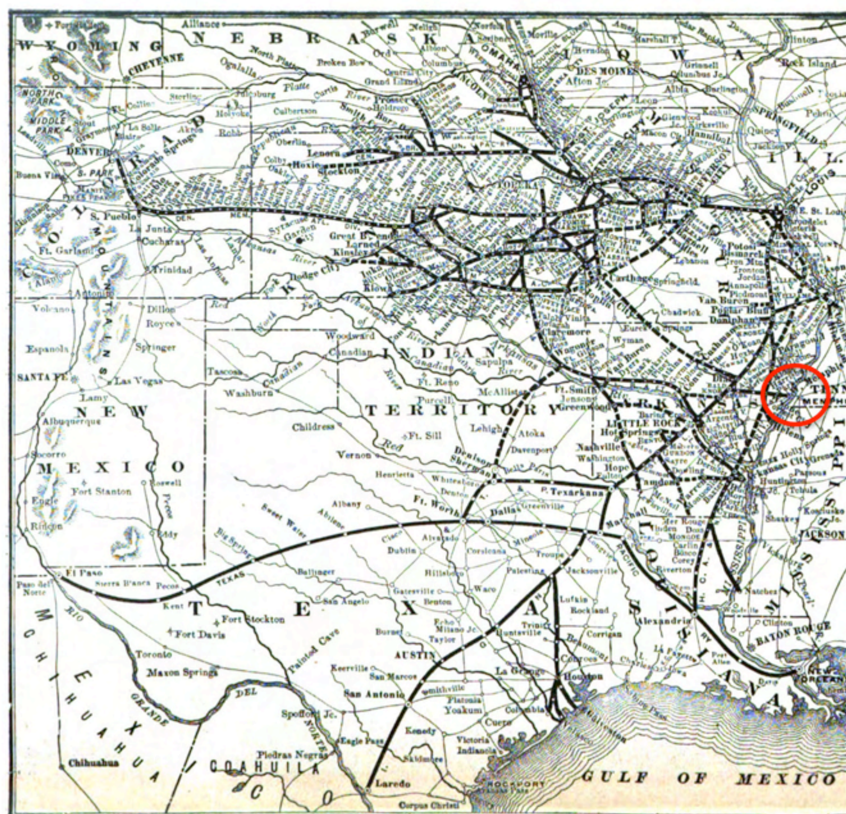
Source: *Julius Cahn's Official Theatrical Guide, Volume 5* (New York: Julius Cahn, 1900), 96.

Figure 27: Illinois Central Railway Map



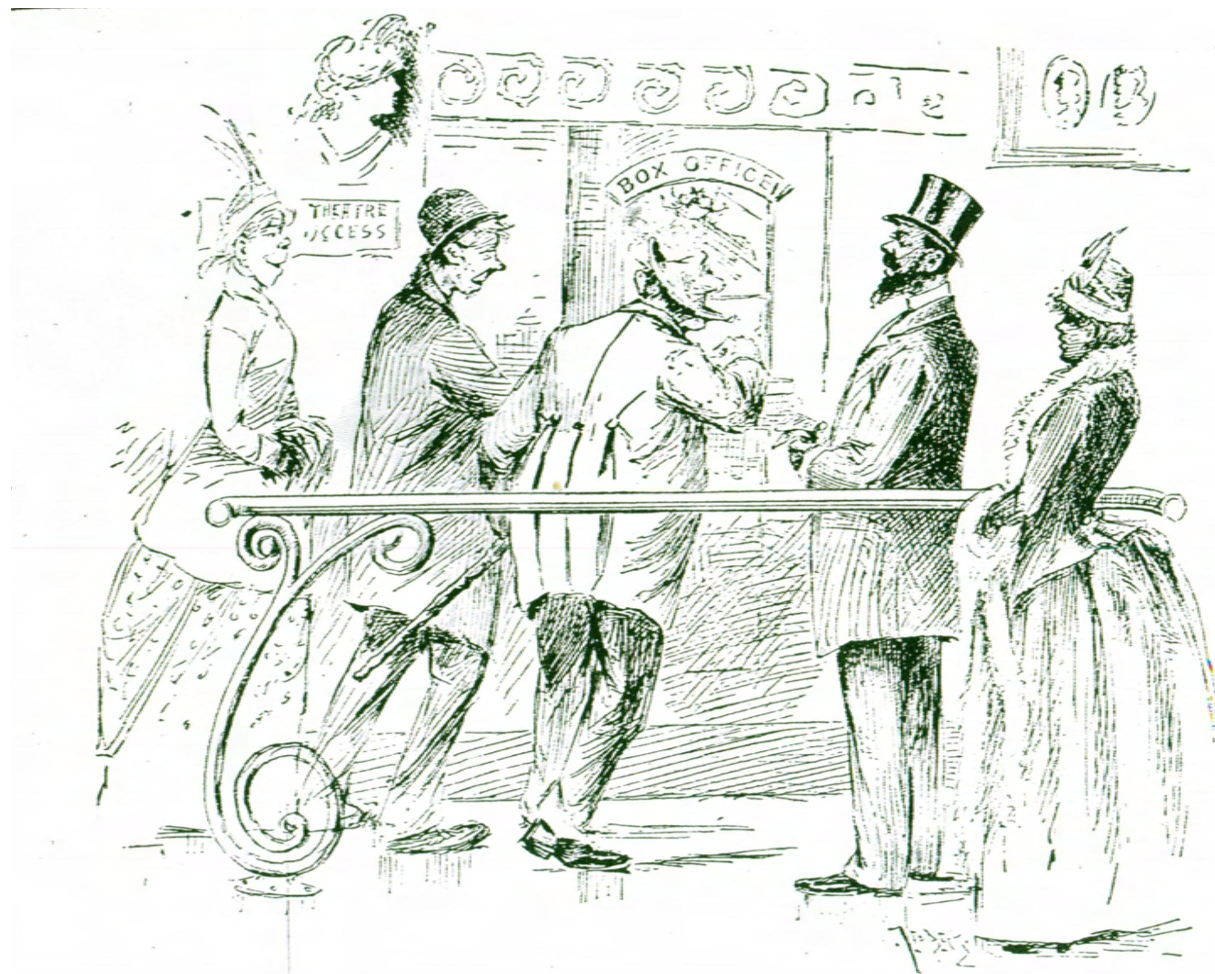
Source: *Julius Cahn's Official Theatrical Guide, Volume 5* (New York: Julius Cahn, 1900), 306.

Figure 28: Missouri Pacific Railway Map



Source: *Julius Cahn's Official Theatrical Guide, Volume 5* (New York: Julius Cahn, 1900), 452.

Figure 29: "Color Caste in the Theatre"



Source: *Indianapolis Freeman*, 5 January 1889.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Newspapers

Atlanta Constitution
Baltimore Sun
Boston Daily Globe
Chicago Daily Tribune
Chicago Defender
Indianapolis Freeman
Los Angeles Times
Memphis Appeal-Avalanche
Memphis Commercial Appeal
Memphis Daily Appeal
Memphis Daily Avalanche
Memphis Herald
Memphis Scimitar
Memphis Sun
National Police Gazette
New York Age
New York Clipper
New York Dramatic Mirror
New York Times
New York Tribune
Washington Post

City Directories and Guides

Directory of the Taxing District of Memphis. Memphis: C.F. Weatherbe, 1884.

Dow's Memphis Directory. Memphis: Harlow Dow, 1885-92.

Guide and Map of the City of Memphis. Memphis: Memphis Abstract Company, 1908. http://www.wdbj.net/shelby/maps/index.html. Accessed 27 January 2012.

R.L. Polk & Co.'s Memphis Directory. Memphis: R.L. Polk & Co., 1892-1942.

Sholes' Memphis Directory. Memphis: A.E. Sholes, 1880-84.

Manuscripts, Public Records, and Other Collections

Robert R. Church Family Papers, Mississippi Valley Collection, Ned R. McWherter Library, University of Memphis.

Grand Opera House Box Office Statement Book, 1894-96, Memphis and Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library.

Grand Opera House Minute Book, 1888-92, Memphis and Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library.

Hugh Higbee Huhn Collection, Memphis and Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library.

Map collection, Memphis and Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library.

Map collection, Mississippi Valley Collection, Ned R. McWherter Library, University of Memphis.

Miscellaneous clippings in folders pertaining to the Auditorium/Bijou Theatre, Church's Auditorium, Grand Opera House/Orpheum Theatre, Lyceum Theatre, Jefferson/Lyric Theatre, and Theatre in general; Memphis and Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library.

Scamehorn, H. Lee. "A Calendar of the Papers of Pinckney C. and William D. Bethell, 1848-1901." Denver: Library of the State Historical Society of Colorado, 1968.

Shelby County Register of Deeds. http://register.shelby.tn.us.

Books and Articles

Allison, Judge John. *Notable Men of Tennessee*. 2 vols. Atlanta: Southern Historical Association, 1905.

Bent, Silas. "Prohibition in the City of Memphis." *Mixer and Server* 19, no. 1 (15 January 1910): 27-32.

Business Men's Club. *Memphis: Yearbook 1908*. Memphis: Business Men's Club, 1908.

Cahn, Julius. *Julius Cahn's Official Theatrical Guide*. 15 vols. New York: Julius Cahn, 1896-1910.

——— and R. Victor Leighton. *The Cahn-Leighton Official Theatrical Guide*. Vols. 16 and 17. New York: Julius Cahn and R. Victor Leighton, 1912-13.

Davis, James D. *The History of the City of Memphis*. Memphis: Hite, Crumpton & Kelly, 1873.

DuBois, W.E.B. "The Talented Tenth." In *The Negro Problem*, edited by Booker T. Washington, 31-75. New York: James Pott and Company, 1903.

Gerhard, William Paul. *Theatre Fires and Panics: Their Causes and Prevention*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1896.

Goodspeed, Westin A. *History of Tennessee*. 1887. Reprint, Nashville: C. and R. Elder Booksellers, 1972.

Grady, Henry W. *The New South*. New York: Robert Bonner's Sons, 1890.

Grau, Robert. *Forty Years Observation of Music and the Drama*. New York: Broadway Publishing Company, 1909.

——————. *The Stage in the Twentieth Century*. 3 vols. New York: Broadway Publishing Co., 1912.

Hamilton, G.P. *Beacon Lights of the Race*. Memphis: E.H. Clarke and Brother, 1911.

——————. *The Bright Side of Memphis*. Memphis: G.P. Hamilton, 1908.

Jones, Mrs. Sam P. *The Life and Sayings of Sam P. Jones*. Atlanta: The Franklin-Turner Co., 1907.

Keating, J.M. and O.F. Vedder. *History of the City of Memphis, Tennessee*. 2 vols. Syracuse, NY: D. Mason & Co., 1888.

Leavitt, Michael B. *Fifty Years in Theatrical Management*. New York: Broadway Publishing Co., 1912.

Leonard, John W., ed. *The Book of St. Louisans: A Biographical Dictionary of Leading Living Men of the City of St. Louis*. St. Louis: The St. Louis Republic, 1906.

The National Cyclopedia of American Biography. Vol. 8. New York: James T. White and Company, 1898.

Shelby County's Shame. N.p.: n.p., 1895.

Smith, Solomon. *Theatrical Management in the West and South for Thirty Years*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1868.

Statistical Atlas of the United States. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1914.

Young, Judge J.P. *Standard History of Memphis, Tennessee*. Knoxville, TN: H.W. Crew & Co., 1912.

Secondary Sources

Books and Articles

Abbott, Lynn and Doug Seroff. *Out of Sight: The Rise of African American Popular Music, 1889-1895*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2002.

——————. *Ragged but Right: Black Traveling Shows, "Coon Songs," and the Dark Pathway to Blues and Jazz*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2007.

——————. "'They Cert'ly Sound Good to Me': Sheet Music, Southern Vaudeville, and the Commercial Ascendancy of the Blues." *American Music* 14, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 402-54.

Amato, Joseph Anthony. *Rethinking Home: A Case for Writing Local History*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002.

Appadurai, Arjun. "The Production of Locality." In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, 178-200. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Auster, Albert. *Actresses and Suffragists: Women in the American Theatre, 1890-1920*. New York: Praeger, 1984.

Ayers, Edward L. *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

——————. *Southern Crossing: A History of the American South, 1877-1906*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.

Baldwin, Davarian L. *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

Barlow, William. *"Looking Up at Down": The Emergence of Blues Culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989.

Barrett, James R. and David Roediger. "Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality, and the 'New Immigrant' Working Class." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16, no. 3 (Spring 1997): 3-44.

Barth, Gunther. *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth-Century America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.

Bean, Annemarie. "Black Minstrelsy and Double Inversion, Circa 1890." In *African American Performance and Theater History: A Critical Reader*, edited by Harry J. Elam, Jr. and David Krasner, 171-91. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

———————. "Vaudeville." In *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance*, edited by Cary D. Wintz and Paul Finkelman, 2 vols., 2:1208-10. New York: Routledge, 2004.

———————, James V. Hatch, and Brooks McNamara, eds. *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1996.

Beauregard, Paul (as DJ Paul), Jordan Houston (as Juicy J), and Frayser Boy. "It's Hard Out Here for a Pimp." *Hustle & Flow: Music from and Inspired by the Motion Picture*, Atlantic.

Bennett, Susan, ed. *Theatre Journal* 53, no. 2 ("Theatre and the City", 2001).

Berkeley, Kathleen C. *Like a Plague of Locusts: From an Antebellum Town to a New South City, Memphis, Tennessee, 1850-1880*. New York: Garland, 1991.

Bernheim, Alfred L. *The Business of the Theatre: An Economic History of the American Theatre, 1750-1932*. 1932. Reprint, New York: Benjamin Blom, 1964.

Biles, Roger. "Cotton Fields or Skyscrapers?: The Case of Memphis, Tennessee." *The Historian* 50, no. 2 (February 1988): 210-33.

Boles, John B., ed. *A Companion to the American South*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.

Bond, Beverly G. and Janann Sherman. *Beale Street*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2006.

———————. *Memphis in Black and White*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2003.

Bone, Martyn. *The Postsouthern Sense of Place in Contemporary Fiction*. Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, 2005.

Bordman, Gerald Martin. *American Theatre: A Chronicle of Comedy and Drama, 1869-1914*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Botein, Barbara. "The Hennessy Case: An Episode in Anti-Italian Nativism." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 20, no. 3 (Summer 1979): 261-79.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. Edited by Randal Johnson. London: Polity Press, 1993.

Boyer, Paul. *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978.

Brown, Vandella. *One Hundred Years of Memphis Black Newspapers, 1880-1980*. Memphis: Memphis Public Library and Information Center, 1981.

Brownell, Blaine A. and David R. Goldfield. *The City in Southern History: The Growth of Urban Civilization in the South*. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1977.

Brundage, W. Fitzhugh, ed. *African Americans and the Creation of American Popular Culture, 1890-1930*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

Burke, David. "Enoch Ensley." *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Article.jsp?id=h-2448. Accessed 28 October 2011.

Campbell, Gavin James. *Music and the Making of a New South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

Canonici, Paul V. *The Delta Italians: Their Pursuit of 'The Better Life' and Their Struggle Against Mosquitos, Floods, and Prejudice*. Madison, MS: P.V. Canonici, 2003.

Cantwell, Robert. *If Beale Street Could Talk: Music, Community, Culture*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009.

Capers, Gerald Mortimer. *The Biography of a River Town: Memphis, Its Heroic Age*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939.

Carlson, Marvin. *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2001.

———. *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture.* Ithaca: Cornell, 1989.

Cartwright, Joseph H. *The Triumph of Jim Crow: Tennessee Race Relations in the 1880s*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976.

Casey, Edward S. *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.

Cash, Wilbur J. *The Mind of the South*. New York: Knopf, 1941.

Cassis, Youssef. "Big Business." In *The Oxford Handbook of Business History*, edited by Geoffrey Jones and Jonathan Zeitlin, 171-93. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Chandler, Alfred D. *Scale and Scope: The Dynamics of Industrial Capitalism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994.

Chaudhuri, Una. *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995.

——— and Elinor Fuchs, eds. *Land/Scape/Theater*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002.

Cheseborough, Steve. *Blues Traveling: The Holy Sites of Delta Blues*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009.

Church, Annette E. and Roberta Church. *The Robert R. Churches of Memphis: A Father and Son Who Achieved in Spite of Race*. Memphis: A.E. Church, 1974.

Church, Roberta and Ronald Walter. *Nineteenth-Century Memphis Families of Color, 1850-1900*. Memphis: Church-Walter, 1987.

Cobb, James C. *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

———. "Beyond Planters and Industrialists: A New Perspective on the New South." *The Journal of Southern History* 54, no. 1 (February 1988): 45-68.

———. "From the First New South to the Second." In *The American South in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Craig S. Pascoe, Karen Trahan Leathem, and Andy Ambrose, 1-18. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005.

———. *Industrialization and Southern Society, 1877-1984*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984.

Cohn, David. *God Shakes Creation*. New York: Harper Brothers, 1938.

Connolly, James. "Bringing the City Back in: Space and Place in the Urban History of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era." *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 1, no. 3 (July 2002): 258-78.

Coppock, Paul R. *Memphis Sketches*. Memphis: Friends of Memphis and Shelby County Libraries, 1976.

———, Helen M. Coppock, and Charles W. Crawford. *Paul R. Coppock's Mid-South*. 4 vols. Memphis: West Tennessee Historical Society, 1983-95.

Cordell, Gina and Patrick O'Daniel. *Historic Photos of Memphis*. Nashville: Turner Publishing Company, 2006.

Crampton, Jeremy W. and Stuart Elden. *Space, Knowledge, and Power: Foucault and Geography*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007.

Crowley, Patrick and Ross Melnick. Cinema Treasures website. www.cinematreasures.org. Accessed 30 January 2012.

Davidson, James West. *"They Say": Ida B. Wells and the Reconstruction of Race*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Davis, Peter A. "From Stock to Combination: The Panic of 1873 and Its Effects on the American Theatre Industry." *Theatre History Studies* 8 (1988): 1-9.

———. "The Syndicate/Shubert War." In *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World*, edited by William R. Taylor, 147-57. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.

Davis, Tracy C. *The Economics of the British Stage, 1800-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

DeCosta-Willis, Miriam. "Ida B. Wells' Diary: A Narrative of the Black Community of Memphis in the 1880s." *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 45 (1991): 35-47.

———. *Notable Black Memphians*. New York: Cambria, 2008.

Donald, Henderson H. "The Negro Migration of 1916-1918." *Journal of Negro History* 6, no. 4 (October 1921): 383-498.

Dormon, James H. *Theater in the Ante Bellum South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967.

Dougan, John. *Memphis*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 1998.

Dowdy, G. Wayne. "Censoring Popular Culture: Political and Social Control in Segregated Memphis." *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 55 (2001): 98-116.

———. *Mayor Crump Don't Like It: Machine Politics in Memphis*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006.

Doyle, Don Harrison. *Nashville in the New South, 1880-1930*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985.

———. *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990.

Duggan, Lisa. *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000.

Durham, Weldon B. *American Theatre Companies: 1888-1930*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1987.

———. "The Revival and Decline of the Stock Company Mode of Organization, 1886-1930." *Theatre History Studies* 6 (1986): 165-88.

Dye, Robert W. *Memphis*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2005.

Elam, Harry J., Jr., and David Krasner, eds. *African American Performance and Theater History: A Critical Reader*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Erdman, Andrew. *Blue Vaudeville: Sex, Morals, and the Mass Marketing of Amusement, 1895-1915*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., Inc., 2004.

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

Faulkner, William. *Sanctuary*. 1931. New York: Vintage, 1993.

Fearnow, Mark. "Theatre Groups and Their Playwrights." In *The Cambridge History of American Theatre, Volume II: 1870-1945*, edited by Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby, 343-77. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Ferber, Edna. *Show Boat*. 1926. Reprint, New York: G.K. Hall and Co., 1981.

Finger, Michael. "East End Park." *Memphis Magazine* 34, no. 2 (May 2009): 47-52.

Folmsbee, Stanley J. "The Origin of the First 'Jim Crow' Law." *The Journal of Southern History* 15, no. 2 (May 1949): 235-47.

Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces," translated by J. Miskowiec. *Diacritics* 16 (1986): 22-27.

———————. "Questions on Geography." In *Power/Knowledge*, edited by Colin Gordon, 63-77. New York: Pantheon, 1980.

Frederickson, George M. *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.

Frick, John W. "A Changing Theatre: New York and Beyond." In *The Cambridge History of American Theatre, Volume II: 1870-1945*, edited by Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby, 196-232. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

———————. *Theatre, Culture and Temperance Reform in Nineteenth-Century America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Gaston, Paul. *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking*. New York: Knopf, 1970.

Gatewood, Willard B. *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

"George Tucker Stainback." Cumberland Presbyterian Church website. http://www.cumberland.org/hfcpc/minister/StainbackGeorgeTucker.htm. Accessed 6 December 2011.

Gibson, Campbell. "Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790-1990." Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 1998. http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/twps0027.html. Accessed 27 January 2012.

Giddings, Paula J. *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*. New York: HarperCollins, 2008.

Gilfoyle, Timothy J. "White Cities, Linguistic Turns, and Disneylands: The New Paradigms of Urban History." *Reviews in American History* 26, no. 1 (March 1998): 175-204.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Gleeson, David T. *The Irish in the South, 1815-1877*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

Goings, Kenneth W. and Raymond A. Mohl. "Toward a New African American Urban History." *Journal of Urban History* 21, no. 3 (March 1995): 283-95.

Goings, Kenneth W. and Gerald L. Smith. "Duty of the Hour: African American Communities in Memphis, 1862-1923." In *Trial and Triumph: Essays in Tennessee's African American History*, edited by Carroll Van West, 227-43. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002.

——————. "'Unhidden Transcripts': Memphis and African American Agency, 1862-1920." *Journal of Urban History* 21, no. 3 (March 1995): 372-94.

Goldfield, David R. *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982.

——————. *Region, Race, and Cities: Interpreting the Urban South*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997.

Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life. "Galveston, Texas." *Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities*. http://www.isjl.org/history/archive/tx/galveston.html. Accessed 17 November 2011.

Gomery, Douglas. "The Movie Palace Comes to America's Cities." In *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure into Consumption*, edited by Richard Butsch, 136-51. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990.

——————. *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992.

Goodson, Steve. *Highbrows, Hillbillies, and Hellfire: Public Entertainment in Atlanta, 1880-1930*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002.

Gordon, Robert. *It Came from Memphis*. New York: Pocket Books, 1995.

Graham-Jones, Jean. "Editorial Comment: Theorizing Globalization through Theatre." *Theatre Journal* 57, no. 3 (2005): viii-xvi.

Grantham, Dewey W. *The South in Modern America: A Region at Odds*. New York: Harper Collins, 1994.

Gray, Richard and Owen Robinson, eds. *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007.

Guglielmo, Thomas A. *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Hale, Grace Elizabeth. *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*. New York: Pantheon, 1998.

Halloran, Pat. *The Orpheum! Where Broadway Meets Beale*. Memphis: Lithograph, 1997.

Hamer, Philip M. *Tennessee: A History, 1673-1932*. New York: American Historical Society, 1933.

Hanchett, Thomas W. *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

Handy, W.C. *Father of the Blues: An Autobiography*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1941.

Hanners, John. *"It Was Play or Starve": Acting in the Nineteenth-Century American Popular Theatre*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993.

Harkins, John E. *Metropolis of the American Nile: Memphis and Shelby County*. Memphis, TN: West Tennessee Historical Society, 1982.

Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1989.

———————. *Social Justice and the City*. Rev. Ed. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009.

Harvie, Jen. *Theatre and the City*. New York: Palgrave, 2009.

Hay, Fred. *Goin' Back to Sweet Memphis: Conversations with the Blues*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001.

Hay, Samuel A. *African American Theatre: An Historical and Critical Analysis*. New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Hays, Samuel P. *The Response to Industrialism, 1885-1914*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.

Henderson, Mary C. *The City and the Theatre*. New York: Back Stage Books, 2004.

Hill, Errol G. and James V. Hatch, eds. *A History of African American Theatre*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Hodin, Mark. "The Disavowal of Ethnicity: Legitimate Theatre and the Social Construction of Literary Value in Turn-of-the-Century America." *Theatre Journal* 52, no. 2 (May 2000): 211-26.

Hoelscher, Steven. "Making Place, Making Race: Performances of Whiteness in the Jim Crow South." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 93, no. 3 (Sept 2003): 657-86.

Holloway, Steven R. "Identity, Contingency and the Urban Geography of 'Race.'" *Social & Cultural Geography* 1, no. 2 (2000): 197-207.

Hopkins, D.J., Shelley Orr, and Kim Solga, eds. *Performance and the City*. New York: Palgrave, 2009.

Hustle & Flow, 16 mm, 116 min., Paramount Pictures, Los Angeles, 2005.

Isaac, Paul E. *Prohibition and Politics: Turbulent Decades in Tennessee, 1885-1920*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1965.

Jacobson, Matthew Frye. *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.

Jansson, David R. "American National Identity and the Progress of the New South in *National Geographic Magazine*." *The Geographical Review* 93, no. 3 (2003): 350-69.

Jenkins, Earnestine. *African Americans in Memphis*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2009.

Johnson, Eugene J. and Robert D. Russell. *Memphis: An Architectural Guide*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990.

Kelley, Robin D.G. *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*. New York: The Free Press, 1994.

——————. "'We Are Not What We Seem': Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South." *Journal of American History* 80, no. 1 (June 1993): 75-112.

Kendall, John S. *The Golden Age of the New Orleans Theater*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952.

Kern, Stephen. *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1920*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983.

Knight, Athelia. "In Retrospect: Sherman H. Dudley: He Paved the Way for T.O.B.A." *The Black Perspective in Music* 15, no. 2 (Autumn 1987): 153-81.

Knowles, Ric. *Reading the Material Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Kolin, Philip C., ed. *Shakespeare in the South: Essays on Performance*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1983.

Krasner, David. *A Beautiful Pageant: African American Theatre, Drama, and Performance in the Harlem Renaissance, 1910-1927*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

Kyriakoudes, Louis M. *The Social Origins of the Urban South: Race, Gender, and Migration in Nashville and Middle Tennessee, 1890–1930*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

Lamon, Lester C. *Black Tennesseans, 1900-1930*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977.

Larsen, Lawrence H. *The Rise of the Urban South*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985.

Lauderdale, Vance. "Ask Vance" (blog). *Memphis Flyer*. http://www.memphisflyer.com/blogs/AskVanceBlog. Accessed 30 January 2012.

Lears, T.J. Jackson. *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1981.

Lee, George Washington. *Beale Street: Where the Blues Began*. New York: R.O. Ballou, 1934.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

Levine, Lawrence W. *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.

Lewis, Robert M. ed. *From Traveling Show to Vaudeville: Theatrical Spectacle in America, 1830-1910*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

Lewis, Selma S. *A Biblical People in the Bible Belt: The Jewish Community of Memphis, Tennessee, 1840s-1960s*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998.

———— and Marjean Kremer. *Angel of Beale Street: A Biography of Julia Ann Hooks*. Memphis: St. Lukes, 1986.

Link, William A. *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992.

Litwack, Leon. *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998.

Londré, Felicia Hardison. *The Enchanted Years of the Stage: Kansas City at the Crossroads of American Theater, 1870-1930*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007.

Lott, Eric. *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Lynch, Kevin. *The Image of the City*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960.

Lynes, Russell. *The Lively Audience: A Social History of the Visual and Performing Arts in America, 1890-1950*. New York: Harper and Row, 1985.

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

Magness, Perre. *Good Abode: Nineteenth-Century Architecture in Memphis and Shelby County, Tennessee*. Memphis, TN: Junior League of Memphis, 1983.

Makeham, Paul. "Performing the City." *Theatre Research International* 30, no. 2 (2005): 150-60.

Mason, Jeffrey D. *Melodrama and the Myth of America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.

Massey, Doreen. "Places and Their Pasts." *History Workshop Journal* 39 (Spring 1995): 182-92.

Mayer, David. *Stagestruck Filmmaker: D.W. Griffith and the American Theatre*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009.

McArthur, Benjamin. *Actors and American Culture, 1880-1920*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000.

McAuley, Gay. *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1999.

McConachie, Bruce A. *Melodramatic Formations: American Theatre and Society, 1820-1870*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992.

—————— and Daniel Friedman. *Theatre for Working Class Audiences in the United States, 1830-1980*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985.

McIlwaine, Shields. *Memphis Down in Dixie*. New York: Dutton and Company, 1948.

McKee, Margaret and Fred Chisenhall. *Beale Black and Blue: Life and Music on Black America's Main Street*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993.

McKinnie, Michael. *City Stages: Theatre and Urban Space in a Global City*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007.

Meier, August. *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963.

Meier, August and Elliott M. Rudwick. *Along the Color Line: Explorations in the Black Experience*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976.

Menefee, Larry T. "A New Hypothesis for Dating the Decline of the Road." *Educational Theatre Journal* 30, no. 3 (October 1978): 343-56.

———————. "The Syndicate War in Little Rock." *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 46.1 (Spring 1987): 27-45.

Merrifield, Andrew. "Place and Space: A Lefebvrian Reconciliation." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series 18, no. 4. (1993): 516-31.

Miklos, Michael. "Theatre Owners' Booking Association." *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance*, edited by Cary D. Wintz and Paul Finkelman, 2 vols., 2:1170-72. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Miller, Matt. "Dirty Decade: Rap Music and the U.S. South, 1997-2007." *Southern Spaces* 10 (June 2008): http://southernspaces.org/2008/dirty-decade-rap-music-and-us-south-1997-2007. Accessed 24 January 2012.

Miller, Patrick B. "The Manly, the Moral, and the Proficient: College Sport in the New South." *Journal of Sport History* 24, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 285-316.

Miller, William D. *Memphis During the Progressive Era, 1900-1917*. Memphis: Memphis State University Press; Madison, WI: American History Research Center, 1957.

Minnix, Kathleen. *Laughter in the Amen Corner: The Life of Evangelist Sam Jones*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010.

Mohl, Raymond A. *The New City: Urban America in the Industrial Age, 1860-1920*. Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1985.

Mumford, Lewis. *The City in History*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1961.

Nasaw, David. *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements*. New York: Basic Books, 1993.

Newby, I.A. *Plain Folk in the New South: Social Change and Cultural Persistence, 1880-1915*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988.

Oberdeck, Kathryn J. "Contested Cultures of American Refinement: Theatrical Manager Sylvester Poli, His Audiences, and the Vaudeville Industry, 1890-1920." *Radical History Review* 66 (1996): 40-91.

O'Brien, Robert. "Beale Street, a Study of Ecological Succession." *Sociology and Social Research* 26 (May 1942): 430-36.

Oliver, Paul. *The Story of the Blues*. 1969. Reprint, Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998.

Parker, David B. "'Quit Your Meanness': Sam Jones's Theology for the New South." *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 77, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 711-27.

Parkinson, Robert. "Peter Staub." *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*. http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=1259. Accessed 14 December 2011.

Patrick, James. *Architecture in Tennessee, 1768-1897*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981.

Patton, William. *A Guide to Historic Downtown Memphis*. Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2010.

Peacock, James L. "Southern Space: From Sense of Place to Force Field." In *Grounded Globalism: How the U.S. South Embraces the World*, 102-33. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007.

Peterson, Bernard L. *Early Black American Playwrights and Dramatic Writers: A Biographical Directory and Catalogue of Plays, Films, and Broadcasting Strips*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990.

———. *Profiles of African American Stage Performers and Theatre People, 1816-1960*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001.

Poggi, Jack. *Theater in America: The Impact of Economic Forces, 1870-1967*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968.

Rabinowitz, Howard. *The First New South, 1865-1920*. Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1992.

———. *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Rainey, Kenneth T. "Footlights and Sidelights: The Last Years of the Memphis Theater (Leubrie's Theater)." *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 41 (1987): 62-73.

Riis, Thomas L. "Pink Morton's Theater, Black Vaudeville, and the TOBA: Recovering the History, 1910-30." In *New Perspectives on Music: Essays in Honor of Eileen Southern*, edited by Josephine Wright, 229-44. Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 1992.

Roach, Joseph. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

Robertson, David. *W.C. Handy: The Life and Times of the Man Who Made the Blues*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009.

Robinson, Angelo Rich. "Race, Place, and Space: Remaking Whiteness in the Post-Reconstruction South." *The Southern Literary Journal* 35, no. 1 (Fall 2002): 97-107.

Robinson, Jo. "Becoming More Provincial?: The Global and the Local in Theatre History." *New Theatre Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (August 2007): 229-40.

———. "Mapping Performance Culture: Locating the Spectator in Theatre History." *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film* 31, no. 1 (Summer 2004): 3-17.

Roediger, David R. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. New York: Verso, 1991.

Roper, James. "The Earliest Pictures of Memphis: Charles Lesueur's Drawings, 1828-1830." *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 25, no. 5 (1971): 5-25.

———. "Paddy Meagher, Tom Huling, and the Bell Tavern." *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 31, no. 5 (1977): 5-32.

Roy, William G. *Socializing Capital: The Rise of the Large Industrial Corporation in America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

Rushing, Wanda. *Memphis and the Paradox of Place: Globalization in the American South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2009.

Rydell, Robert W. *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Sampson, Henry T. *The Ghost Walks: A Chronological History of Blacks in Show Business, 1865-1910*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1988.

Sandoval-Strausz, A.K. "Travelers, Strangers, and Jim Crow: Law, Public Accommodations, and Civil Rights in America." *Law and History Review* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 53-94.

Savran, David. *Highbrow/Lowdown: Theater, Jazz, and the Making of the New Middle Class.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009.

Schmier, Louis, ed. *Reflections of Southern Jewry: The Letters of Charles Wessolowsky, 1878-1879*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1982.

Schmitz, C.J. *The Growth of Big Business in the United States and Western Europe, 1850-1939*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Schwartz, Michael. *Broadway and Corporate Capitalism: The Rise of the Professional-Managerial Class, 1900-1920*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Sentilles, Renée M. *Performing Menken: Adah Isaacs Menken and the Birth of American Celebrity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Sewell, George A. and Margaret L. Dwight. *Mississippi Black History Makers*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984.

Sharp, Tim. *Memphis Music: Before the Blues*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2007.

Sherman, Susanne K. *Comedies Useful: A History of the American Theatre in the South, 1775-1812*. Williamsburg, VA: Celest Press, 1998.

Shields, Rob. *Lefebvre, Love and Struggle: Spatial Dialectics*. New York: Routledge, 1999.

Sigafoos, Robert Alan. *Cotton Row to Beale Street: A Business History of Memphis*. Memphis: Memphis State University, 1979.

Silk, Michael L. "Come Downtown & Play." *Leisure Studies* 26, no. 3 (July 2007): 253-77.

———— and David L. Andrews. "Managing Memphis: Governance and Regulation in Sterile Spaces of Play." *Social Identities* 14, no. 3 (May 2008): 395-414.

Silver, Christopher. "Urban Planning in the New South." *Journal of Planning Literature* 2 (1987): 371-83.

Silver, Christopher and John V. Moeser. *The Separate City: Black Communities in the Urban South, 1940-1968*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995.

Skinner, Margaret. *Old Jim Canaan*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 1990.

Snyder, Robert W. "Vaudeville and the Transformation of Popular Culture." In *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World*, edited by William R. Taylor, 133-46. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.

Soja, Edward. *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. New York: Verso, 1989.

"Stainback Family Information." Cumberland Presbyterian Church website. http://www.cumberland.org/hfcpc/minister/Stainback.htm. Accessed 6 December 2011.

Theatre Memphis: Celebrating 75 Years. Memphis: Memphis Little Theatre Players Association, 1994.

Tindall, George B. *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1967.

Toll, Robert C. *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.

————. *On with the Show: The First Century of Show Business in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.

Tompkins, Joanne, ed. *Modern Drama* 46, no. 4 ("Geographies of the Theatre," 2003).

Trachtenberg, Alan. *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age*. Rev. ed. New York: Hill and Wang, 2007.

Tucker, David M. *Black Pastors and Leaders: Memphis, 1819-1972*. Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1975.

———————. *Lieutenant Lee of Beale Street*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1971.

Uselton, Darrel B. "Irish Immigration and Settlement in Memphis, Tennessee: 1820s-1860s." *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 50 (1996): 115-29.

Waller, Gregory A. *Main Street Amusements: Movies and Commercial Entertainment in a Southern City, 1896-1930*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995.

Watson, Charles S. *The History of Southern Drama*. Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 1997.

Wedell, Marsha. *Elite Women and the Reform Impulse in Memphis, 1875-1915*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991.

Wells-Barnett, Ida B. *The Memphis Diary of Ida B. Wells*, edited by Miriam DeCosta-Willis. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.

Werner, Randolph D. "The New South Creed and the Limits of Radicalism: Augusta, Georgia, before the 1890s." *Journal of Southern History* 67 (2001): 573-600.

Wertheim, Arthur Frank. *Vaudeville Wars: How the Keith-Albee and Orpheum Circuits Controlled the Big-Time and Its Performers*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Wiebe, Robert H. *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1966.

Wiles, David. *A Short History of Western Performance Space*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Williamson, Joel. *The Crucible of Race: Black/White Relations in the South Since Emancipation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.

Wilmeth, Don B. and Christopher Bigsby, eds. *The Cambridge History of American Theatre, Vol. II: 1870-1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Winders, Jamie and Barbara Ellen Smith. "New Pasts: Historicizing Immigration, Race, and Place in the South." *Southern Spaces*, 4 November 2010: http://www.southernspaces.org/2010/new-pasts-historicizing-immigration-race-and-place-south. Accessed 27 January 2012.

Wintz, Cary D. and Paul Finkelman, eds. *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance*. 2 vols. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Wood, Amy Louise. *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009.

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

Wrenn, Lynette Boney. *Crisis and Commission Government in Memphis: Elite Rule in a Gilded Age City*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998.

Wright, Sharon D. *Race, Power, and Political Emergence in Memphis*. New York: Garland, 2000.

Zietz, Karyl Lynn. "Orpheum Theater." In *The National Trust Guide to Great Opera Houses in America*, 78-84. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1996.

Ziter, Edward. "Staging the Geographic Imagination: Imperial Melodrama and the Domestication of the Exotic." In *Land/Scape/Theater*, edited by Una Chaudhuri and Elinor Fuchs, 189-208. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002.

Unpublished Works

Batson, Gordon Theodore. "The Theatrical History of the Lyceum Theatre of Memphis, 1910-1935." Master's thesis, University of Mississippi, 1971.

Beach, Claudia Anne. "Henry Greenwall: Theatre Manager." Ph.D. diss., Texas Tech University, 1986.

Blackwood, Byrne David. "The Theatres of J.B. McElfatrick and Sons, Architects, 1855-1922." 2 vols. Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1966.

Blank, Linda Cornish. "The Evolution of Beale Street." Master's thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, 1990.

Boyd, J. Caleb. "Southernness, not Otherness: The Community of the American South in New Southern Gothic Drama." Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 2004.

Bristow, Eugene K. "'Look Out for Saturday Night': A Social History of Professional Variety Theater in Memphis, Tennessee, 1859-1880." Ph.D. diss., State University of Iowa, 1956.

Caplinger, Christopher. "Conflict and Community: Racial Segregation in a New South City, 1860-1914." Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 2003.

Davis, Dernoral. "Against the Odds: Postbellum Growth and Development in a Southern Black Urban Community, 1865-1900." Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Binghamton, 1987.

Fain, Eda Clarke. "'Cut Loose the Corset Strings of Dull Times': Attending Carnival in Memphis, Tennessee, Through Newsprint Coverage, 1872-1901." Ph.D. diss., University of Memphis, 1999.

Faulkner, Seldon. "The New Memphis Theater of Memphis, Tennessee, from 1859 to 1880." Ph.D. diss., State University of Iowa, 1957.

Fraser, Leigh D. "A Demographic Analysis of Memphis and Shelby County, Tennessee, 1820-1972." Master's thesis, Memphis State University, 1974.

Gritter, Elizabeth. "Black Politics in the Age of Jim Crow: Memphis, 1865 to 1954." Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2010.

Herget, Danielle. "The Vaudeville Wars: William Morris, E.F. Albee, the White Rats, and the Business of Entertainment, 1898-1932." Ph.D. diss., Tufts University, 2004.

Lippman, Monroe. "The History of the Theatrical Syndicate: Its Effect Upon the Theatre in America." Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1937.

Maiden, Lewis Smith. "A Chronicle of the Theater in Nashville, Tennessee, 1876-1900." Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1955.

Melton, Gloria Brown. "Blacks in Memphis, Tennessee, 1920-1955: A Historical Study." Ph.D. diss., Washington State University, 1982.

Modey, Yao Foli. "The Struggle Over Prohibition in Memphis, Tennessee, 1880-1930." Ph.D. diss., University of Memphis, 1983.

Ouzts, James Wesley. "History of the Lyceum Theatre, Memphis, Tennessee, 1900-1910." Master's thesis, University of Mississippi, 1963.

Powell, Carolyn. "The Lyceum Theater of Memphis, 1890-1900." Master's thesis, University of Mississippi, 1951.

Reeves, Donna. "'Theaters of Resistance': African American Resistance to Segregation on the Memphis Street Railway Company Trolley Cars, 1900-1920." Master's thesis, Memphis State University, 1997.

Ritter, Charles C. "The Theatre in Memphis, Tennessee, from Its Beginning to 1859." Ph.D. diss., State University of Iowa, 1956.

Roitman, Joel M. "Race Relations in Memphis, Tennessee, 1880-1905." Master's thesis, Memphis State University, 1964.

Sheahan, Eileen. "Theatre in Memphis: Its History." Typed Manuscript. n.p., 1978.

Smith, Peter Dunbaugh. "Ashley Street Blues: Racial Uplift and the Commodification of Vernacular Performance in La Villa, Florida, 1896-1916." Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 2006.