ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: WITH SIGHT AND SOUND: BLACK PHOTOGRAPHIC AND MUSICAL EXPRESSION IN RURAL ALABAMA, 1900-1930

Andrew L. Nelson, Doctor of Philosophy, 2015

Directed By: Professor Nancy Struna, Department of American Studies and Associate Professor Psyche Williams-Forson, Department of American Studies

"With Sight and Sound" is a case study of early twentieth-century black photography and music in rural Fayette County, Alabama. At the time, rural black southerners engaged in myriad forms of creative expression and contributed to a number of national aesthetic and cultural movements. Yet, prevailing historical narratives still fail to accurately portray the breadth and diversity of black cultural production in the southern countryside. This dissertation addresses this shortcoming by examining four understudied types of cultural production—photography, pre-jazz brass band music, Dr. Watts singing, and shape-note singing. In doing so, "With Sight and Sound" argues that African Americans in Fayette County used these creative forms to craft local cultures, enhance community life, and critique the dominant ideologies that bolstered the region's racial oppression. By addressing both photography and music, this project unpacks the intermedial nature of these expressive modes, exploring how pictures and songs were

used in concert to reiterate particular themes and convey pointed counterhegemonic and race-conscious messages.

This study draws insight from sources that include photographs, songbooks, interviews, and written archival records. Its primary visual archive is a collection of over 800 photographs produced by the family of Mitch and Geneva Shackelford, who were black landholding farmers and commercial portrait photographers living in Fayette County. A range of interdisciplinary methods are used to analyze this project's myriad sources, including archival research, textual analysis, and ethnography.

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by

Andrew L. Nelson

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Advisory Committee:

Professor Nancy L. Struna, Co-Chair
Associate Professor Psyche Williams-Forson, Co-Chair
Associate Professor Saverio Giovacchini
Associate Professor Leslie S. Rowland
Associate Professor Mary Corbin Sies

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I have been fortunate to write this dissertation with the support of a number of mentors, scholars, family members, and friends. These people made this one of the most fulfilling and enjoyable experiences of my life, and I begin by recognizing and thanking them.

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I am grateful to the staff of the libraries, archives, and government institutions that housed many of the materials that informed this work. These institutions include the Birmingham Public Library's Department of Archives & History, the Birmingham Public Library's Southern History Department, the Fayette County Memorial Library, the Fayette County Tax Assessors Office, the Alabama Department of Archives and History, the Samford University Special Collection, the Alabama Historical Commission, and Emory University's Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Book Library.

A number of archivists, folklorists, and scholars aided in the research for this dissertation. Joey Brackner of the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture brought this project into being in its earliest stages by making me aware of the Shackelford Collection photographs, which he generously donated to the Birmingham Public Library decades

ago. Other scholars who shared their expertise and enthusiasm include Jim Baggett, Frances Robb, Martin Olliff, Kevin Nutt, and Chiquita Willis-Walls.

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This dissertation would not have been possible without the support and friendship of the descendants of Mitch and Geneva Shackelford, whose photographs are at the center of this work. I am grateful to Annie Shackelford, Marvin Shackelford, Alice Smith, Aline Haley, Melvin Shackelford, and El Jay Shackelford for supporting and participating in my study of the remarkable photographs created by their grandparents and great grandparents 100 years ago. I would especially like to thank Annie Shackelford, whom I first met when I rang her doorbell as a stranger four years ago. Since that day, Ms. Shackelford has shared with me her vast knowledge of Fayette County's history and culture, connected me with potential informants, joined me on visits to several of northwest Alabama's historic black churches, and served as my co-presenter in gallery talks about the Shackelford family's photographs. A number of other individuals from Fayette County and Lamar County, Alabama, also welcomed me into their communities, homes, and churches and shared stories from their family histories and

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My family has been a constant source of support and has championed this work in countless ways. Thank you very much to Harry Nelson, Judith Seitel, Ronnie Seitel, Sharon Nelson, Lara, Scott, Maggie, and Jonah Kamowski, and Bob and Janet Daniel. Most of all, I would like to thank my wife Meg for her years spent supporting this endeavor at great personal sacrifice. She has read countless drafts, listened as I rehearsed conference presentations, provided counsel on a number of decisions, and endured the schedule and stresses that accompany the academic lifestyle. All of this she has done while excelling at her own professional and personal pursuits and inspiring me to try to match her skill as a writer and creative thinker. I would also like to thank my daughter Harper, who on several occasions used crayon and colored pencil to make uninvited yet enlightening edits to hard copy drafts of this dissertation that she found on my desk. More than anything, I am grateful to Meg and Harper for the unending joy that they bring to my life, and I dedicate this dissertation to the two of them.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction: Creating Culture with Sight and Sound

In the first decades of the twentieth century, black people throughout the United States were engaged in numerous forms of cultural production. They were, to name a few, forming brass bands, making quilts, dancing, writing poetry, and posing for photographs.[1] These and countless other types of creative expression forged individual and group identities and gave shape to local and national black cultural life. This was happening during an era when the expansion of the railroad and advances in technology connected people across the nation to international markets and a burgeoning mass culture. Writing at the time, Walter Benjamin termed it the "age of mechanical reproduction," highlighting the fact that a single picture, story, or song could be reproduced and disseminated, reaching the masses as never before.[2] In addition, Americans had unprecedented access to consumer products—from clothes to cameras to musical instruments—to be used in their everyday creative acts.

These evolutions in transportation and technology had noteworthy effects on the ways black Americans experienced and produced culture. More than ever before, they could see and hear how their race was being represented in various products and performances that constituted American popular culture. The scientific racism of the era

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[1] The term *cultural production* is used broadly in this dissertation to apply to the array of human expressions—both in terms of performance and the creation of products—that shape and define a given culture. This approach is based on the writings of scholars like Pierre Bourdieu and Michel de Certeau, who argue that culture is produced on the ground by the behaviors and expressions of people living within a specific social, political, and economic structure. See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, trans. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), and Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

[2] Benjamin argued that the reproduction of images, films, and sound recordings stripped works of art of their "aura" or their uniqueness to a specific cultural tradition and presence in a particular location. By enabling creative products to travel and exist in multiple places at once, mechanical production activated them as potential tools for social change. See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. and trans. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 217-215.

and the oppression it sought to justify were undergirded by a far-reaching multimedial discourse aimed at denigrating and dehumanizing the black race. Black people in all corners of the nation were exposed to an unending array of racist illustrations, advertisements, publications, photographs, songs, and theatrical performances meant to deride and humiliate them.[3]

In this context, black cultural production became an increasingly valuable avenue for positive self-definition and refuting racism. African Americans incorporated new technologies and cultural products into their expressive acts to create a counternarrative capable of subverting dominant discourses of white supremacy and black inferiority. They did so through cultural production, using the clothes they wore, the speeches they gave, the words they wrote, the art they made, and the songs they sang.[4] It was a national cultural phenomenon.[5] More than ever before, African Americans in all regions of the United States were able to communicate with and influence one another with their cultural production. They used expressive culture to create a national counterhegemonic

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[3] For foundational analyses of this corpus of ephemera and performances see James H. Dorman, "Shaping the Popular Image of Post-Reconstruction Blacks: The 'Coon Song' Phenomenon of the Gilded Age," *American Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (1988): 450-471; Kenneth Goings, *Mammy and Uncle Mose: Black Collectibles and American Stereotyping* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Stanley Lemons, "Black Stereotypes as Reflected in Popular Culture, 1880-1920," *American Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (1977): 102-116; Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); and Psyche Williams-Forson, *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs: Black Women Food and Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

[4] For an overview of multiple black expressive forms in the United States that spans the antebellum era to the end of World War II, see Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture From its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

[5] This dissertation recognizes the fact that cultural acts of racial self-definition and anti-racism were an international phenomenon carried out by members of the African diaspora throughout the world. In an effort to keep the scope of this dissertation manageable, this study will address this black cultural movement only in the United States. On international representations of members of the African diaspora see Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). Among others, Isabel Cserno likewise addresses this topic in her dissertation "Race and Mass Consumption in Consumer Culture: National Trademark Advertising Campaigns in the United States and Germany, 1890-1933" (doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland, 2008).

movement held together not only by shared experiences and goals, but also by shared performances, creations, and styles.[6]

"With Sight and Sound" documents how black people in a rural region of Alabama—day laborers, sharecroppers, and landholding farmers—participated in this national practice of African American cultural production, self-definition, and counterhegemonic subversion. It does so with a case study of black photographic and musical production in and around Fayette County, Alabama, a rural area located in the state's northwestern hill country. Focusing on the years between 1900 and 1930, "With Sight and Sound" details the impact of music and photography on local African American life amidst the systematic and violent racial oppression that characterized the Jim Crow South.

This dissertation argues that photography and music were interrelated cultural forms that many African Americans in Fayette County called upon to construct vibrant and energetic communities, craft a discernible local black culture, and participate in American culture writ large. Black people in the region used pictures and melodies to construct racial and gender identities, reflect socioeconomic status, and visually record particular skills and talents. Like African Americans across the nation, those in Fayette

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[6] Use of the term *counterhegemonic* in these pages in based on T. J. Jackson Lears's engagement with the work of Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci coined the term *hegemony* and defined it as that facet of one group's oppression over another that is ideological and cultural. A hegemonic relationship occurs when the oppressed consent to their own domination by buying into the ideology of their inferiority and in turn adopting the values, practices, and products of their oppressors. However, Lears points out that Gramsci also argued that subaltern communities often develop a "spontaneous philosophy," a unique worldview shaped by their specific histories and circumstances. This spontaneous philosophy is capable of transcending lines of socio-economic class to bring together people with shared experiences, struggles, and goals. Once such a spontaneous philosophy is developed, the oppressed group may still participate in the dominant culture, but they adapt the varying facets of this culture to suit their specific ideologies, using their cultural practices to critique the very foundations of their oppression. In turn, a counterhegemonic movement comes into being. See Antonio Gramsci, "Hegemony, Relations of Force, Historical Bloc," in *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 189-221, and T. J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *American Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (1985): 570-572.

County implemented these creative forms in exhibitions of fluency with white American culture and demonstrations of refinement, learnedness, and civic readiness. In turn, seemingly mundane acts like playing brass instruments, singing sacred songs, and striking specific poses in photographic portraits were coded counterhegemonic strategies. "With Sight and Sound" will detail how African Americans in Fayette County used these forms of cultural production to safely critique the ideologies that upheld their subjugation and to participate in American culture at a time when they were denied the rights of American citizenship.

A collection of early twentieth-century photographs and three musical genres are this dissertation's focus of study. The majority of the photographs analyzed in these pages were produced by Mitch and Geneva Shackelford and their adult children. The Shackelfords were wealthy black farmers, artists, and commercial photographers who lived in the countryside outside of the Fayette County township of Covin.[7] Operating their two-story farmhouse as a photo studio and boarding house, the Shackelfords and their adult children made portraits for local residents and visiting travelers, black and white.[8] Today, the 883 glass plate negatives produced by the Shackelford family are housed at the Birmingham Public Library's Department of Archives & Manuscripts in a

[7] The Shackelford family's work as commercial photographers is preserved in local Fayette County lore. In interviews for this project, descendants of the Shackelford family and residents who grew up near the Shackelford home recall the family's photographic enterprises. Albert Abrams, interview by author, September 15, 2011, and Warda Prewitt, interview by author, March 21, 2012. In 1913, the Shackelfords were in the top 15 percent of all landholding households in Fayette County in terms of their total taxable wealth and property. Fayette County Tax Book 1913, page 199. Fayette County Courthouse, Fayette, Alabama.

[8] The Alabama Historic Inventory's record of the Shackelford house includes the following note: "This house was located on the main road from Fayette to Columbus and used as a rest stop. Meals were served and a room was reserved for travelers for overnight stops." Mitch Shackelford House, Alabama Historic Inventory, Fayette County, Alabama, House No. 40, recorded April 1979.

collection titled *Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs* (the Shackelford Collection).[9]

As this dissertation will describe, the Shackelfords, who staged and framed the photographs, operated the camera, and developed the images, were artisans fluent in the era's aesthetics of American portraiture. The local and visiting African Americans they photographed were likewise carrying out a meaningful form of creative expression. "With Sight and Sound" examines both the Shackelford family's work as photographers and the manner in which posing for a photograph could be a form of cultural expression in and of itself, a still performance meant to communicate specific ideas and themes.

Musically, this dissertation elucidates the impact of an unnamed black brass band and two types of sacred singing that were widely practiced in northwest Alabama's black communities—Dr. Watts singing and shape-note singing.[10] Also based in Covin, this

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[9] The Shackelford family's glass plate negatives were donated to the Birmingham Public Library in 1986 by Joey Brackner, a folklorist who is now Executive Director of the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture. Brackner purchased the 883 negatives at a flea market in Bessemer, Alabama. It remains unclear how the Shackelford family negatives made it from the Shackelfords' vacant family home in Fayette County to a flea market outside of Birmingham. In the late 1980s, a Birmingham photographer named Melissa Springer used the Shackelfords' glass negatives to develop a print of each image, and these photographs were made available for view at the Birmingham Public Library Archives. Unless otherwise indicated, the reproductions of the Shackelford photographs found in this dissertation are digital scans of Springer's prints.

[10] Named for the eighteenth-century English theologian and hymn writer Isaac Watts, Dr. Watts singing is an African American style of sacred call-and-response singing in which a deacon or other song leader sings or "lines out" a couplet that is then sung by the congregation. Enslaved Africans first learned this song style in the antebellum era. In the early twentieth century, Dr. Watts singing continued to be practiced in black communities throughout the South. For a brief yet rich introductory history of the Dr. Watts tradition, see Joyce Cauthen, "Hark the Doleful Sound: The Old Way of Singing in the Original Sipsey River Primitive Baptist Association," in *Benjamin Lloyd's Hymn Book: A Primitive Baptist Song Tradition*, ed. Joyce Cauthen (Montgomery: Alabama Folklife Association, 1999). Shape-note singing is a type of social singing in which groups sing hymns from songbooks that employ a simplified form of musical notation—"shaped notes"—intended to make sight-reading accessible to those who lack formal musical training. In the early twentieth century, shape-note singing was immensely popular throughout the southern states, but primarily among the region's white population. In pockets of the South, including northwest Alabama, there was a rich black shape-note tradition that served as a crucial component of everyday cultural and social life. For a brief introductory history of shape-note singing, see James R. Goff Jr., "Gospel Music in the Nineteenth Century" and "Shape Notes and a Musical Tradition" in *Close Harmony: A History of Southern Gospel* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 20-25 and 35-39. Jerrilyn McGregory offers a substantive overview of the black shape-note tradition in the Wiregrass region of southeast Alabama. See

brass band played marching bands standards, popular American songs, and pre-jazz melodies with African American roots. Throughout northwest Alabama, Dr. Watts singing and shape-note singing were significant aspects of black religious, civic, and social life.

This study engages with various bodies of scholarship in multiple disciplines. There is a vast and foundational literature documenting rural black culture and cultural production in the early twentieth-century South.[11] What is needed, however, is more in-depth examination of the variegated forms of cultural production that took place in the region's agricultural countryside. Fayette County's African Americans participated in an array of creative activities. They made quilts, played blues guitar, prepared regionally specific foods, marched in parades, and joined fraternal orders. Such expressive deeds were carried out in black communities across Alabama and throughout the rural South and have been well documented in scholarly literature.[12] A primary motivation for this

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Jerrilyn McGregory,"'On the Way to Glory': The Shape-Note Tradition," in *Downhome Gospel: African American Spiritual Activism in Wiregrass Country* (Oxford: University of Mississippi Press, 2010), 74-99.

[11] Edited by Douglas Hurt, the collection of essays *African American Life in the Rural South, 1900-1950* outlines rural black life in the first half of the twentieth century and includes essays on work, religion, and race relations. Of particular interest in Hurt's volume is Valerie Grim's article "African American Rural Culture, 1900-1950," which describes rural black home life, club life, celebrations, and leisure activities**.** See Douglas Hurt, ed. *African American Life in the Rural South, 1900-1950* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003). Other book-length works that largely address rural African American life are Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), and Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Knopf, 1998). In terms of black cultural production in the South, two studies warrant mention. The first is Tera Hunter's *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*. Examining the everyday lives of black women in Atlanta, Hunter reveals how leisure practices like forming social clubs, strolling the city streets on a Saturday night, and dancing operated as class-specific mechanisms for racial uplift and escape amidst Jim Crow society. Likewise, Robin D. G. Kelley unpacks ways that members of the black working class used subtle and coded actions like working slowly, making noise on city buses, and dressing in zoot suits as modes of resisting the oppression of white supremacy. See Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), and Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).

[12] In regard to quilting, studies of women quilters in the Gee's Bend community of Wilcox County, Alabama, are of particular note. See William Arnett, Alvia Wardlaw, and Jane Livingston, eds., *Gee's Bend: The Women and their Quilts* (Atlanta: Tinwood Books, 2002), and Victoria F. Phillips,

dissertation's focus on rural black photography, brass band music, and sacred singing is to supplement the cultural histories of Alabama and the South. The goal is to illuminate a few more stars in the constellation of the state and the region's rural black creative activities to offer a more complete and complex picture of the region's cultural realities.

A number of scholars have conducted pathbreaking research on the cultural significance of early twentieth-century African American photography.[13] More work needs to be done, however, to unpack the artistic process and output of everyday black photographers in the South to understand the effect that these artisans could have on their surrounding communities.[14] This account of the Shackelford family's photography and

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"Commodification, Intellectual Property and the Quilters of Gee's Bend," *American University Journal of Gender, Social Policy, and the Law* 15 (2007): 359-377. On blues guitar playing, two works that effectively place the significance of this idiom in the historical context of everyday life in the rural South are Paul Oliver, *The Story of the Blues* (Boston: Northeastern Press, 1998), and Jeff Todd Titon, *Early Downhome Blues: A Musical and Cultural Analysis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977). Also of note is Kevin Nutt's biographical essay about Ed Bell, Alabama's most widely recorded blues guitar player of the 1920s. See Kevin Nutt, "Butler County Blues," *Tributaries: Journal of the Alabama Folklife Association* 5 (2002): 49-61. For studies of southern black foodways see Williams-Forson, *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs*, and Kelsey Scouten Bates, "Comfort in a Decidedly Uncomfortable Time: Hunger, Collective Memory, and the Meaning of Soul Food in Gee's Bend, Alabama," *Food and Foodways* 20, no. 1 (2012): 53-75. On parading in the South, see W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "Whispering Consolation to Generations Unborn: Black Memory in the Era of Jim Crow," in *Warm Ashes: Issues in Southern History at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Winfred B. Moore, Jr., Kyle S. Sinisi, and David H. White Jr., 341-56 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), and Thavolia Glymph, "'Liberty Dearly Bought': The Making of Civil War Memory in Afro-American Communities in the South," in *Time Longer Than Rope: A Century of African American Activism, 1850-1950*, ed. Charles M. Payne and Adam Green, 111-39 (New York: New York University Press, 2003). For a study of rural fraternal orders, see John M. Giggie, "Fraternal Orders, Disfranchisement, and the Institutional Growth of Black Religion," in *After Redemption: Jim Crow and the Transformation of African American Religion in the Delta, 1875-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 59-95.

[13] See Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W. E. B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith, eds., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Jennifer Way, "Reterritorialization and *Whispers from the Walls*," *Journal of Material Culture* 9 (2004): 219-36; *Deborah* Willis, ed., *Picturing Us: African American Identity in Photography* (New York: New Press, 1994); and Deborah Willis, *Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers 1840 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000).

[14] A handful of studies of early twentieth-century southern black photographers warrant mention here, as they constitute a scholarly corpus that this study hopes to further enrich. Deborah Willis offers accounts of the lives and work of several photographers who operated in southern cities in the early twentieth century. See Willis, *Reflections in Black*, 35-81. Though it provides limited historical information and analysis, another noteworthy source is Thomas L. Johnson and Phillip C. Dunn's published collection of portraits by Richard Samuel Roberts, who worked in Columbia, South Carolina, in the 1920s and 1930s. See, Thomas

the photographic performances of the African Americans they photographed tells such a story in the context of one of the South's more sparsely populated rural areas.

Black brass bands peppered the southern countryside in the early twentieth century, yet their impact on local life remains understudied.[15] The same is true of Dr. Watts singing and shape-note singing. There is rich ethnomusicological work on the origins and practice of Dr. Watts singing yet room for research that explores the social and cultural ramifications of this vocal tradition.[16] Shape-note singing was decidedly less popular among black southerners than Dr. Watts singing, but there were subregions where this song style was a vital component of black recreational and community life. Of these areas, shape-note singing in the Wiregrass region of southeast Alabama is the most widely documented.[17] There is less scholarly work, however, on the shape-note customs of African Americans who lived in eastern Mississippi and northwest Alabama (including

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L. Johnson and Phillip C. Dunn, eds., *A True Likeness: The Black South of Richard Samuel Roberts* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1986). Not set in the southeast but relevant to this study is Jennifer Hildebrand's cultural analysis of photographer John Johnson's portraits of African Americans in and around Lincoln, Nebraska, in the early twentieth century. See Jennifer Hildebrand, "The New Negro Movement in Lincoln, Nebraska," *Nebraska History* 91 (2010): 166-189.

[15] Though most published histories of jazz address the pre-jazz African American brass band tradition of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there is a surprising dearth of studies dedicated solely to the subject. Detailed accounts of pre-jazz brass music can be found in Jacqui Malone, *Steppin' on the Blues* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 127-146; William Schafer, *Brass Bands and New Orleans Jazz* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977); and Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 257-259. Two particular works informed this dissertation's analysis of brass band music in the rural South. The first is Schafer's *Brass Bands and New Orleans Jazz*. The second comes from folkorist Frederic Ramsey, who in the 1950s conducted the most in-depth research to date of African American bands in the rural South. In addition to making field recordings of rural bands, Ramsey interviewed older black brass musicians in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, allowing him to trace the history of this musical tradition back to the 1860s. See Ramsey's essay "Country Brass Bands" in his collection of field recordings *Music from the South, Vol. 1: Country Brass Bands*, Folkways Records FA 2650, 1955.

[16] For a book-length examination of Dr. Watts singing, see William T. Dargan, *Lining out the Word: Dr. Watts Hymn Singing in the Music of Black Americans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). An exploration of the community-building capabilities of Dr. Watts singing can be found in Bernice Johnson Reagon, "The Lined Hymn as a Song of Freedom," *Black Music Research Bulletin* 12, no. 1 (1990): 4-7.

[17] On shape-note singing in Alabama's Wiregrass region, see McGregory, "'On the Way to Glory'"; John Wesley Work III, "Plantation Meistersinger," *Musical Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (1941): 97-106; and Joe Dan Boyd, *Judge Jackson and the Colored Sacred Harp* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005).

Fayette County), where shape-note singing thrived well into the second half of the twentieth century.[18]

At times, the Shackelford family photographed singings, concerts, and other musical gatherings in and around Fayette County. Individuals also often posed for the Shackelford photographers displaying musical instruments or songbooks. In turn, an additional area of focus for this dissertation is the intermediality of photography and music in Fayette County, the relationship between these expressive modes and the processes by which black people in the region wove them together to construct and reiterate race-conscious themes.[19]

In highlighting photographs of musicians and musical events, "With Sight and Sound" brings to light a widespread photo-musical custom whose import remains largely unrecognized in literature on early twentieth-century popular music. As this dissertation will detail, in the first decades of the twentieth century, people throughout the world posed for photographs displaying instruments and other musical signifiers. In scholarly works about southern black music, and southern music writ large, photographs of

[18] The best available research on black shape-note singing in western Alabama and eastern Mississippi can be found in the liner notes to field recordings of shape-note singers made in the 1990s. See Steve Grauberger, *Traditional Musics of Alabama, Volume 2: African American Seven Shapenote Singing*, Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, 2002; and Chiquita Willis-Walls, *Songs of Faith: African American Shape Note Singing from the Deep South*, Southern Culture Recordings STM3001, 1999.

[19] My use of the term *intermediality* comes from the work of Jacques Ranciere. Ranciere argues that, by the late nineteenth century, Western cultures had experienced a widespread proliferation of cultural texts in varying mediums that included images, literature, song, theater, and others. Because of this saturation of multimedial cultural production, a single text is always being influenced by texts in other mediums, both in terms of its production by a creator and its reception by an audience. Ranciere asserts that cultural representations are therefore formed not by one particular text, such as a song or photograph, but by the *relationship* among texts and the ways that they work in concert to make meaning. This dissertation uses Ranciere's theoretical foundation to highlight ways that African American photography and music in Fayette County shaped one another and were used in tandem to convey pointed messages. See Jacques Ranciere, *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2007), 3-8.

musicians most often serve as illustrations rather than objects of study.[20] There is extant literature dedicated to photographs and other images of southern black musicians, but such works tend to either forgo in-depth analysis or overlook the agency of those pictured.[21] This dissertation explores this photo-musical practice in Fayette County and treats the act of posing for a photograph as a meaningful and overlooked mode of musical performance.

To comprehend these varying visual and musical phenomena, a range of source material and research methodologies were utilized. Written records like state and federal government documents, newspaper articles, tax digests, deeds, maps, self-published genealogies, and unpublished family and church histories situate the photographic and musical performances discussed in this dissertation in their appropriate historical context.

In addition, interviews were conducted with black men and women who grew up in Fayette County or neighboring Lamar County.[22] Most of these informants were one or two generations removed from the creative activities inquired about in the interviews, while others were young children in the 1920s or 1930s. Interview questions were

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[20] Though by no means photographic studies, a number of books on southern music were the inspiration for this project simply because they included so many photographs and brought to my attention the frequency with which southerners posed for pictures with musical instruments in the early twentieth century. Among these are Oliver, *The Story of the Blues*, and Cecilia Conway, *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia: A Study in Folk Traditions* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995).

[21] Richard Carlin and Bob Carlin offer a book-length compilation of early twentieth-century photographs of black and white southern musicians. The authors provide little analysis of the photographs themselves, but this collection is a great starting place for understanding the ubiquity of this photo-musical practice in the South. See Richard Carlin and Bob Carlin, *Southern Exposure: The Story of Southern Music in Pictures and Words* (New York: Billboard Books, 2000). In addition, Eileen Southern and Josephine Wright compiled a collection of hundreds of historical engravings, drawings, paintings, photographs and other images depicting African American musicians. See Eileen Southern and Josephine Wright, *Images: Iconography of Music in African-American Culture, 1770s-1920s* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000). Also of note is Leo Mazow, ed., *Picturing the Banjo* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2005).

[22] In the earliest stages of my research for this project, I met and was befriended by Annie Shackelford, who is the great granddaughter of Mitch and Geneva Shackelford. Ms. Shackelford is well known in Fayette County and introduced me to many of this dissertation's informants.

dedicated to the creative practices, photographers, or musicians studied in these pages, and informants' names have been changed in order to preserve their anonymity. I talked with experienced shape-note singers, people who remembered the brass band, and grandchildren and great grandchildren of the Shackelford family photographers. The Shackelford family's descendants welcomed me to walk through the family's early twentieth-century farmhouse, which has been vacant for decades. There I visited the darkroom where the Shackelfords developed their photographs and located objects from the era that became essential sources, including sheet music, songbooks, real photo postcards, and brass instruments.

This dissertation's informants provided a perspective from within Fayette County's black community and often offered pieces of local lore that have never been written down. Since a primary goal of this study is to access facets of southern black history that have remained hidden or overlooked by the prevailing historical record, hearing from individuals within the community enabled invaluable access to local knowledge. These interviews also came with limitations and potential pitfalls, and there were obvious and understandable boundaries to what informants were willing to share. This is true for any interviewer/informant relationship, but in this case I was coming to the informants as an outsider. Though being a native Alabamian and living in the state offered some measure of common ground, I was a white man from Birmingham interviewing black people in rural areas. I was coming to the informants from a position of power on multiple fronts, including race, often gender, and often class.

Like so many southern states, in Alabama there is a centuries-old legacy of both seemingly and genuinely well-meaning whites taking advantage of blacks. I remained

mindful of the presence of this history and explored paths to ensure that I was sharing and disseminating as well as gathering information. Whenever possible, I shared with my informants details about Fayette County's African American history that I uncovered from archival materials and other sources. In addition, I partnered with the Birmingham Public Library and descendants of the Shackelford family photographers to curate an exhibition of forty of the Shackelford family's photographs that highlights early twentieth-century African American life in and around Fayette County. Titled *Both Sides of the Lens: Photographs by the Shackelford Family, Fayette County, Alabama, 1900-1935*, this exhibition continues to travel to museums and libraries throughout the southeast. In its earliest days, *Both Sides of the Lens* was shown at the Fayette County Museum of Art, making this exhibition of the region's black history available to local audiences.

During interviews for this dissertation, informants often seemed comfortable and pleased that someone was interested in the history of their community. However, it was also clear that there was only so much of their local and family lore that they were willing to share with a white outsider holding a tape recorder. In other instances, like members of all communities, informants seemed committed to telling a specific, positive version of the history of their region. In particular, issues regarding race relations as well as class stratification and everyday discord within the black community were glossed over or left out.

A more imposing bias to contend with was my own. My motivations for this project are political, intellectual, and emotional. I have viewed this dissertation from its earliest stages as an opportunity to enrich the history of my home state by recovering the

creative nuances of its rural African American history. Over the course of my research, I also developed a deeply held respect and affection for the people I met in and around Fayette County, as well as those who lived there 100 years ago. I have spent weeks in Fayette County not only interviewing people, but also conducting research at the courthouse and library, visiting churches and cemeteries, and eating at local restaurants. I remain an outsider but have also been welcomed in, in to the town, in to the community, and in to people's homes and churches. I developed a genuine rapport with many of the people I met and interviewed, and in some cases we formed lasting friendships.

In the writing of these pages, then, there had to be an accounting for this closeness and its impact on editorial decisions, on what gets put in and left out. Rather than push my emotional attachments to the side, I opted instead to embrace these feelings, allowing them to serve as motivation. At the end of the day, enhancing the historical record and expressing respect and affinity for people of the past and present are intertwined goals met by the same means—honest historical analysis. In turn, I aim to honor my friends, the history of my state and region, and the lives of people of the past by offering a frank and nuanced account of these early twentieth-century creative acts and those who carried them out.[23] To do so, I incorporate data from a range of materials while also reading between the lines, considering what was unspoken, unwritten, and unseen in the interviews, documents, and pictures that serve as this dissertation's sources.

Photographs, sheet music covers, postcards, and other illustrated ephemera were essential sources for this project. The analysis of such images began with a

[23] Virginia R. Domínguez's calling for a "politics of love" served as an inspiration and guiding framework for this approach, which I came to only after months of reflection and early drafts that missed the mark. See Virginia R. Domínguez, "For a Politics of Love and Rescue," *Cultural Anthropology* 15, no. 3 (2000): 361-393.

straightforward concept foundational to visual culture studies—all images convey socially contextualized semiotic meaning.[24] A number of methodological approaches were used to comprehend the coded messages communicated by this dissertation's visual sources. The first was to root the images in their local and historical context using primary and secondary source material, which unlocked the meaning of these images by uncovering some of hegemonic and counterhegemonic ideologies at play in Fayette County and throughout the United States.

When reading photographs, which make up the bulk of the images analyzed in this dissertation, the goal was to interpret the personal and cultural expressions conveyed by both the performances of those pictured and the artistic decisions made by the photographers. To arrive at these understandings, photographs taken from throughout the South and throughout the United States were put in conversation with one another to identify patterns, similarities, and differences. This is particularly true for the Shackelford family portraits, which are contrasted with illustrated caricatures and analyzed alongside other portraits of black and white Americans.[25]

As a result, "With Sight and Sound" identifies a rhetoric of early twentieth-century American photography that lays bare the meanings conveyed in the Shackelford family's portraits and other portraits of African Americans.[26] Written histories of American and European portraiture were foundational to understanding this visual

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[24] Here, the work of Roland Barthes is particularly useful. Building on linguistic theorist Ferdinand de Saussure's system of structuralism, Barthes argued that all cultural products produce ideological meaning that is rendered understandable by the audience's knowledge of prevailing cultural signifiers and signs. See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).

[25] In taking such an approach, I am drawing from the work of historian of photography Shawn Michelle Smith, who terms this a "critically comparative interpretive methodology." See Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*, 2-3.

[26] Here again, Barthes provides a useful methodological framework. See Roland Barthes, "The Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (Hill and Wang: 1977).

language.[27] Though these scholarly works supplied useful information about photographic methods and trends, they rarely cataloged or listed the stock poses that appear time and again in turn-of-the-century American portraits. In turn, the visual analysis in these pages is built on the examination of hundreds of late nineteenth- and the early twentieth-century portraits found in archives, antique shops, online, and in books.[28] Over time a number of stock poses, props, and sets rose to the surface, making it possible to describe and identify this visual language and comprehend its use by black people across the nation.

To understand how posing for a photograph served as a means of creating a local culture and shaping racial identities, "With Sight and Sound" takes a performance approach to photographic portraiture. The idea here is that the lived act of posing for a portrait is a cultural moment that is in and of itself worthy of inquiry, regardless of the outcome of the developed photographic print. The work of scholars who detail the ways in which culture is produced on the ground by everyday individuals offers a framework for understanding the performative aspects of early twentieth-century portraiture.[29] At issue is what Michel De Certeau calls "enunciations" or "ways of operating"—everyday

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[27] Of particular note are Audrey Linkman, *The Victorians: Photographic Portraits* (London: Tauris Parke Books, 1993); Miles Orvell, "Presenting the Self," in *American Photography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 19-38; Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989); Shawn Michelle Smith, *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); and Rosamond B. Vaule, *As We Were: American Photographic Postcards, 1905-1900* (Boston: David R. Godine, 2004).

[28] Books dedicated to Victorian fashion are a valuable resource for viewing portraits of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See Allison Gernsheim, *Victorian and Edwardian Fashion: A Photographic Survey* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1982), and Kristina Harris, *Victorian Fashion in America: 264 Vintage Photographs* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003). For early twentieth-century portraits of African Americans, Emory University's Robert Langmuir African American Collection is a particularly robust archive that has only recently been made available to the public.

[29] Of particular note are De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*; Dwight Conquergood, "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research," *The Drama Review* 46, no. 2 (2002): 145-156; and Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

human activities ranging from walking to singing to cooking. Such activities are the bricks and mortar of culture itself, the tools by which people create culture in the context of a given social, economic, and political structure.[30] This dissertation addresses posing for a portrait as a significant moment of cultural production and racial self-definition implemented by many African Americans in and around Fayette County.

The concerts of the brass band and the singing of Dr. Watts and shape-note hymns are likewise treated as performances that bring a local culture and racial identities into being. Analyzing Fayette County's black photographic and musical practices alongside one another allows for the identification of a series of repeated themes and messages and a discernible movement in which cultural production was used as a vehicle for racial advancement and the critique of white supremacy. None of these artistic endeavors—the Shackelfords' photographs, the brass band's music, and sacred song—existed in a vacuum. A dissertation exploring only one of them, sequestering it in cultural isolation, would miss the point and fail to truly capture their comprehensive cultural impact, which is made possible by the relationship among them.

As a unit of analysis, Fayette County is admittedly a construct. To be sure, many of the photographic and musical performances detailed in the chapters that follow occurred within the county limits. Moreover, special attention is paid to the area of the county known as Covin because the Shackelford family photographers lived there and the brass band was based there. However, these pages will illustrate how these photographic and musical performances were regional phenomena. The Shackelford family's photographs document African American life throughout northwest Alabama, as they

[30] De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xi-xxiv.

often traveled to other communities to take pictures.[31] Likewise, the brass band played at events in neighboring counties, and Dr. Watts singing and shape-note singing were foundational aspects of cultural and social life across the region.[32] Focusing on Fayette County therefore offers an opportunity to study the place where many of these performances occurred while also accounting for the fact that these were regional cultural practices.

Though the stories of African American life in Fayette County will be told through the images and performances in the chapters that follow, some background is in order to set the stage. Located in Alabama's Hill Country subregion, Fayette County is a rugged, upcountry territory made up of rolling hills, piney woods, and a bevy of creeks and streams flowing from the Sipsey and Luxapalila Rivers (Map 1). At the turn of the twentieth century, the northern portion of the county was craggy and mountainous, while its southern territory was flatter, more fecund, and full of farmlands.[33] In part because its soil lacked the fertility of other regions of Alabama, such as the Tennessee Valley to its north and the Black Belt to its south, Fayette County was home to one of the state's sparsest populations and smallest black populations.[34]

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[31] Here, the photographs themselves tell the story. In the Shackelford Collection photographs, numerous church groups, schools groups, and families appear in front of varying churches, schools, and houses, and some of these have been identified as being in neighboring Lamar County.

[32] In his memoir, Jasper Rastus Nall, the father of the brass band's founder and cornet player James Nall, states that the band "traveled part of the time." Likewise, in an interview Warda Prewitt, who was born and raised in Covin, remembered the band playing events in neighboring Lamar County. Jasper Rastus Nall, *Freeborn Slave: Diary of a Black Man in the South* (Birmingham, AL: Crane Hill Publishers, 1996), 99, and Warda Prewitt, interview by author, March 21, 2012.

[33] *The Birmingham News*, May 10, 1936.

[34] In 1900, only six of Alabama's sixty-six counties had overall populations smaller than Fayette County's 14,132 inhabitants. That same year, Fayette County's 1,701 black residents made up only 12 percent of the county's overall population. In only ten Alabama counties did black people make up a lower percentage of the total population than Fayette County. Historical Census Browser, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, University of Virginia, http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu, accessed October 19, 2013 (hereafter cited as Historical Census Browser). See *Note on U.S. Census Records and Other Documents Accessed Through Online Databases*, appendix.

Map 1. Alabama's Tennessee Valley, Hill Country, and Black Belt subregions in 1903. Fayette County is located in the western portion of the Hill Country subregion. Map created by the author.

The construction of a train depot in the county seat of Fayette established it as Fayette County's largest town and economic and social center. Fayette bustled with ginneries, cotton warehouses, general stores, saloons, churches, and hotels.[35] The railroad also brought to Fayette County ideas, technology, images, songs, and consumer products from the outside world. Between the local store and the Sears, Roebuck, and Company catalog, people in Fayette County had access to a range of contemporary goods, from clothes to decorative household items to musical instruments to cameras.[36] In turn, the tracks of the Southern Railway linked this rural region to the United States' developing national marketplace and mass culture, turning farmers into consumers.

The town of Fayette may have been the nexus of economic life in the region, but the vast majority of Fayette County's residents lived out in the country, cobbling together a living as hardscrabble farmers and laborers, and traveling to town to sell crops, buy supplies, or socialize.[37] Fayette County's countryside was not residentially segregated, and its black and white families lived in log cabins, wooden shacks, and clapboard farmhouses interspersed throughout the areas fields, hills, and hollows.[38]

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[35] For a history of the town of Fayette, see Herbert M. Newell and Jeanie Patterson Newell, eds., *History of Fayette County Alabama* (Fayette, AL: Newell Offset Printing, 1960), 17-27.

[36] On the proliferation of national consumer culture in the southern countryside, see Grace Elizabeth Hale, "Bounding Consumption: 'For Colored' and 'For White,'" in *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Book, 1999), 121-198. For a discussion of turn-of-the-century consumer practices in Fayette County that includes residents' frequent use of mail order, see Sharlene McGee Stough, *Winding Trails* (Fayette, AL: *Fayette County Broadcaster*, n.d.), 140. A local historian in Fayette County, between 1977 and 1982 Stough published monthly articles on the county's history in a *Fayette County Broadcaster* newspaper column entitled *Winding Trails*. Stough's newspaper columns have been compiled and locally published and distributed in the volume *Winding Trails*, which is a useful source for Fayette County history.

[37] According to the U.S. census, there were 2,673 total households in Fayette County in 1900. Of these, only 93 (3 percent) were located in the Fayette town limits. 1900 United States Census, Population Schedule, Fayette County, Alabama, Fayette Town Precinct, accessed via www.ancestry.com July 12, 2013. See *Note on U.S. Census Records and Other Documents Accessed Through Online Databases*, appendix.

[38] Though census records are not maps, they are geographic in nature as they indicate the order in which census enumerators visited local homes. Black and white households are consistently interspersed among one another in the pages of the Fayette County population schedule. 1900 United States Census, Population Schedule, Fayette County, Alabama, accessed via www.ancestry.com July 12, 2013.

Like their white counterparts, in 1900 most of Fayette County's black residents were farmers who grew cotton, as well as corn, wheat and other foodstuffs (Table 1).[39] The majority of these black farming families were sharecroppers or tenant farmers working the land of white farm owners (Table 2).[40] Like those across the South, Fayette County's sharecroppers and tenant farmers faced hardships that included abject poverty, unending debt, and the possibility of being tied to a particular landowner year after year.[41] Due in part to the poor quality of soil and corresponding low cost of land, more black people in Fayette County owned land than in many other Alabama counties.[42] However, in places like Fayette County, where acreage was relatively affordable, land ownership in and of itself was not an indication of wealth or comfort. Throughout the South, many black and white farmers who owned small amounts of acreage continued to find themselves in debt, only to a local merchant rather than a landowner.[43]

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[39] For a brief description of Fayette County farming practices, see Stough, *Winding Trails*, 194. Cotton, corn, and vegetables are also mentioned as the county's primary crops in *The Birmingham News*, May 10, 1936.

[40] A local source supports the numbers provided by the U.S. census in Table 2. In 1914, Landon Stewart, the chair of Fayette County's Colored School Board, wrote a letter to James Sibley, Alabama's State Supervisor of Rural Schools. In the letter, Stewart wrote, "More than 60% of our people are tenants and sharecroppers with the white landowners." L. A. Stewart to James Sibley, 21 September 1914, Alabama Department of Education, Correspondence of the Rural School Agent, Box SG015442, Folder S, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

[41] Alabama's sharecropping system was backed by statewide enticement laws and false-pretenses laws devised to serve white planters and limit black mobility. William Cohen, *At Freedom's Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest for Racial Control, 1861-1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 229-231. There is also evidence of Fayette County whites using violent means to hold black sharecroppers to their land. For example, *The Fayette Sentinel* newspaper described an 1897 murder of a black Fayette County resident whose white assailants confused him for another man they intended to punish for leaving the plantation of one of the murderers "after contracting for a year and becoming involved in debt." *The Fayette Sentinel*, June 4, 1897.

[42] In 1900—a year when 24 percent of black farmers in the average Alabama county were landowners—37 percent of Fayette County's black farmers owned the land they worked. A comparison with counties in Alabama's more fertile regions in 1900 will further illustrate the point. In Dallas County, which was in the Black Belt region, only 5 percent of black farmers were landowners. In Limestone County, in the Tennessee Valley, that number was 13 percent. Historical Census Browser, accessed June 23, 2013.

[43] On the economic challenges faced by early twentieth-century southern farm owners, see Jacqueline Jones, *The Dispossessed: America's Underclasses from the Civil War to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 95-103.

Table 1
Occupations of Black Heads of Household, Fayette County, Alabama, 1900

Farmer	203
Farm Laborer	21
Day Laborer	23
Railroad Laborer	13
Washerwoman	7
Carpenter	5
Brick Mason	2
Barber	1
Hotel Porter	1
Miner	1
Preacher	1
Occupation Not Given	17
Total	295

Source: 1900 U.S. Census, Population Schedule, Fayette County, Alabama, accessed via www.ancestry.com July 20, 2013.

Note: Because this table lists the occupations of heads of households rather than those of Fayette County's entire adult black population, the occupations of black women are greatly underrepresented.

Table 2
Status of Farm Operators, Fayette County, Alabama, 1900

	Black Farmers		*White Farmers*		*All Farmers*	
Cash Tenants	16	(7%)	96	(4%)	112	(5%)
Share Tenants	103	(48%)	510	(24%)	613	(26%)
Farm Managers	0	(0%)	1	(0%)	1	(0%)
Owners and Tenants	1	(0%)	20	(0%)	21	(0%)
Part Owners of Farms	17	(8%)	226	(10%)	243	(10%)
Farm Owners	79	(37%)	1,302	(60%)	1,381	(58%)
Total Farms	216		2,155		2,371	

Source: Historical Census Browser, http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/, accessed June 23, 2013. Percentages calculated by the author and may not add to 100 due to rounding.

As was the case throughout the South, Fayette County's black farming families maintained complex household economies propped up by income from multiple sources.[44] In addition to growing cash crops like cotton and corn, rural southern family members often found other ways to make money. During the cotton cycle's summer lay-by period or during the winter months, men would work as day laborers, often in extractive industries. In Fayette County, this often meant hours at the sawmill, as lumber was the region's preeminent extractive industry.[45] In addition to their labor at home and in the field, women in the rural South were known to wash laundry, sell eggs, mend clothes, and take on other income-generating pursuits.[46] Fayette County's rural families were also subsistence farmers who produced and raised what they ate. They grew vegetables like peas, okra, tomatoes, and turnip greens and raised chickens, hogs, cows, and other livestock.[47]

Included among Fayette County's black landowners was a small but significant group of families who possessed sizeable acreage and notable wealth (Table 3 and Table 4). In the southern countryside, such large landholding farmers constituted the black middle class. Though an in-depth analysis of Fayette County's black middle class is beyond the scope of this dissertation, this study will exemplify ways that these landowners fit certain regional patterns. Wealthy black landowners often headed

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[44] See Sharon Ann Holt, "An Escape Clause: Farm Tenancy and the Household Economy," in *Making Freedom Pay: North Carolina Freedpeople Working for Themselves, 1865-1900* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 1-24, and Jacqueline Jones, "The Family Economy of Rural Southerners, 1870-1930," in *The Dispossessed: America's Underclasses from the Civil War to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 73-103.

[45] Stough, *Winding Trails*, 192-193.

[46] On the work of women in the southern household economy, see Jacqueline Jones, "'Bent Backs and Laboring Muscles': In The Rural South, 1880-1915," in *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 73-102, and Lu Ann Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

[47] Cheryl Studdard, interview by author, June 13, 2012.

community institutions like churches, schools, and fraternal orders and donated the land on which church and school buildings were constructed. They were also known to serve as mediators between the black community and white community, and in some cases whites held middle-class, landholding blacks in higher regard than other black people in a given area.[48]

Table 3
Taxable Acreage of Landowners, by Number of Acres Owned and Race, Fayette County, Alabama, 1913

No. Acres	*Black Landowners*		*White Landowners*		*All Landowners*	
1 to 49	32	(35%)	268	(13%)	300	(14%)
50 to 99	18	(20%)	525	(26%)	543	(26%)
100 to 199	23	(25%)	673	(33%)	696	(33%)
200 to 299	13	(14%)	301	(15%)	314	(15%)
300 to 399	2	(2%)	110	(5%)	112	(5%)
400 to 499	2	(2%)	63	(3%)	65	(3%)
500 to 999	1	(1%)	62	(3%)	63	(3%)
1000 or more	0	(0%)	14	(0%)	14	(0%)
Total Landowners	91		2,016		2,107	
Average Acres Owned	111		176			

Source: Fayette County Tax Book 1913, Fayette County Courthouse, Fayette, Alabama. Percentages calculated by the author and may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Note: By quantifying families' landholdings and the total value of their personal property, including land, homes, livestock, and household items ranging from pianos to pistols, the 1913 Tax Book provides a workable metric for measuring the wealth of landholding families in Fayette County. Although a 1900 edition of the annual tax book would be ideal because it would correspond with other data from that year, the 1913 Tax Book is the earliest extant version of the digest. When analyzing the tax book, only individuals and families owning at least one acre of land were recorded. Families with less than one acre but owning what tax assessors termed a "one lot residence" are not included, nor are the corporations listed throughout the digest, such as coal, lumber, real estate, and railroad companies. The African American households listed in the tax book are identified with the designation "col." meaning "colored."

[48] These and other characteristics of middle-class black property owners in the rural South can be found in scholarly works that include, J. William Harris, *Deep Souths: Delta, Piedmont, and Sea Island Society in the Age of Segregation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 281-282; Debra A. Reid and Evan P. Bennet, eds., *Beyond Forty Acres and a Mule: African American Landowning Families since Reconstruction* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012); and Loren Scheweninger, *Black Property Owners in the South, 1790-1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990).

Table 4
Total Assessed Value of Real Estate and Personal Property, by Amount and Race, Fayette County, Alabama, 1913

Total Assessed Value	*Black Landowners*		*White Landowners*		*All Landowners*	
$1 to $99	10	(11%)	79	(4%)	89	(4%)
$100 to $299	27	(30%)	378	(19%)	405	(19%)
$300 to $499	20	(22%)	447	(22%)	467	(22%)
$500 to $699	16	(18%)	344	(17%)	360	(17%)
$700 to $999	9	(10%)	303	(15%)	312	(15%)
$1,000 to $1,999	8	(9%)	332	(16%)	340	(16%)
$2,000 to $2,999	1	(1%)	79	(4%)	80	(4%)
$3,000 to $4,999	0	(0%)	38	(2%)	38	(2%)
$5,000 to $9,999	0	(0%)	9	(0%)	9	(0%)
$10,000 or more	0	(0%)	7	(0%)	7	(0%)
Total Landowners	91		2,016		2,107	
Average Value of Real Estate and Personal Property	$457		$800		$819	

Source: Fayette County Tax Book 1913, Fayette County Courthouse, Fayette, Alabama. Percentages calculated by the author may not add to 100 due to rounding.

The chapters that follow will show that some of Fayette County's middle-class black landowners were local members of what W. E. B. Du Bois dubbed "the talented tenth," the most gifted, educated, and successful ten percent of the black race.[49] These were Fayette County's uplifters, practitioners of refined cultural pursuits who promoted Victorian values like decorum, sophistication, temperance, and thrift. Their goals were to end the oppression of black people by demonstrating to whites and other blacks their intellectual, moral, and cultural sophistication, "lifting up" the inferior lower-class black masses with them as they climbed the ladder to equality.

[49] W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth," in *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative American Negroes of To-day*, ed. Booker T. Washington (New York: James Pott and Company, 1903).

Within Fayette County's black communities there were divisions and resentments between middle-class landowners and working-class sharecroppers and laborers, as well as colorism, cultural clashes, and the everyday disputes and rivalries that define all social bodies.[50] Though evidence of such community discord is scant, this dissertation will point to instances from the written and spoken record that reveal these realities of African American life in the region.

In the early twentieth century, all of Fayette County's black residents were subjected to the series of statutes, customs, and violence that constituted Jim Crow. As a system of oppression, Jim Crow was a defining aspect of southern society, and black life in Fayette County can only be understood in the context of the local manifestations of this regional phenomenon. Written with the stated goal of disfranchising black voters, the cornerstone of Jim Crow in Alabama was the state's 1901 constitution, which all but eliminated the black vote in Fayette County.[51] Disfranchisement paved the way for legal segregation, as African Americans across the South were denied access to spaces ranging from parks to libraries and without the aid of institutions like hospitals and orphanages.[52] Rural areas like those in Fayette County lacked spaces segregated by law, such as hotels,

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[50] For a brief an overview of class conflicts within the South's black communities, see Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 374-378. For specific studies that unpack such class divisions, see Leslie Brown, *Upbuilding Black Durham: Gender, Class, and Black Community Development in the Jim Crow South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), and Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*. On colorism see Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 149-181.

[51] In 1894, 117 black men were registered to vote in Fayette County. In 1908, just seven years after Alabama's new constitution was ratified by a popular vote, that number had been reduced to twelve. Fayette County Qualified Voters 1894-1896 and 1902-1904, Fayette County Memorial Library, Fayette, Alabama, and List of Registered Voters, 1908, Fayette County, Alabama, Local Government/County Records on Microfilm, Box LGM 0009, Reel 05, Alabama Department of Archives and History. On Alabama's 1901 Constitution, see William Warren Rogers et al., *Alabama: The History of a Deep South State* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1994), and 343-354, and Sarah A. Warren, "1901 Constitutional Convention," in *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Article.jsp?id=h-3030, accessed October 27, 2013.

[52] On segregation in Alabama see Julie Novkov, "Segregation (Jim Crow)," in *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1248, accessed July 23, 2013.

streetcars, restaurants, and theaters. Nonetheless, blacks and whites in the countryside lived side-by-side and frequently interacted in the field, sawmill, cotton gin, general store, or while passing on the road or wooded path. In the absence of legal segregation, the customs of Jim Crow—a proscribed racial etiquette and system of personal black deference to whites—played a particularly significant role.[53]

The laws and customs of Jim Crow were enforced by the threat and reality of violence. Black people in Fayette County heard about, read about, and experienced firsthand the white supremacist terrorism that characterized the South in the early twentieth century. The Ku Klux Klan was active in Fayette County in the 1910s and 1920s, and the pages of local newspapers describe the intimidation, harassment, murder, and public lynching of local blacks at the hands of Fayette County whites. Three incidents that occurred in 1925 illustrate the violence faced by African Americans in the area. As described in the *Fayette Banner*, in February of that year, "A car loaded with men in full Ku Klux regalia, and presumably Ku Klux, drove up to the intersection of Columbus Street and Temple Avenue Saturday night about 9 o'clock and lighted and burned a fiery cross. After which, they silently disappeared."[54] Five months later, a black itinerant worker accused of raping a white woman in Fayette County was convicted by an all-white jury. The next month, after he was hung in a gallows constructed expressly for his execution, the accused's body was displayed in an open coffin in the Fayette County courthouse so citizens could pass by and view his remains.[55] Four weeks later, the *Fayette Banner* published an account of a black timber cutter charged with attacking a

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[53] See Melissa Walker, "Shifting Boundaries: Race Relations in the Rural Jim Crow South," in *African American Life in the Rural South, 1900-1950*, ed. R. Douglas Hurt (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003).
[54] *Fayette Banner,* February 12, 1925.
[55] Ibid., July 25, 1925; August 20, 1925; and August 27, 1925.

white woman and burned alive by a mob of close to 4,000 whites on the other side of the state line in New Albany, Mississippi.[56]

Following a pattern found across the rural South, Fayette County's churches and schools were the cornerstones of black community life and important institutions of group self-help in the context of Jim Crow society. The majority of Fayette County's black residents were members of Baptist, Methodist, or Church of Christ denominations.[57] Church services, meetings, and revivals were key community social events, but scholars of African American church history have also illustrated ways that churches served as political entities, institutions of mutual aid, and bodies of racial advancement.[58] In addition to their local impact, Fayette County's Christian organizations were also members of national religious bodies, connecting those in the region to broader networks of African American faith and racial consciousness.[59]

Likewise, many Fayette County blacks held a marked investment in education as a venue for community development and racial advancement. At a time when black schools in Alabama were underfunded, Fayette County's black residents supplemented meager state funding by donating their own moneys for the construction and maintenance

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[56] Ibid., September 24, 1925. In addition, accounts of murders of Fayette County blacks by "whitecappers" can be found in *The Fayette Sentinel*, June 4, 1897, and *The Fayette Sentinel*, December 17, 1897. A Ku Klux Klan recruitment advertisement appears in *Fayette Banner*, July 24, 1924.

[57] Fred Tolliver, interview by author, June 17, 2012.

[58] See Elsa Barkley Brown, "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom," *Public Culture* 7, no. 1 (1994): 107-146, and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[59] To offer an example, the Davis Creek and Holly Spring Baptist Association, a conglomeration of ten black Baptist churches from Fayette and Lamar counties, was an affiliate of The Alabama Colored Baptist Convention, which was itself a member of the National Baptist Convention. Minutes of the Third Annual Session of the Davis Creek and Holly Spring Baptist Association, Alabama African American Baptist Annuals, 1873-1994, Reel 6, Samford University Library Special Collections (hereafter cited as Minutes of the Davis Creek and Holly Spring Baptist Association).

of schoolhouses and to pay teacher salaries.[60] As will be detailed in chapter 4, there was also support in Fayette County for Booker T. Washington's program for racial uplift via economic self-sufficiency and education. Community members across the county planted school farms, started homemakers clubs, and took part in other activities that defined the era's industrial education program.[61]

Also of great significance were black church and school buildings themselves. Throughout the South, black churches and schools were multi-use public spaces that operated as community centers, lecture halls, fraternal lodges, healthcare facilities, and performance venues.[62] They were also the sites of a range of events that defined local recreational life. This was certainly the case in Fayette County. In addition to church events and educational exhibitions and fundraisers, Fayette County's churches and schoolhouses hosted recreational activities like baseball games, lay-by rallies, concerts, plays, and singing conventions.[63]

In turn, Fayette County's black church and school buildings were primary venues for local cultural production. Over the course of a given week, the county's black

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[60] In 1915 African Americans in Fayette County made a total of $322 in contributions for the improvement of their schools. Final Report of the Supervisor of Fayette County, 1 May 1915, Alabama Department of Education, Correspondence of the Rural School Agent, Box SG015466, Jeanes Teachers' Reports 1915 Folder, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

[61] In 1915, there were three school farms in Fayette County and ten homemakers clubs whose membership included fifty-eight girls and forty-two mothers. List of Alabama School Farms, Correspondence of the Rural School Agent, Box SG015466, Supervising Industrial Teachers and Agents of Homemakers Clubs Alabama 1915 Folder, Alabama Department of Archives and History, and 1915 Preliminary Report of Homemakers' Clubs for Negro Girls, Correspondence of the Rural School Agent, Box SG15466, Homemakers Clubs Folder, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

[62] On the many uses of church buildings, see Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 37-38, and Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent,* 7. On school buildings as community centers, see Stephanie Deutsch, *You Need a Schoolhouse: Booker T. Washington, Julius Rosenwald, and the Building of Schools for the Segregated South* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 132.

[63] In an interview with the author, Fred Tolliver named baseball as one of the most popular leisure activities in Fayette County's early twentieth-century black communities. Fred Tolliver, interview by author, June 17, 2012. Clyde Wilson recalled seeing a range of theatrical performances at his local schoolhouse in the community of Covin. Clyde Wilson, interview by the author, March 22, 2012. A description of a summer lay-by rally held at a Lamar County church can be found in *The Vernon Courier*, July 5, 1897. Chapter 4 and 5 respectively will detail concerts and singings held at local churches and schools.

residents stepped out of their homes and walked through wooded paths and along dirt roads to congregate in and around church and school buildings to pray and learn, discuss and argue, listen and sing. In addition, these buildings were meaningful geographic markers that identified the loci of black community life in the region. With their pitched roofs rising above the tree line and their whitewashed walls intermingling with the houses, sawmills, and cotton gins etched into the landscape, church and school buildings gave visible shape to the black communities that dotted the Fayette County countryside.

While creating their own separate communities and cultures, black people in Fayette County continually participated in American cultural life writ large. Many of the institutions, events, and performances that constituted black culture in Fayette County were also key components of and had roots in white American and southern culture. There were no simple binaries of clearly defined "white culture" or "black culture" in Fayette County or the South as a region. Marginalized from electoral politics and denied a range of governmental supports and services, African Americans in Fayette County joined those across the nation in using consumer products and performative practices to participate culturally in the national citizenry. Though there were instances throughout the South of black people being beaten, abused, and run out of town for style of dress or other cultural acts deemed to be strictly within the purview of whites, culture could not be policed in the same way as a voting booth or a train station.[64] The wholesale cultural disfranchisement of southern blacks was an impossibility, which in turn made cultural production a particularly effective avenue for participating in American society and refuting the racist ideologies that sought to justify black subjugation.

[64] For examples of African Americans facing violent retribution for their style of dress, see White and White, *Stylin'*, 153-155.

"With Sight and Sound" uses five chapters to uncover the role that Fayette County's black photographic and musical practices played in local cultural life. Dedicated to the work of the Shackelford family photographers, chapter 2 unpacks the effect that a black photographer—in this case a family of photographers—could have on community life. It does so by detailing ways in which the Shackelford family's photographic expertise connected local African Americans to a national practice of black photographic self-definition and affirmation. In chapter 3, the focus shifts to the other side of the camera. At issue in this chapter are ways in which posing for a picture could, in and of itself, be a powerful form of creative expression and community building. Chapter 4 is dedicated to the performances of the African American brass band based in the Fayette County community of Covin. This chapter details this ensemble's dynamic role in improving local educational and community life before analyzing a photograph of the band to highlight the cultural and racial significance of the national practice of posing for a photograph with a musical instrument. The musical discussion continues in chapter 5 with a description of the impact of black sacred singing in Fayette County. This chapter offers a study of the ways that Dr. Watts singing kept local blacks connected to their past while shape-note singing enabled them to participate in modern vocal traditions and bolster the community's mutual aid capabilities. Finally, a conclusion ties these chapters together and details a number of findings about the roles of photography, music, and the relationship between the two in and around Fayette County.

Chapter 2 – Behind the Camera:
The Shackelford Family and Photographic Respectability

In the rural Fayette County community of Covin, sometime in the 1910s, a black man stepped in front a screen hung from the porch of the home of Mitch and Geneva Shackelford (Fig. 2.1). He wore a three-piece suit, stood upright with his arms behind his back, held his head high and turned slightly to his left, and looked into the distance. His dress, posture, and expression conveyed palpable pride and a desire for his sense of self-worth to be to recognized and recorded. Like so many in northwest Alabama, this unidentified man had come to the Shackelford family to have his portrait made. As he carried out this still performance, one of the Shackelfords squeezed a rubber bulb to open and close the shutter on their camera, and the picture was taken. This is such an ordinary portrait, yet one with immeasurable cultural and social value.

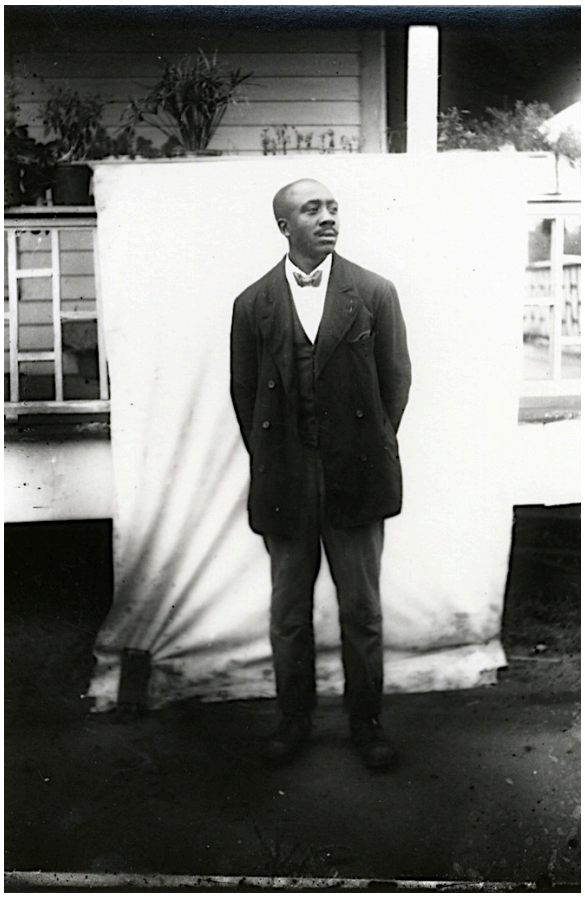

Figure 2.1. Unidentified portrait, ca. 1910s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.138); photograph by the Shackelford family.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the Shackelford family's work as commercial portrait artists. Of particular note are a number of straightforward portraits like that in figure 2.1. The Shackelford photographers used contemporary poses and settings to create portraits of African Americans that conveyed confident respectability at a time when American popular culture was overrun by degrading caricatures of black Americans and black southerners in particular. By producing such affirming portraits, the Shackelford family's technical skill and artistry helped connect African Americans in and around Fayette County to a widespread African American movement of counterhegemonic photographic expression.

The Shackelford family was part of a new wave of small town photographers who permeated the United States in the early twentieth century. With technical improvements and the availability of consumer goods making the photographic process less daunting and more inexpensive than ever before, more and more Americans took up the photographic trade. Chief among the innovations responsible for this increase in the medium's availability was the invention of the dry plate negative in the 1880s, which streamlined the photographic process and removed the need for various liquids and chemicals while taking pictures.[1] Mail order houses across the United States stocked dry

[1] Glass plate negatives had been the industry standard since the 1850s, but using them was a cumbersome endeavor, especially outdoors and away from the conveniences of a photo studio. Photographers had to prepare each negative by hand to render it photosensitive, and they did so by pouring a solution of collodion and potassium iodide over the glass plate. These "wet plates" had to then be quickly inserted into plate holders that fit into the back of the camera and used to take a photograph while still saturated. After the photograph was taken, the negative needed to be immediately stored in a liquid solution of silver nitrate, where it was preserved while transported to a darkroom. The invention of dry plates streamlined this process. These new glass negatives were coated with dry gelatin emulsion in the factory and were photosensitive and ready to use out of the box. Dry plates were also markedly more sensitive than their wet predecessors and allowed for decreased exposure times, often of one second or less. Dry plate negatives simply made taking pictures easier, and photographers continued to use them well into the twentieth century and even decades after the invention of flexible roll film. On the advent of the dry plate negative, see John Ward, "Dry Plate Negatives: Gelatine," in *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography*, Vol. 1, ed. John Hannavy, 438-439 (New York: Routledge, 2008), and Sarah Kennel, Diane Waggoner, Alice

plate negatives along with a range of photographic supplies, enabling an interested individual to obtain all of the equipment and knowledge needed to produce a photograph without leaving his or her home. The fall 1910 Sears, Roebuck, and Company catalog, for example, contained twenty pages of photography supplies while also giving first time photographers the option of purchasing a "complete outfit," in which for $3.23 one could buy a camera and all the other materials needed to take photos and develop prints.[2]

Throughout the United States, those who seized on the increased accessibility of this image-making craft did so in large part to create portraits.[3] Originally a luxury reserved for the wealthy, portraits became increasingly affordable, and middle- and working-class Americans flocked to photo studios to have their likenesses preserved in a displayable format.[4] The *carte de visite*—a small portrait mounted on a two-and-a-half by four inch card—was popularized in the 1850s and was the first photographic portrait format to gain widespread appeal.[5] By the turn of the twentieth century, the carte de visite had been replaced by two new types of photographic print. The cabinet card was a larger version of the carte de visite and was made by gluing a print—usually four-by-five inches or five-by-seven inches in size—to a cardboard mount intended to be displayed in the home.[6] The other predominant portrait format in the early twentieth century was the real photo postcard. Beginning around 1900, companies like Azo, Darko, Cyko, and Kodak Eastman's Velox produced postcards that were also photographic papers, enabling

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Carver-Kubik, *In the Darkroom: An Illustrated Guide to Photographic Processes before the Digital Age* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2009), 45.

[2] Sears, Roebuck, and Company catalog, Fall 1910, page 762, accessed via www.ancestry.com November 8, 2013.

[3] Shirley Teresa Wajda, "The Artistic Portrait Photograph," in *The Arts and the American Home, 1890-1930*, ed. Jessica H. Foy and Karal Ann Marling (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 168.

[4] See Roger Taylor, "Domestic and Family Photography," in *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography*, Vol. 1, ed. John Hannavy, 431-434 (New York: Routledge, 2008).

[5] John Plunkett, "Carte-De-Visite," in *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography*, 276-277.

[6] See William B. Becker, "Cabinet Cards," in *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography*, 233-234.

photographers to develop prints directly onto the postcard itself. Customers could have their likeness developed on a postcard and then mail it, with a message written on the other side, to friends and family throughout the world. It was also often the case that people opted instead to keep these portable portraits at home and display them on a shelf or place them in the family photo album.[7] By the turn of the twentieth century, amateur and professional portrait photographers opened up shop in cities and towns large and small across the United States and began churning out these easily-produced real photo postcards.

The Shackelford family of Fayette County was among these photographic tradespeople. Mitch and Geneva Shackelford, along with their five adult children, were landholding farmers who lived in southwest Fayette County in the rural community of Covin (Fig. 2.2). Though the Shackelfords worked primarily as farmers growing cotton and corn, they undertook a variety of additional endeavors, running a general store and owning and operating a sawmill.[8] Over the years, the family gradually increased their acreage, buying the land surrounding their Covin homestead piece by piece.[9] The Shackelfords were members of what Loren Schweninger termed the "new black

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[7] For studies of the real photo postcard in the early twentieth century United States, see Luc Sante, *Folk Photography: The American Real-Photo Postcard, 1905-1930* (Portland, OR: Yeti Books, 2009), and Rosamand Vaule, *As We Were: American Photographic Postcards, 1905-1930* (Boston: David R. Godine, 2004).

[8] Walter Shackelford, History of Mitch Shackelford and Family, ca. 1960. Written by Mitch and Geneva Shackelford's grandson Walter Shackelford, this unpublished history is based on the family story as told to him by his father Ollie and Mitch and Geneva's other sons Curtis, Jackson, and Carlos Shackelford. A copy is in the author's possession.

[9] For details on the Shackelfords' land acquisitions in Covin see Deed of Sale from W. Brazelle and Mary M. Brazelle to Mitchel Shackelford, 29 August 1892 (filed 29 July 1903), Fayette County, Alabama, Deed Record 19, page 410; Deed of Sale from W. F. Shackelford and wife E. A. Shackelford to Michel Shackelford, 23 October 1899 (filed 29 July 1903), Fayette County, Alabama, Deed Record 19, page 409; and Deed of Sale from J. F. Barnes and wife L. E. Barnes to Mich Shackelford, 20 November 1908 (filed 24 November 1908), Fayette County, Alabama, Deed Record 22, page 163. Fayette County Courthouse, Fayette, Alabama.

economic elite," a small number of African Americans scattered across the South in the early twentieth century who accrued vast amounts of acreage and sizable wealth.[10]

Figure 2.2. Mitch and Geneva Shackelford on the steps of their home with an unidentified boy, ca. 1910s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.737); photograph by the Shackelford family.

In 1913, the Shackelfords possessed almost twice the acreage as Fayette County's average landholding black household, were one of the five wealthiest black families in the county, and were in the top 15 percent of all Fayette County families—black and white—in terms of taxable wealth.[11] The Shackelfords also took in laborers to work their fields and gave small cash loans to local blacks who put up future crops and/or livestock

[10] Schweninger, *Black Property Owners in the South, 1700-1950* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 207.

[11] In 1913, the Shackelford family owned 210 acres, and the combined assessed value of their real estate and personal property was $1,399. Fayette County Tax Book 1913, page 199. Fayette County Courthouse, Fayette, Alabama. See also Table 3 and Table 4, appendix.

as collateral.[12] Though their prosperity is noteworthy, in Fayette County the Shackelfords were not a singular exception but were instead one of a handful of wealthy black families scattered across the county (Table 3 and Table 4).

The manner in which the Shackelfords acquired their land and wealth mirrors patterns identified by historians of rural black landowners and prosperous rural black southerners. These avenues to prosperity included the diversification of economic interests, a gradual accumulation of acreage, and a measure of support from local whites.[13] As to the latter, Mitch Shackelford was born during the Civil War in 1862 in Lamar County, Alabama, which bordered Fayette County to the west.[14] At a young age Mitch was taken in by a white farming couple named John and Dicie Shackelford.[15]

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[12] In an interview, Mitch and Geneva Shackelford's great granddaughter Sarah Cunningham recalls that there was small bedroom in the rear of the Shackelford home that was reserved for any hired hands that may be working the family farm. Sarah Cunningham, interview by the author, September 12, 2011. In addition, on his World War One draft registration card, a black Covin resident named Willie Hewitt lists his occupation as "farming" and "M.C. Shackelford" as his employer. World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, Fayette County, Alabama, serial number 453, order number 426, Willie Matthew Hewitt; digital image, www.ancestry.com, accessed July 13, 2013. For examples of loans given by the Shackelfords to local black residents see Mortgage Loan from M. C. Shackelford to R. E. and G. E. Loftis, 18 December 1911, Fayette County, Alabama, Mortgage Record 36, page 298; Mortgage Loan from Mitch Shackelford to P. M. Bobo, 16 January 1913, Fayette County, Alabama, Mortgage Record 38, page 393; and Mortgage Loan from Mitch Shackelford to L. A. Stewart, 29 April 1916, Fayette County, Alabama, Mortgage Record 47, page 531. Fayette County Courthouse, Fayette, Alabama.

[13] Schweninger, *Black Property Owners in the South*, 207-16, and Harris, *Deep Souths*, 281-282. For a study of a prosperous African American family in Texas whose land and wealth accumulation mirror that of the Shackelford family, see Keith J. Volanto, "James E. Youngblood: Race, Family, and Farm Ownership in Jim Crow Texas," in *Beyond Forty Acres and a Mule: African American Landowning Families since Reconstruction*, ed. Debra A. Reid and Evan P. Bennet (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012).

[14] Shackelford, History of Mitch Shackelford and Family.

[15] Mitch Shackelford appears as a member of the Shackelford family household on the population schedules of the 1870 and 1880 U.S. Census. On the 1880 population schedule, his relationship to the head of household is listed as "laborer" and his occupation as "farm laborer." 1870 U.S. Census, Sanford County, Alabama, Population Schedule, Precinct 11, page 10, dwelling 67, and 1880 U.S. Census, Lamar County, Alabama, Population Schedule, Beat 11, page 30, dwelling 133, accessed via www.ancestry.com November 3, 2013. There are varying accounts of how Mitch came to live with the Shackelford family. In one version, one of John Shackelford's adult sons found a black child on the floor of an abandoned cabin with his deceased father lying in bed beside him and took the orphaned child to John Shackelford, who raised him. Another account maintains that after emancipation Mitch's biological father asked John Shackelford to take his son in to provide the child with a proper education. See Joan W. BeBeau, *Henry Shackelford, Sr. of Elbert County, Georgia: Family History* (Hastings, MI: privately printed, 1988), 45, and Catherine Drexel, "Memoir of Walter Franklin Shackelford," in BeBeau, *Henry Shackelford,* 193-194.

Mitch lived on and worked the Shackelford family's farm as a child, and the Shackelfords raised Mitch along with their youngest son Walter. At the age of twenty-one, Mitch left the Shackelford farm, having taken the Shackelford name.[16] Throughout his life, Mitch maintained a close relationship with John and Dicie Shackelford's biological son Walter Shackelford and Walter's older siblings in the region. In a family history written in 1960, Mitch's grandson, who was also named Walter Shackelford, wrote the following about his grandfather Mitch's relationship with the white Shackelfords:

> He always spoke of the Shackelfords who reared him, the Rowlands [another white family in the area] and all their relatives. He stated that they played a very vital role in the success he accomplished in life. He constantly went to them for information, advice and assistance and this relationship still exists today.[17]

Less is known about Geneva Bobo Shackelford's background. The child of landholding former slaves, Geneva Bobo was born in 1866 and was raised on a Lamar County farm a short distance from where Mitch Shackelford was reared. [18] Geneva

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Another possibility that must be considered is that Mitch was "bound" to the Shackelford family as an apprentice, which was made possible by Alabama legislation intended in part to extend slavery in the years immediately following the Civil War. On Alabama's apprenticeship law see Peter Kolchin, *First Freedom: The Responses of Alabama's Blacks to Emancipation and Reconstruction*, 2nd ed. (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2008), 63-64.

[16] Shackelford, History of Mitch Shackelford and Family.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Census records indicate that Geneva Bobo's parents were a couple named Andy and Eliza Bobo. Since the names of enslaved African Americans were not listed in census records and were rarely recorded in other written documents, recovering the Bobo family history presents a challenge. However, dates rather than names tell the story, and cross-referencing multiple census records allows the family history to be traced. As was the case throughout the South, it was common practice in Fayette County for former slaves to take the last names of their masters. In 1860, there were only two slaveholders in Fayette County with the last name Bobo—Levingston Bobo and his brother Absolom Bobo. Levingston Bobo owned only one slave who was seventy years old in 1860, and he can thus be ruled out as the former master of Geneva Bobo's parents Andy or Eliza. Absolom Bobo, on the other hand, owned eight slaves in 1860. In 1870, the ages of Andy and Eliza Bobo and two of their sons were exactly ten years more than the ages of four of the slaves held by Absolom Bobo in 1860—an indicator that Andy and Elize Bobo and at least two of their children were enslaved by Absolom Bobo. Moreover, multiple census records list South Carolina as the place of birth of Andy and Eliza Bobo as well as Absolom Bobo. See 1860 U.S. Census, Fayette County, Alabama, Slave Schedule, Middle Division, page 4, dwelling 21; 1870 U.S. Census, Sanford County, Alabama, Population Schedule, Beat 12, page 15, dwelling 105; 1840 U.S. Census, South Carolina, Population Schedule, Page 25; and 1850 U.S. Census, Fayette County, Alabama, Beat 9 16 Division, page 21, dwelling 133, accessed via www.ancestry.com November 5, 2013.

attended a school whose name is unknown but which was sure to be one of the first black schools in the county.[19] She and her family were members of New Hope Church, which was founded in 1850 and was one of the oldest black churches in the area.[20] In 1889, Geneva Bobo and Mitch Shackelford were married in a ceremony performed by a white Confederate veteran who was the husband of one of John Shackelford's daughters.[21]

As devout Baptists committed to local education, the Shackelfords actively contributed to the development of Covin's black community. Like other members of Fayette County's black middle class, the family spearheaded the formation of key community institutions. They were among the founders of Covin's black school and church and supplied the land on which both the church and school buildings were erected.[22]

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[19] 1880 U.S. Census, Lamar County, Alabama, Population Schedule, Beat 12, page 7, dwelling 57, accessed via www.ancestry.com November 3, 2013.

[20] Christine Lacey, "New Hope Missionary Baptist Church," in *Heritage of Lamar County Alabama*, ed. Lamar County Heritage Book Committee (Poca, WV: Heritage Books, 2000), 71.

[21] Wiley Rowland is identified as the person performing Mitch and Geneva's wedding in Shackelford, History of Mitch Shackelford and Family, and Marriage License of M. C. Shackelford and Geneva Bobo, February 2, 1889, Lamar County, Alabama, Marriage Record 5, page 23. Lamar County Courthouse, Vernon, Alabama. See also BeBeau, *Henry Shackelford,* 193-194. Stough describes Wiley Rowland's experiences as a Confederate soldier in *Winding Trails*, 237.

[22] The Shackelfords' role as founders of Covin's New Friendship Church and the Covin School is recorded in Walter Shackelford's unpublished history of New Friendship Church. Walter Shackelford, History of the New Friendship Church, n.d. Taking advantage of 1907 Alabama legislation that helped rural school districts receive state funds for building or repairing schoolhouses, in 1910 Mitch and Geneva Shackelford sold the State of Alabama two acres of land to be used for the "erection or repair of a school." Deed of Sale from Mich Shackelford and wife Geneva to the State of Alabama, 6 October 1910 (filed 11 October 1910), Fayette County, Alabama, Deed Record 26, page 285. Fayette County Courthouse, Fayette, Alabama. In 1915, the couple sold one-half acre of land to "The Missionary Baptist Church" for two dollars. Language included in the deed points to the Shackelfords' religious piety and expectations of others in the community. The deed stipulated that the Shackelfords were selling "one half acre of land . . . joining the school house land to have and to hold to the said church as a place of worship to All Mighty-God so long as it remains as a place of worship." The following caveat was also included: "But should it go down and become a defunct church then the title shall revert back to the said grantors Mitch Shackelford and wife Jennie Shackelford." Deed of Sale from Mitch Shackelford and wife Jennie Shackelford to The Missionary Baptist Church, 16 August 1915 (filed 4 September 1915), Fayette County, Alabama, Deed Record 32-A, page 121. Fayette County Courthouse, Fayette, Alabama. Two examples of other prosperous black landholding families helping to found churches and schools speaks to this pattern in the region. According to a commemorative cornerstone mortared into its current building, the "founder" of Shady Grove Baptist Church in the southern Fayette County community of Newtonville was Matthew Freeman. In 1913, Freeman owned 340

The Shackelford family's five-bedroom farmhouse stood on the Columbus Road—the primary artery from Columbus, Mississippi to Fayette—and was a well known landmark in Fayette County and neighboring Lamar County.[23] As seen in the photograph in figure 2.3, local residents and travelers who passed by the Shackelford house encountered a spacious two-story home with a three-gabled design, two chimneys, a wrap-around porch, and a number of ornate embellishments.

Figure 2.3. Mitch Shackelford and unidentified children at the Shackelford home, ca. 1910. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.574); photograph by the Shackelford family.

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acres of land, and the combined assessed value of his real estate and personal property was $1,440. Fayette County Tax Book 1913, page 162. Fayette County Courthouse, Fayette, Alabama. Also, in 1914 Fayette County's Jeanes Industrial Supervisor created a list of black schools in the county. The name given for many of these schools was in fact the surname of a black Fayette County family. Though the specific families were not identified, these surnames appear frequently among the black landholders listed in the 1913 Fayette County Tax Book. See Linnie Walston to James Sibley, 2 May 1914, Alabama Department of Education, Correspondence of the Rural School Agent, Box SG015458, Jeanes Homemakers Work, 1914 Folder, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

[23] Mitch Shackelford House, Alabama Historic Inventory, Fayette County, Alabama, House No. 40, recorded April 1979. In 1928, when describing the location of a recently constructed prison camp, the editors of the *Fayette Banner* wrote that the camp was located "just below the Shackelford place," a sign of the house's status as a well-known landmark in the area. *Fayette Banner*, January 26, 1928.

Based on the ages of the children pictured and the quality of the home, the photograph in figure 2.3 appears to have been taken soon after the house was completed in 1910.[24] Three of the Shackelfords' sons are in the front yard—two playing marbles and one displaying a horse—and Mitch sits on the front porch with an easy, relaxed pose and a discernible gratification with his family's abode.

To black people in the area, the Shackelford home was known evocatively as "the big house," a reference to both the Shackelfords' economic prosperity and class divisions within the local black community.[25] "Big house" was indeed an accurate description of the Shackelfords' Covin farmhouse, but for local sharecroppers and laborers to call it by the same name antebellum slaves called their masters' homes highlights class disparities in the area. The use of this moniker to describe the Shackelford home likened the family themselves to white slaveholding plantation owners and potentially reflected resentments felt by working-class blacks in the area.

In the big house on the Columbus Road, Mitch and Geneva Shackelford raised five children who would live to adulthood. Known collectively as the "the Shackelford brothers," Mitch and Geneva's four sons—Curtis, Ollie, Jackson, and Carlos Shackelford—were among the first children to attend the Covin School, and each lived his entire life in Covin, save for Curtis and Ollie who left for a time when they were

[24] Using the current location of the Shackelford family's vacant home and plat maps and deeds at the Fayette County Courthouse, the deed for the plot of land in Covin where the Shackelford home was built was located. The deed is dated 1908. Deed of Sale from J. F. Barnes and wife L. E. Barnes to Mich Shackelford, 20 November 1908 (filed 24 November 1908), Fayette County, Alabama, Deed Record 22, page 163. Fayette County Courthouse, Fayette, Alabama.

[25] Clyde Wilson, interview by author, September 15, 2011, and Warda Prewitt, interview by author, March 21, 2012.

drafted and served in the U.S. Army during the First World War.[26] As they began to marry and start families of their own in the 1920s, the Shackelford brothers built their own homes just a short walk from the family homestead.[27] After the death of their father Mitch in 1919, the Shackelford brothers continued sustaining the family economy by growing cotton and corn, operating the family sawmill as well as a syrup mill used to produce cane syrup, and later working as dairy and poultry farmers.[28]

Born in 1898, Mitch and Geneva Shackelford's only daughter Roxie Shackelford was a teacher at the Covin School who trained at the Tuskegee Institute.[29] Working as a teacher was a pathway to leadership for middle-class black women in the rural South, and Roxie Shackelford assumed such a role in local educational activities. When Roxie passed away in 1928 at the age of thirty, the principal and teachers of the Covin School submitted a tribute to her to the local newspaper. The language in this tribute, with its emphases on religious dutifulness and leading by example, highlights Roxie Shackelford's status as one of the region's middle-class uplifters. The obituary read in part:

> She was dutiful to her Church and community. Her efforts were always to make the community better. Even though she is not with us longer in person, her efforts to populate those with whom she came in contact with lofty ideas and ideals and

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[26] Shackelford, History of Mitch Shackelford and Family. World War I Soldiers and Sailors Discharge Record, Fayette County, Alabama, page 110 and page 111, Local Government/County Records on Microfilm, LGM0009, Reel 6, Alabama Department of Archives and History.
[27] 1920 U.S. Census, Fayette County, Alabama, Population Schedule, Precinct 1, page 11B, dwelling 213, accessed via www.ancestry.com November 3, 2013.
[28] Shackelford, History of Mitch Shackelford and Family.
[29] 1910 U.S. Census, Fayette County, Alabama, Population Schedule, Town Beat 1, page 14, dwelling 233, accessed via www.ancestry.com November 3, 2013. Roxie Shackelford is listed as a teacher at the Covin School in R. L. Reaves to J. S. Lambert, 24 October 1918, Alabama Department of Education, Correspondence of the Rural School Agent, Box SG15415, Rosenwald Schools Folder, Alabama Department of Archives and History. She spent the summers of 1916, 1918, 1919, and 1921 training at the Tuskegee Institute Summer School. Roxie Shackelford, Individual Records of Teachers Attending the Tuskegee Summer School, Tuskegee University, Tuskegee, Alabama.

> correct ways of living will continue to blossom and bear fruits that will ever keep her presence in the hearts and minds of the people.[30]

In both generations, members of the Shackelford family engaged in multiple forms of creative expression, especially music, that represented a combination of local traditional arts and the refined pursuits of the New Negro, of the twentieth century's new black middle class. Geneva sewed quilts, wove rugs, played the accordion, and sang hymns in church and at singing conventions.[31] Curtis, Ollie, and Roxie were musicians who played the cornet, bassoon, and trombone respectively in the community brass band.[32] The family also owned a decorative pump organ, which was a popular parlor instrument at the time.[33] In turn-of-the-century middle-class American households, music-making remained an integral aspect of home life and was an activity linked to strivings for cultural elevation, self-discipline, and moral character.[34] Played predominantly by women, parlor organs in particular were important signifiers of Christian spirituality.[35] The Shackelfords' various musical habits therefore served as a domestic facet of the family's engagement with middle-class American values and a family culture of racial uplift.

In addition, the Shackelford family's creative works were not always private matters, for their home was often a public space. In the main hall of the home, with its high ceilings and position at the center of the house, the family held community-wide

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[30] *Fayette Banner*, January 26, 1928.
[31] In an interview with the author, Geneva's granddaughter Ruth Anthony recalled her grandmother playing the accordion, quilting, and weaving rugs. Ruth Anthony, interview by author, June 20, 2011. Seen in chapter 5, there is a portrait in the Shackelford collection of Geneva holding *The Christian Harmony*, a popular shape-note songbook. Shackelford Collection Fayette County Photographs, File 877.36, Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts.
[32] The music of the Shackelford children and the brass band are discussed in detail in chapter 4.
[33] Seen in figure 4.6 in chapter 4, the organ was identified by Sarah Cunningham as belonging to the family. Sarah Cunningham, interview by the author, June 20, 2011.
[34] Jessica H. Foy, "The Home Set to Music," in *The Arts and the American Home*.
[35] Ibid., 66.

celebrations on holidays like Christmas and New Year's Eve. The community brass band, of which Curtis, Ollie, and Roxie Shackelford made up almost half of the membership, often provided the entertainment for such gatherings.[36]

Among their other income-generating activities, the Shackelfords operated their home as a boarding house, a place of overnight rest for both black and white travelers making the trek from Columbus, Mississippi, to Fayette and Birmingham.[37] Those traveling the Columbus Road in a wagon and later an automobile could pull over and stay the night at the Shackelford house, while people riding the Southern Railway could get off at the station in Covin and travel the short distance to the Shackelford home. In addition to offering a place of rest, the Shackelfords fed their guests and entertained them with the music of their brass instruments.[38]

For African Americans traveling the segregated South, boarding houses like the Shackelfords' were indispensable refuges. In welcoming black travelers, the Shackelford family offered respite and a safe haven at a time when there were few hotels that would accommodate black guests and when being a black visitor in an unknown southern town—to say nothing of the countryside—could be a dangerous and uncertain position. In boarding white guests, the Shackelfords recognized the social mores of the time, segregating their home by setting aside a particular room for white boarders.[39] It should also be kept in mind that for a black family in the Jim Crow South to provide meals for

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[36] Clyde Wilson, interview by the author, September 15, 2011, and Ruth Anthony, interview by the author, June 20, 2011.
[37] Sarah Cunningham, interview by the author, June 20, 2011, and Mitch Shackelford House, Alabama Historic Inventory, Fayette County, Alabama, House No. 40, recorded April 1979. The Alabama Historic Inventory record of the Shackelford house includes the following note: "This house was located on the main road from Fayette to Columbus and used as a rest stop. Meals were served and a room was reserved for travelers for overnight stops."
[38] Albert Abrams, interview by the author, September 15, 2011.
[39] Sarah Cunningham, interview by the author, June 20, 2011.

and rent a room to whites was more a service than a sign of social equality. Nonetheless, the Shackelford home was at times a space of interracial interaction, a place where black and white people gathered under one roof to relax, eat, and sleep.

People also came to the Shackelford house to have their picture made. Along with their other economic pursuits, the Shackelfords were professional photographers, an endeavor that combined the family's entrepreneurial acumen with its creative drive.[40] Owning a large-format camera capable of taking studio quality photographs, the Shackelfords built a darkroom in their attic and produced portraits of local residents and visiting travelers from various walks of life.[41] We will likely never know how the Shackelford family picked up the ins-and-outs of the photographic trade, but potential avenues for learning to produce photographic portraits included correspondence courses, instructional guides, or apprenticeship under another photographer. What we do know is that it was Mitch and Geneva Shackelford who first began to work as photographers before their children, and their sons in particular, took over the family's photography business in the 1910s.[42]

Whether they were locals or travelers spending the night, black and white portrait seekers would visit the Shackelford home to have their picture taken. Since the home was

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[40] Albert Abrams, interview by the author, September 15, 2011, and Warda Prewitt, interview by author, March 21, 2012.

[41] Roughly five feet wide and ten feet long, the Shackelfords' attic darkroom was lined with matte black wallpaper, and quilts were stuffed into a few areas to ensure that the room was light tight. There was a small workstation on the lefthand side of the darkroom where family members stood to develop the photographs. These observations were based on a visit to the now vacant Shackelford home in 2012.

[42] There are a number of portraits in the Shackelford Collection that portray the Shackelford children as youngsters, and there are several group shots in the collection in which Geneva is pictured but Mitch is not, indicating that he was frequently the one behind the camera. Interviews indicate that the Shackelford children were taking photographs by the time they were teenagers and that the Shackelford brothers in particular had taken over the family photography business by the mid-1910s. Mitch Shackelford's great grandson Albert Abrams, for example, heard from older relatives that both Mitch and Mitch's son Ollie took photographs. Warda Prewitt, who was born in Covin in the 1920s, recalled that Jackson Shackelford was also an especially active photographer. Albert Abrams, interview by the author, September 15, 2011, and Warda Prewitt, interview by author, March 21, 2012.

without electricity until the 1930s, the Shackelfords did not operate an indoor studio but instead posed their customers outside of the family home with a tree, shrub, or the whitewashed siding of the house serving as a backdrop.[43] As seen in figure 2.1, which was taken in front of the family's wrap-around porch, the Shackelfords frequently had customers pose in front of a screen, which appears to be oilcloth. When developing such images, the Shackelfords would crop the portraits so that only the screen was visible in the background, giving the appearance that the portraits were taken in an indoor photo studio.

Since multiple members of the Shackelford family were musicians, sitting for a portrait at the Shackelford house was a multimedial event with an emphasis on leisure and entertainment. If a family or other group came for a portrait session at the big house, individuals would take turns outside having their picture taken. Those waiting to be photographed were invited inside to relax in the house's main hall and enjoy music played by various family members.[44] In this sense, the Shackelford house was a salon of sorts, a space of musical sophistication and personal photographic expression.

As will be detailed in the following chapter, the family also traveled around the region photographing families, individuals, school groups, and fraternal orders at a range of locations. After a photograph was taken and the negative exposed, the Shackelfords went to work in their attic darkroom. The Shackelford family produced five-by-seven inch prints glued to decorative cardboard mounts and intended to be displayed on a shelf or

[43] Repeated viewings of the Shackelford Collection have enabled the identification of a number of photographs as being taken at the Shackelford home. Signs that the family home was the backdrop of a photograph include the recognizable design of the railing around the Shackelford family's wrap-around porch and a particular whitewashed side of the home where a tree-stump is visible as part of the house's foundation.

[44] Albert Abrams, interview by the author, September 15, 2011.

mantle in a family home. However, most of the photographs they developed were the real photo postcards that remained so popular in the first three decades of the twentieth century.[45]

The portraits produced by the Shackelfords reflect the family's emphasis on respectability and uplift via the engagement with middle-class American values and customs. For the Shackelford family's black customers, posing for the family could be a profound moment of photographic self-definition at a time when they lived in a Jim Crow society that sought not only to politically and socially marginalize them, but also to deny them the very dignity that the photographic portrait was intended to afford. Understanding how this worked, how the Shackelford family's portraits served as vehicles for counterhegemonic performance, requires an examination of photographic conventions and hegemonic operations of visual culture in the early twentieth-century United States.

The aesthetic template for the turn-of-the-century real photo postcard portrait was established decades earlier in the photographic studios of Victorian England and America. Stylistically, Victorian era photographic portraits were influenced by centuries old traditions of western painted portraiture. Available only to the upper stratum of society, the purpose of a painted portrait was to convey the status and social standing of the sitter.

[45] When developing their photographs, the Shackelfords used dry plate negatives to make contact prints. In the darkroom, the Shackelfords first placed the glass negative and developing paper into a contact printing frame, a wooden device that pressed and held the negative side of the glass plate and the sensitive side of the photographic paper or postcard firmly together. The frame was then exposed to light produced either by a standard oil lamp or a gas darkroom lamp designed for this purpose. Once exposed, the paper was immersed in a chemical developing solution, rinsed in a tray of water, placed in an acid fixing bath, rinsed again, and dried. When making a cabinet card, the Shackelfords would then glue the finished five-by-seven print to a decorative cardboard mount. For real photo postcards, the family used an adapter that would allow the photosensitive postcard to be placed into the contact frame. These understandings of the Shackelfords' developing process come from the discovery of a contact printing frame in the family's darkroom and instructions found in developing out postcards and other developing papers that were uncovered there as well. See also Michael Pritchard, "Contact Printing and Frames," in *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography*, 335-337.

The Victorian photographic portrait shared this goal, and photographers accomplished it by mimicking the poses and backgrounds found in the paintings of their predecessors in oil. The task of the portrait photographer, like the portrait painter, was not to perfectly represent the likeness of the customer, but instead to *idealize* the sitter, to portray him or her as dignified, noble, and graceful. Customers did their part by arriving at the sitting in their finest attire. It was then the job of the photographer to act as director, to instruct the customer to strike an upright, refined pose and hold a facial expression that was equal parts confident, sober, and pensive. Photographers also kept their studios stocked with a range of backgrounds and props, such as a Grecian column, a fine table or chair, a bouquet of flowers, a parasol, or a book. These objects enhanced a portrait's overall theme of civility and status. [46]

In the second half of the nineteenth century, photographers' repeated uses of a number of stock poses, props, and backgrounds constituted a rhetoric of American photographic portraiture, a visual language that lasted well into the twentieth century. A few Victorian portraits will illustrate these photographic conventions and be of use later in this discussion (Fig. 2.4 through Fig. 2.11).[47] In a straightforward example, seen in figures 2.4 and 2.5, men and women often posed standing with their bodies turned slightly away from the camera and with one or both arms held behind their backs. Of the props incorporated into Victorian portraits of women, parasols—symbols of the leisure and luxury of material comfort—were a frequent choice, as illustrated by the portrait in

[46] For more on these and other aspects of Victorian photography, see Audrey Linkman, "Photography and Art Theory," in *The Victorians: Photographic Portraits,* 33-53.

[47] The following examples and analysis are based on the review of hundreds of portraits from the era seen in books, archives, antique shops, and online. The poses selected here are but a handful of the stock poses that defined Victorian portraiture. These particular poses were selected because they bring to light the aesthetic patterns in the Shackelford family photographs discussed below.

Figure 2.4. Unidentified portrait, Scranton, Pennsylvania, ca. 1880s. Author's collection; photographer unknown.

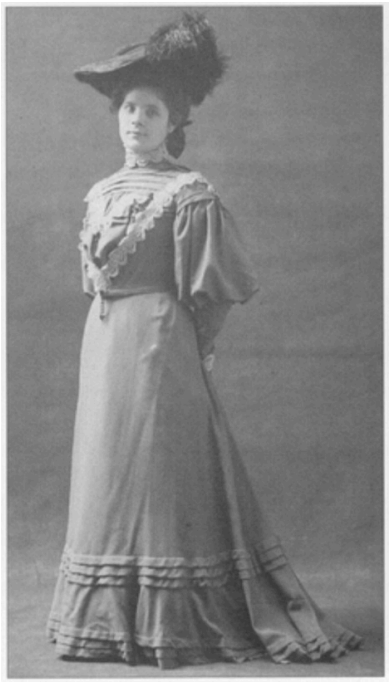

Figure 2.5. Unidentified portrait, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, ca. 1897. Courtesy Dover Pictorial Archive. Harris, *Victorian Fashion in America*, Image 178; photographer unknown.

Figure 2.6. Lottie Campbell, Utah, ca. 1870s. Courtesy Utah State Historical Society, Peoples of Utah Photograph Collection (39222001492722); photographer unknown.

Figure 2.7. Unidentified portrait, Lawrence, Kansas, ca. 1870s. Courtesy of The Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Negatives and Transparencies Collection

Figure 2.8. Unidentified portrait, ca. 1870s. Plummer's Wheeling, West Virginia. Author's collection; photographer unknown.

Figure 2.9. Unidentified portrait, Reading, Pennsylvania, ca. 1880s. Author's collection; photographer unknown.

Figure 2.10. Unidentified portrait, Oshkosh, Wisconsin, ca. 1880s. Author's collection; photograph by Cook Ely.

Figure 2.11. Unidentified portrait, ca. 1890s. Author's collection; photographer unknown.

figure 2.6. Though Victorian culture and the term "Victorian" itself often get historically coded as pertaining only to white society, the woman in figure 2.6 and the man in figure 2.7 are reminders that African Americans were participants in the practice of Victorian portraiture from its earliest days.

For men and women alike, it was common to be photographed standing with one hand resting on a column or, as seen in the image in figure 2.7, on a decorative chair. Portraits of couples and families likewise carried several oft-repeated poses. A regular configuration was the one seen in figures 2.8 and 2.9, in which a man sits comfortably but upright while his wife stands beside or behind him with a supportive hand resting on his shoulder. As such, this pose served as a visual representation of prevailing patriarchal notions of family. This positioning of husband and wife was often used as the foundation for family portraits, with children being added beside the couple or in the husband's lap (Fig. 2.10 and 2.11).

Roland Barthes supplies a useful conceptual framework for understanding the rhetoric of American portrait photography illustrated by these examples. In his essay "The Rhetoric of the Image," Barthes argues that all images are capable of conveying ideological messages because they are produced and viewed in a particular cultural context and because they are part of a visual language that is widely understood by a given society. This visual language, or "rhetoric of the image," is constructed by the repetition of optic cues that signify particular messages. Such visual signifiers are reiterated so frequently by the innumerable pictures that populate daily life that their meanings become common sensical to society at large. After a photograph is produced, it is therefore experienced by its viewer in the context of this broader language of

photography.[48] The portraits above both helped produce and were rendered understandable by the rhetoric of American portraiture. Once this language of portraiture became enmeshed in American culture in the second half of the nineteenth century, posing for a photograph with your arms behind your back, holding a parasol, standing next your husband with your hand on his shoulder, and sitting in a chair surrounded by your wife and children all became immediately understandable techniques for portraying gentility and sophistication.

This rhetoric of American portraiture also evolved over time and was shaped by changing photographic formats. The ease with which real photo postcards could be produced by photographers and the affordability they offered customers made them immensely popular in the United States and accelerated a national engagement with the photographic medium.[49] Liberated from the confines of the studio by the advent of the dry plate negative, turn-of-the-century portrait photographers like the Shackelfords could work exclusively outdoors. The must-have Victorian props were taken outside and a large section of oilcloth or even a quilt could serve as a backdrop. Once developed and cropped, photographic portraits taken *en plein air* would appear to have been taken inside a state-of-the-art studio.

Along with the proliferation of the community photographer at the turn of the twentieth century came fresh portrait practices catalyzed by the newfound portability of the camera. Photographers began to take outdoor group portraits that included families, church congregations, school children, civic organizations, and even entire communities.

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[48] Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image/Music/Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

[49] Though an average price of an early twentieth-century real photo postcard could not be located, Sante and Vaule describe real photo postcards as being "cheap" and "affordable" respectively. Sante, *Folk Photography*, 10, and Vaule, *As We Were*, 120.

In addition to representing people, photographic portraits had taken on an additional objective—conveying a sense of place. People posed for portraits with the backdrops of their everyday lives—their homes, their churches, their schools, their neighborhoods, or perhaps the landscape surrounding their rural cabins. Everyday Americans began to use portraiture to express not just who they were, but also where they were.[50]

Amid these changes, many of photographic portraiture's Victorian conventions remained. People were still photographed in their finest attire, they still held the same stock Victorian poses, and they still grasped the same objects; only by 1900 they often did this in front of a manicured shrub or a building rather than in a portrait studio. For example, the photograph of an unidentified couple in figure 2.12 was taken around 1900 in Black River Falls, Wisconsin. The portrait contains the standard pose for couples and

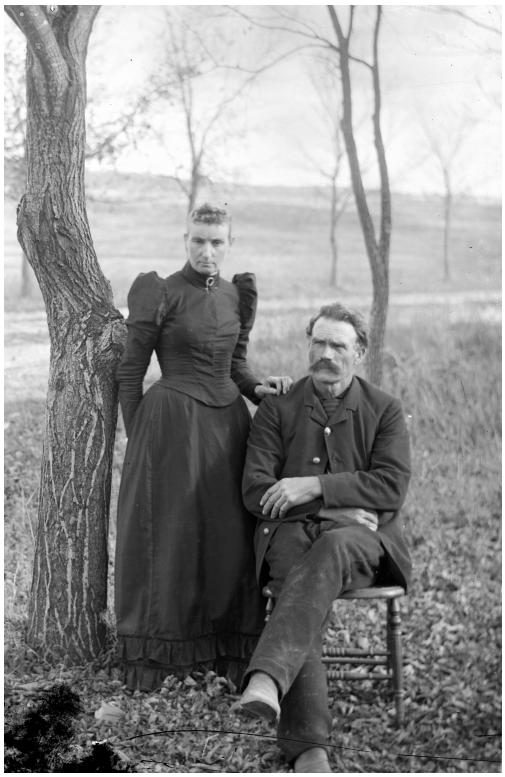

Figure 2.12. Unidentified portrait, Black River Falls, Wisconsin, ca. 1900. Courtesy Wisconsin Historical Association, Charles Van Schaik Photographs and Negatives Collection (32529); photograph by Charles Van Schaik.

[50] Here again, the photographs themselves tell the story. Starting around 1900, and corresponding with the proliferation of the real photo postcard community photographer, there is a discernible shift in which portraits are more frequently taken outdoors and become place-specific.

reflects the qualities of the Victorian studio portraits discussed above. But, this couple was photographed outside, next to a tree with the rural landscape and a country road behind them.

Taken in southeastern Louisiana, the portrait in figure 2.13 illustrates another significant blending of old photographic conventions with new locations. Two women and a man stand in front of a home, which immediately informs the viewer that this is a domestic portrait. Though the exact relationships between the individuals cannot be discerned, their ages indicate the likelihood that the man and woman on either side of the image are husband and wife and that the woman in the center is their daughter.

Figure 2.13. Unidentified portrait, in or near Hammond, Louisiana, ca. 1900s. Center for Southeast Louisiana Studies, Southeastern Louisiana University, Piney Woods People Photography Collection (H465); photograph by Arch Lee Blush.

The woman to the far left stands beneath a tree with her hand grasping one of its limbs. The woman in the center of the frame is finely dressed in a hat, blouse, and long skirt. She stands with her right hand behind her back—a standard Victorian pose—and her left displaying a parasol. The man on the far right has likewise been arranged into one of the usual Victorian positions, standing with both arms behind his back and turned from the camera at a forty-five degree angle. When this photograph was taken, in the first decade of the twentieth century, these poses as well as the incorporation of the parasol were facets of portraiture that were at least sixty years old in the United States.

What was new in the portrait in figure 2.13, however, was its location, an outdoor setting with the family standing in front of the home. The family members are not arranged near one another and are in fact markedly separated. They are fanned out in front of the house allowing the viewer to take in the elegance of the home, yard, and porch, which is lined with potted plants and tables and chairs draped with decorative linens. The house and family are on display in equal measure, and this arrangement of a family in front of a home appears time and again in portraits from the era.

Posing for a portrait had become a meaningful and accessible moment of identity formation and cultural production that was not to be taken lightly; it was an opportunity to define oneself and preserve one's likeness in a tangible and semi-permanent visual format. Historian of photography Alan Trachtenberg argues that the proliferation of portraiture in the nineteenth century instilled in people "a new way of seeing themselves in the eyes of others, seeing oneself as an image."[51] He goes on to write, "A new form of

[51] Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs : Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 29.

social identity begins to emerge, to take shape and body, in these earliest photographs."[52] While posing for portraits, turn-of-the-century Americans performed a certain version of themselves. Whether taken in a photo studio or another outdoor location, the goal of the photographic portrait in the early twentieth century was the same as it had been in the nineteenth century—to convey an air of cosmopolitan status and nobility. Miles Orvell speaks to this phenomenon while referencing the standard photographic conventions discussed above, stating that "the studio portrait afforded an occasion for defining the self in conformity with prevailing norms of appearance and taste."[53] At the same time, advances in photographic technology had rendered portraits inexpensive and accessible. Using the same poses, expressions, and props as the nation's elite, members of the working class—factory workers, laundresses, domestics, farm laborers—could employ portraiture in the production and preservation of a dignified and refined self.

In the United States, this leveling of portraiture's cultural playing field was particularly significant for black southerners, whose subjugation via Jim Crow was perpetuated by pictures. The ideology of white supremacy and the presumed biological inferiority of the black race was created, depicted, and repeated in multiple aspects of American popular culture in an attempt to normalize the idea that African Americans were members of an inferior race. A visual discourse aimed at dehumanizing and humiliating black people and consisting of racist caricatures was circulated throughout the nation on postcards, sheet music covers, advertisements, and other illustrated ephemera. The sheer size of this visual discourse—the number of these images traveling

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[52] Ibid.
[53] Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 90.

throughout the nation—cannot be exaggerated. They were an inescapable aspect of American life, as were the harmful messages they carried.[54]

Such pictures were also regionally specific, being directed in great part at rural black southerners. A few examples will illustrate the regional character of these damaging depictions and their status as the backdrop against which African Americans of the time posed for portraits. Produced in 1907, the sheet music cover for the song "Why Was I Ever Born Lazy," reflects many of the stereotypes found in the era's pictorial ephemera (Fig. 2.14). The song's lyrics, written by a white lyricist in New York City, describe a shiftless "coon" who refuses to work and expects his wife to provide for him.[55]

Figure 2.14. Illustrated cover of sheet music for the song "Why Was I Ever Born Lazy," 1907. Courtesy Temple University Libraries, Temple Sheet Music Collections (bsm0329); produced by H. J. Wood Co., New York, New York.

[54] For foundational analyses of such visual products, see Goings, *Mammy and Uncle Mose*; Lemons, "Black Stereotypes as Reflected in *Popular Culture*, 1880-1920"; and Williams-Forson, *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs*. For analyses of a handful of illustrated caricatures aimed at black musicians, see chapter 4.
[55] Sheet music for Billy Levere and Dawson Wood, "Why Was I Ever Born Lazy," H. J. Wood Co., New York, 1907, Temple Sheet Music Digital Collections (bsm0329), Temple University Libraries.

This narrative is played out on the sheet music cover itself, with its portrayal of a black woman washing clothes while looking down disapprovingly at her husband, who is fast asleep with his head on the rail of a fence. The tree with Spanish moss hanging from its limbs, the river, and the steamboat off in the distance set the scene for the illustration—this is the rural countryside.

The woman pictured is immediately identifiable as a mammy figure by her heavy-set frame and the red kerchiefs around her neck and on her head. She is dressed not in recreational or formal attire but in her work clothes—a defining characteristic of the trope of the mammy. Illustrations of the mammy figure, like this one, often portray her as having no leisure time of her own, no personal life, and no children. The mammy is perpetually in service of a white employer or master, cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, and raising their children. In the image in figure 2.14, the woman's lips are colored red in an effort to dehumanize her, and the large hoop earring in her ear, a signifier of African aesthetics, is meant to further exoticize her appearance.

The caricature of the woman's sleeping husband likewise communicates pointed messages. As is the case with his wife, his lips have been colored red and are exaggerated in size. His clothes are in tatters and reflect an inability—whether it be financial or cultural—to dress in contemporary fashions. The song's title, printed at the top of the illustration, leaves no mistake about the image's most prominent message—black men are lazy. Photographs of the song's white composer, lyricist, and a young performer are set into the image, and their stately appearances serve to accentuate the differences between whites and blacks. The whites pictured are worthy of the realistic medium of

photographic portraiture, while the black couple is relegated to the realm of illustrated caricature where likenesses can be manipulated and lampooned.

The trope of the lazy black man is repeated in the postcard in figure 2.15. As in the previous example, we see a black man in a rural setting leaning up against a fence rather than laboring in the field. The enormous red lips appear in this illustration as well, and the giant slice of watermelon acts as a goofy grin, communicating to the viewer how content this man is in his shiftlessness. As is the case in the sheet music cover discussed above, printed (and sarcastic) text works to make the overall message of the image inescapable: "You can clearly see how miserable I am."

Figure 2.15. Postcard, 1907. Author's collection.

It should be added that illustrated caricatures like those in figures 2.14 and 2.15 were a national and not a southern phenomenon, as they were often printed in northern urban centers.[56] The sheet music cover for "Why Was I Ever Born Lazy," for example, was published in New York City, and the postcard in figure 2.15 was mailed in 1907

[56] See Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 151-167.

from Coteau, North Dakota to Kermit, North Dakota, and may have never been south of the Mason-Dixon Line.[57]

Produced in 1901 by Russell Brothers Studio in Anniston, Alabama, the photograph of two black boys and two black men in figure 2.16 stands as an example of a stereotypical image that was produced in the South. More importantly, it highlights the fact that in the early twentieth century the photographic medium was increasingly being used for hegemonic purposes.[58] The barn, field, and trees in the background of the photograph make the viewer aware that this picture was taken in a rural setting.

Figure 2.16. "Short Distance Telophone in Alabam,'" 1901. Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, (LC-USZ62-27871); produced by Russell Brothers Studio, Anniston, Alabama.

[57] The mailing addresses of the sender and recipient are handwritten on the back of the postcard, along with the 1907 postmark.

[58] On photography and hegemony in the early twentieth century see John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

Though all photographic portraits indeed represent the performances of those pictured, it is clear that the posing here was particularly staged. The four men were being directed by the photographer or another observer to hold specific poses meant to convey a certain message. In the center of the frame, the two boys sit facing one another on a mule, while one man speaks into the mule's ear and another listens through its tail. The phrase "Short Distance Telophone in Alabam'" is inscribed at the bottom of the print as the punch line for the intended joke. The message is unmistakable: rural black southerners are simple, unintelligent, and lacking in cultural and technological sophistication. The misspelling of the word "telephone," along with the dialectical spelling "Alabam'" reiterate these themes, and the inclusion of these men's location—Alabama—makes it clear that it is rural black southerners and black Alabamians in particular who are being derided.

Surrounded by such damaging depictions, black people across the United States were using the same format—pictures—to create positive and affirming self-representations. This was the era of the New Negro, a time when black people throughout the nation were using various modes of cultural production to redefine black identity and distance themselves from damaging stereotypes and the folk culture of slavery.[59] Posing for a portrait was indeed a method black Americans used to preserve memories, honor family and loved ones, and commemorate events. At the same time, however, posing for a portrait was an opportunity to engage in an affirming act of visual self-definition that refuted the stereotypical caricatures discussed above. Having a portrait made was an opportunity to present oneself as deserving of empathy and opportunity and worthiness of social equality and civic responsibility.

[59] On the New Negro see Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Gene Andrew Jarrett, eds., *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, and African American Culture, 1892-1938* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

Produced by unknown photographers, a few examples of everyday twentieth century real photo postcards—the era's affordable and accessible portrait format—will illustrate the point. The postcard portraits in figures 2.17 through 2.19 were taken between 1900 and 1920. Those pictured have not been identified, and the locations where these portraits were made are unknown. Nonetheless, each portrait represents a self-affirming act rendered understandable by the rhetoric of American portraiture outlined above.

In particular, the poses used in these portraits do important cultural work that becomes clear when these images are read alongside the photographic portraits discussed above. The woman in figure 2.17 stands in one of the most common poses of the era, looking into the camera with her body turned at a forty-five degree angle and her arms held behind her back. The man and woman in figure 2.18 hold the stock pose for couples, with the man casually sitting with legs crossed and his wife standing to his left with her hand on his shoulder. This pose is seen again in figure 2.19, only in an outdoor setting. This image appears to be a portrait of an extended family, with the older woman on the left most likely being the mother of the younger man or woman. The home in the background is reflective of contemporary photographic practices, with the potted plants and the open door offering a glimpse into the house's interior, contributing an air of domesticity.

These are but three postcards portraits, but they represent a national photographic engagement with what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham terms the politics of respectability. In *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*, Higginbotham argues that the black Baptist women's movement of the late

Figure 2.17. Unidentified portrait, ca. 1900. Courtesy of Emory University Manuscripts, Archives, & Rare Book Library, Robert Langmuir African American Photograph Collection (MSS1218_b073_i388); photographer unknown.

Figure 2.18. Unidentified portrait, ca. 1910s. Courtesy of Emory University Manuscripts, Archives, & Rare Book Library, Robert Langmuir African American Photograph Collection (MSS1218_b072_i293); photographer unknown.

Figure 2.19. Unidentified portrait, ca. 1910s. Courtesy of Emory University Manuscripts, Archives, & Rare Book Library, Robert Langmuir African American Photograph Collection (MSS1218_b072_i405); photographer unknown.

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was in part defined by a politics of respectability—an emphasis on practicing and displaying respectable, moral, and dignified behavior in moments of positive self-definition and self-representation. According to Higginbotham, with their writings, speeches, and everyday comportment, black church women created a discourse of respectability intended to subvert the structural oppression of white supremacy by counteracting the multimedial discourse that perpetuated its racist ideology.[60] Likewise, the politics of respectability constituted a strategy of racial uplift in which the display of such behaviors was also intended to serve as an example for other African Americans. Higginbotham may have devised the term when addressing church women, but African Americans from all walks of life engaged in the politics of respectability in an array of expressive modes, including portraits like those exemplified above.

[60] Higginbotham, "The Politics of Respectability," in *Righteous Discontent*, 185-230.

In the turn-of-the-century United States, the prevailing photographic rhetoric offered black people an avenue for visually performing the politics of respectability. Such a strategy was effective in large part because American portraiture's defining poses and props had themselves existed for decades to convey respectability and civility. In their portraits, those pictured in figures 2.17 through 2.19 were speaking a national photographic language and creating favorable representations of themselves that were understandable to all participants of American culture. They were contributing to an African American discourse of respectability, to borrow Higginbotham's term, made up of photographic portraits. These three examples represent countless portraits of African Americans that together tell a story that refutes the narrative created by the stereotypical portraits of the day. These are favorable representations of African American identity that convey self-assured pride and accomplishment.

An additional example has particular significance in regard to African Americans' turn-of-the-century creation of a photographic discourse of respectability. Taken in an unidentified location around 1910, in the real photo postcard in figure 2.20 a black woman stands in one of the stock Victorian poses, with her body angled slightly away from the camera and her eyes staring off into the distance. We see in the background not the backdrops and props of a photo studio, but instead the rural landscape—a cotton field, a house, and a barn.

Patricia Hill Collins's concept of black women's self-valuation is particularly useful in understanding the import of the real photo postcard seen in figure 2.20. Collins argues, "When Black females choose to value those aspects of Afro-American womanhood that are stereotyped, ridiculed, and maligned in academic scholarship and

Figure 2.20. Unidentified portrait, ca. 1910s. Courtesy of Emory University Manuscripts, Archives, & Rare Book Library, Robert Langmuir African American Photograph Collection (MSS1218_b073_i249); photographer unknown.

popular culture, they are actually questioning some of the basic ideas used to control dominated groups in general."[61] As we saw in the caricatures above, region and especially rurality were frequently used in visual attempts to externally define not only rural black women, but also rural black Americans in general. In addition to being a photographic enactment of the politics of respectability, the postcard portrait in figure 2.20 was likewise a demonstration of regional self-valuation. With the assistance of a photographer, this rural black woman struck an immediately understandable pose of dignity and respectability, and did so in a cotton field. Because of the portrait's bucolic setting, this image represents a positive affirmation of black female identity that

[61] Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," *Social Problems* 33, no. 6 (1986): S18. I am indebted to the work of Psyche Williams-Forson, which first brought the concept of self-valuation to my attention. See Psyche Williams-Forson, "'Suckin' the Chicken Bone Dry,'" in *Cooking Lessons: The Politics of Gender and Food*, ed. Sherrie A. Inness (New York: Rowmand and Littlefield, 2001), 171.

subverted dominant racist discourses that attempted to use the rural landscape to demean black people and black culture.

It is with this that I return to the Shackelford family in Fayette County. The Shackelfords were indeed themselves rural people, but they were also rural photographers who helped local African Americans engage acts of identify formation and self-valuation. Historians of photography have detailed the cultural work early twentieth-century black portrait photographers undertook in crafting such portraits, but not in the rural areas of the American South.[62] In the Shackelford family's portraits there lies an opportunity not only to address the work of rural black photographers, but likewise the photographic performances of everyday rural black community members.

The Shackelfords were among the new class of turn-of-the-century photographers who incorporated Victorian props, poses, and techniques in the creation of outdoor portraits and community photographs. Both racially and regionally, the black southerners the Shackelfords photographed were the very people being derided in the mass-produced stereotypical illustrations discussed above, and the family's customers certainly encountered such images regularly in advertisements, magazines, and newspapers. They were likewise being photographically ridiculed by whites at home in Fayette County. An example of such a photographic performance produced in early twentieth-century Fayette County can be found in a local history published in the late 1960s. Printed in this volume is a photograph taken in 1902 that depicts twelve white men, calling themselves the

[62] The two most notable scholarly works on the subject are Deborah Willis's chapter "The New Negro Image: 1900-1930," in her seminal *Reflections in Black* and Shaun Michelle Smith's *Photography on the Color Line*, which uses as its primary archive 363 photographs created by various photographers that W. E. B. Du Bois compiled for the American Negro Exhibit at the 1900 Paris Exposition. Willis offers insightful biographies of the lives and work of a number of early twentieth-century black photographers, but they almost all operated out of metropolitan areas like New York, Boston, Chicago, Atlanta, and New Orleans. Likewise, in Smith's work the primary photographer addressed is Thomas E. Askew, who was based in Atlanta.

"Fayette Natives," wearing blackface and donning the top hats and ill-fitting, mismatched, and outlandish clothes characteristic of minstrel performers. It is not clear if this group was a local minstrel troupe that performed regularly or if this was a one-time event, but for this photograph they were referring to themselves as the "Cullud Debating Sassiety."[63] This latter moniker was a pointed form of mockery because African Americans in the area had formed at least one debating society in the nineteenth century to nurture and demonstrate intellectual acumen. Mimicking such organizations was a clear attempt by local whites to undercut black strategies for racial advancement.[64]

In this discursive context, the Shackelford family produced hundreds of portraits of local blacks that communicated dignity, refinement, and respectability. The Shackelford family's understanding of the rhetoric of American portraiture detailed above played a primary role in rendering these photographic messages comprehensible. A handful of examples illustrate this prevailing aspect of the Shackelford family's photography. Figure 2.1, which began this chapter, and figure 2.21 illustrate how a single pose could alone serve as a counterhegemonic personal expression. In both of these portraits, simply dressing fashionably while standing with one's arms behind his or her back—striking the quintessential pose of Victorian photography—served as an expression of gentility and grace. The portrait in figure 2.1 was taken outside of the Shackelford home and was likely cropped to look like it was taken in an interior photo studio. In the portrait in figure 2.21, however, we see the early twentieth-century practice

[63] Marilyn Smith Meachern, ed., *Pictorial History of Fayette County Alabama: Sesquecentennial Broadcaster* (Fayette, AL: Fayette County Broadcaster, 1969), 77.
[64] Written by the paper's white editors, the following notice appeared in a 1879 edition of the *Vernon Clipper* newspaper, which was published just west of the Fayette County line in the Lamar County seat of Vernon: "The colored people in the vicinity of Esqr. J. T. Collins, have organized a Debating Society, at the school house called Temple Star. We learn from Peter M. Shaw, a member, that peace and harmony prevails, and all seem to have a feeling of civilizing interest in the organization." *Vernon Clipper*, November 7, 1879.

of combining the refined dress and pose of studio portraiture with an outdoor setting, in this case a wooded forest. As was the case in figure 2.20, the rural landscape is being emphasized and valued here, positively representing rural southern black womanhood through the language of portraiture.

Figure 2.21. Unidentified portrait, ca. 1910s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.235); photograph by the Shackelford family.

While highlighting the wooded landscape of this woman's everyday life, the portrait in figure 2.21 also showcases her familiarity with modern fashions and link to the national marketplace. In both figure 2.1 and figure 2.21, in fact, contemporary, formal, and stylish attire are used to present the sophistication of black farmers in Alabama. A word on fashion is therefore in order both in terms of these two examples and other portraits discussed in this dissertation. Of the material tools turn-of-the-century African

Americans used to photographically craft their identities, perhaps none was more expressive or readily available than dress. White and White have argued that for black southerners in the age of Jim Crow, wearing stylish, formal attire was a predominant mode of racial expression and affirmation for those living in town and those out in the country.[65] Also, by showcasing the adoption of the nationally agreed upon formal attire in portraits, African Americans indicated a mastery of American culture and a sameness with white America, a commonality with those who claimed to be their racial superiors. It should be added that assumptions that all formally or stylishly dressed African Americans pictured in the Shackelford Collection are middle-class or well-to-do should be avoided. Clothes could be borrowed, and even members of the most impoverished families in the rural South were at times able to purchase or make one piece of formal attire for church or other social occasions.[66] The man and woman in these two examples could be tenant farmers or middle-class landholders.

In addition to their use of the prevailing poses of the day, the Shackelford photographers were adept at turning an outdoor area—whether it was at their house or elsewhere—into a contemporary photo studio. Take for example the portrait of a young man in figure 2.22, which was likely taken at the Shackelford home. An oilcloth screen and a chair covered with decorative linens served as the backdrop and prop. By posing this customer with his left hand on the chair, the Shackelfords connected him—in the most straightforward way—with the broader cultural practices of photographic portraiture exemplified in figure 2.7.

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[65] White and White, *Stylin'*, 172-176.
[66] White and White located a number of primary sources documenting tenant farmers' and other working-class blacks' possession of fine clothing. See White and White, 173-175.

Figure 2.22. Unidentified portrait, ca. early 1920s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.137); photograph by the Shackelford family.

The portrait in figure 2.23 reflects the Shackelfords' mastery of the oft-used pose for couples and its corresponding positive connotations, while the portrait in figure 2.24 illustrates the family's use of the standard positioning for families. The man in figure 2.24 is seated surrounded by children and holding an infant in his lap while his wife stands behind the family. She may not have her hand rested on his shoulder as in the family portraits discussed above, but this arrangement is nonetheless recognizable as the standard and dignified family pose of the era. Moreover, in this image's location we see an act of self-valuation being undertaken by an entire family. So many pictured in the Shackelford Collection, like the couple in figure 2.23, use the side of a building as the

Figure 2.23. Unidentified portrait, ca. 1910s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.101); photograph by the Shackelford family.

Figure 2.24. Unidentified portrait, ca. 1910s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.228); photograph by the Shackelford family.

backdrop for their portraits or a screen hung by the photographers. In this portrait, however, this family, the Shackelfords, or both selected to feature the wooded landscape of the rural South. And once again the fashions, poses, and expressions of the group are rendered understandable by the rhetoric of American portraiture.

In a final example, it becomes clear that the Shackelfords were also versed in the modern photographic techniques for incorporating the built environment into portraits to articulate home ownership and domesticity (Fig. 2.25). Here we see three generations of black women arranged in front of a home in the standard style of the day, introduced in figure 2.13. They strike some of the stock Victorian poses—arms behind the back, a hand on the hip—yet are spread out enough to call attention to their domestic life and the

Figure 2.25. Unidentified portrait, ca. 1910s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.862); photograph by the Shackelford family.

house itself. Though there is no way of knowing with certainty, these women appear to be members of the local home-owning class who are using photographic portraiture to preserve their ties to one another as well as their family home.

In the first years of the twentieth century, a national black photographic movement came to life in the United States. Because photographic portraiture had become affordable, ordinary African Americans could visit a local photographer and use the American rhetoric of portraiture in the enactment of pointed photographic performances. At work here was more than a counterhegemonic movement that upended the racist stereotypes of the day; it was the construction of a national African American identity. Through the language of portraiture, black people across the nation used a series of fashions, poses, settings, and props to create a visual narrative that told a story of black civility, sophistication, and intelligence. The Shackelford family photographers, through their technical skill and understanding of the aesthetics of American portraiture, were potent conduits who enabled between black people in rural Fayette County to participate in this national photographic phenomenon.

Chapter 3 – In Front of the Lens: Community and Photographic Performance

Around 1911, a group of African Americans of all ages convened in front of the Covin schoolhouse to pose for the Shackelford family photographers (Fig. 3.1). Stylishly dressed, they arranged themselves side-by-side, standing and sitting. Some rested hats and purses in their laps, one woman held a child, and three men displayed open books. Several wore smiles or half smiles. They all looked into the camera and maintained their poses while the Shackelford photographers took the picture. This photograph is a record of a still, silent performance, a deliberate tableau in which a group of black southerners used clothing, poses, objects, and a select location to tell a story of community.

The previous chapter detailed how the Shackelford family's expertise in the rhetoric of American portraiture connected people in Fayette County to a national African American movement in which photographs were used to craft racial identities and refute racism. With the group portrait in figure 3.1 as its focus, this chapter addresses the other side of the Shackelfords' lens, emphasizing the performances of those who posed for this family of photographers. The distinction between the portrait itself, the tangible object, and the performance responsible for it is nuanced but noteworthy. In the early twentieth century, deliberate choices were made in the moments before a photograph was taken, and standing or sitting in front of a camera, readying oneself, and giving a brief, motionless performance was a meaningful form of cultural production and one worthy of investigation. Explored in this chapter are the fleeting, seconds-long moments in time responsible for the Shackelfords' portraits. In unpacking these performances, this chapter illustrates how men and women across Fayette County collectively used portraiture as a tool for community development and counterhegemonic cultural expression.

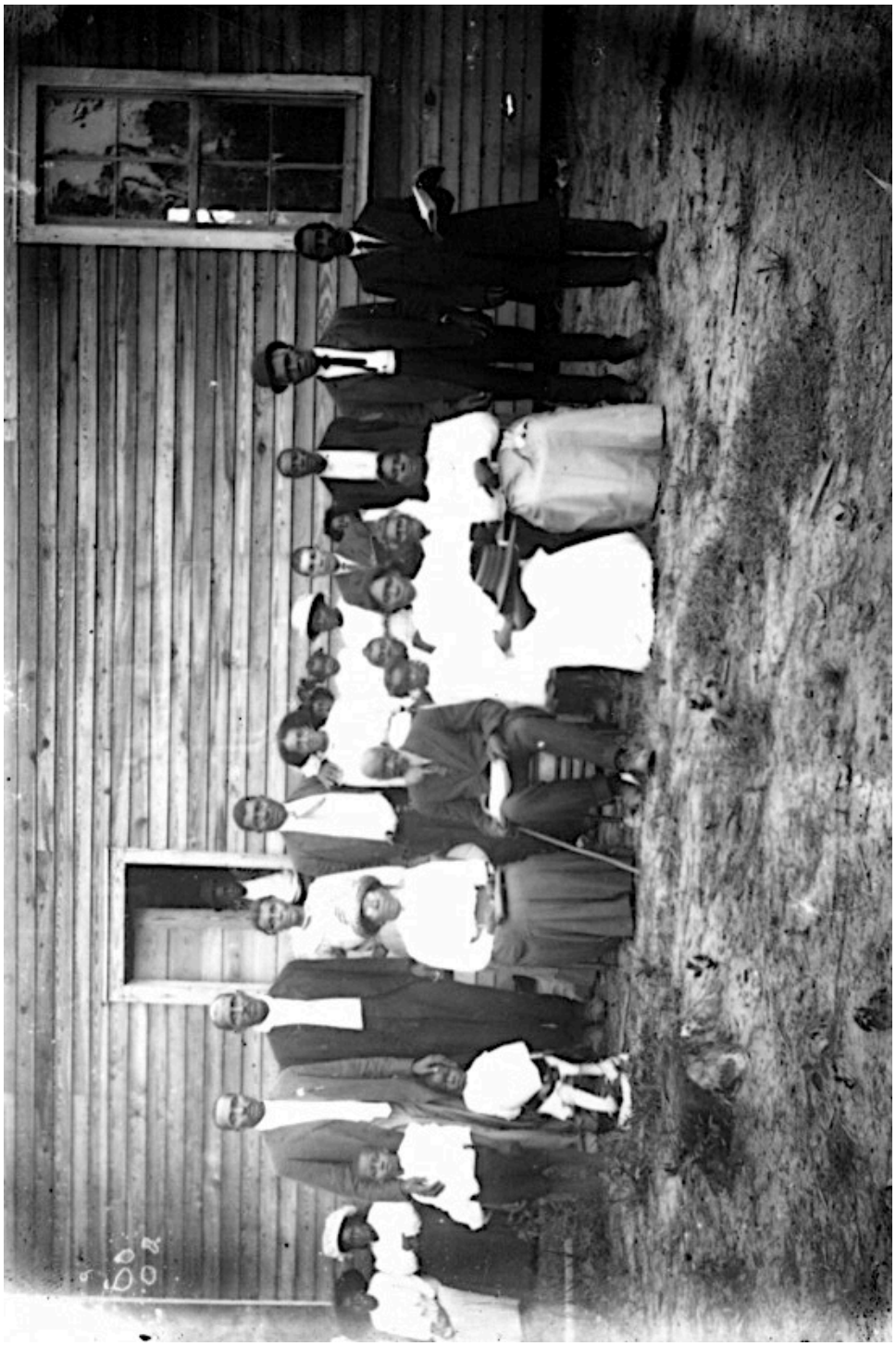

Figure 3.1. Unidentified group portrait, ca. 1911. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.126); photograph by the Shackelford family.

As detailed in chapter 1, blacks in Fayette County endured disfranchisement, segregation, the consistent threat of violence, and the other forms of racial oppression that constituted Jim Crow society. In this context, robust black communities were a necessity not only for everyday social and cultural life, but also for survival and group advancement. Churches and schools were community foundations, but these institutions were not enough. Communities had to be nurtured, communal values had to be reiterated, and ties among members had to be cultivated. In black communities across the South, these necessities of community life were carried out through performances such as church revivals, school exhibitions, speeches, concerts, singings, parades, and dances. This chapter will detail ways in posing for a portrait could also serve as such a community development strategy.[1]

The question at hand is, how could carrying out such a performance—posing for a photograph—enhance black community life in Fayette County? This chapter's analysis of the black photographic expressions preserved in the Shackelford Collection offers three answers. First, African Americans in northwest Alabama defined their communities with pictures. They used photographic performance to highlight shared ideologies, customs, and goals. Photographic performance was a form of visual storytelling that succinctly

[1] This chapter takes its definition of the term *community* from the work of historian Thomas Bender. Bender acknowledges the salience of the standard sociological definition of community, which holds that communities come into being when people who live near one another and have shared history, struggles, and interests form social organizations and engage in collective activities. However, he contributes the notion that communities take shape as a result of profound affective and emotional experiences shared among members. In Bender's estimation, community has an "experiential dimension that is crucial to its definition," and members of a given community are "bound together by affective or emotional ties rather than by a perception of individual self-interest." In his words, "Community, then, can be defined better as an experience than a place." Proximity and locality are not perquisites for community in this view because people can participate in communities fashioned by shared traits, experiences, struggles, and goals that supersede proximity and do not necessitate face-to-face interaction among members. This chapter will unpack ways that posing for a photograph served as one of many experiences that brought into being what Bender calls the "sense of we-ness" in Fayette County's black communities. See Thomas Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 6-7.

narrated what mattered most to community members, in turn giving rise to the community itself. Second, posing for a photograph was a method blacks used to publicly demonstrate and validate their personal bonds and the vibrancy of their communities. And third, photographic portraiture was a place-making exercise responsible for creating and disseminating local geographic knowledge.

Photography differs from drawing, painting, and other visual art forms in that the referent—the person, place, or thing pictured—is a necessity for the image's production; it must exist in front of the camera in order for the photograph to come into being. In terms of photographic portraiture, this reality means that the very presence of the subject makes him or her the photographer's co-author of the image—an indispensible producer of the photograph itself. Roland Barthes eloquently articulated this unique aspect of photography when he wrote, "The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me."[2] In Barthes's estimation, the camera is capable of not only precisely mimicking the shapes, tones, and textures of our bodies and clothing, but also of capturing our emanations, projections of ourselves that have thumb-print uniqueness. When viewed in this way, it becomes clear that standing or sitting in front of a camera is an effortless yet active form of personal expression. While posing for a portrait, we produce ourselves, and the camera records these productions, preserving them while also making them portable and reproducible.

Diana Taylor offers additional vocabulary and conceptual tools that are useful for this chapter's examination of the performance of portraiture. Taylor defines the term

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[2] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 80.

performance itself as "the many practices and events—dance, theatre, ritual, political rallies, funerals—that involve theatrical, rehearsed, or conventional/event appropriate behaviors."[3] She goes on to note that all performances are, by definition, framed and bracketed off from everyday social life. In this view, performances are distinct and deliberately theatrical events with a beginning and an end whose operations are rooted in tradition. Funerals, dances, plays, and countless other performance types are influenced by culturally specific norms that mold them and make them understandable to the audience. Particularly germane to this discussion is Taylor's argument that all performances disseminate social knowledge and help construct the identities of the performers and the audience.[4]

Early twentieth-century portrait photography had all of the components of Taylor's conception of performance. It was theatrical, it was shaped by prevailing conventions (the rhetoric of American portraiture detailed in the previous chapter), it had a beginning and an end, and it was bracketed off from other social activities. People prepared for photographic performances by selecting clothing, poses, and objects. The moment they stepped in front of the camera, the performance began, and they acted out the version of themselves they wanted to present before walking away, thereby bringing the performance to an end.

In this sense, photographic performances like the example in figure 3.1 and other portraits taken by the Shackelford family were akin to the theatrical practice of *tableau*

[3] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 3.
[4] Ibid., 2-3.

vivant, or living picture.[5] A tableau is created when costumed actors arrange themselves on a stage or in another setting in a soundless and motionless scene. With roots in British theater, by the second half of the nineteenth century performing tableau had become a form of middle- and upper-class parlor entertainment in England and the United States.[6] Historical scenes and famous works of art were common tableau subjects, as was the depiction of various themes of civic virtue.[7]

The community portrait in figure 3.1 is representative of so many others in the Shackelford Collection in that its enactment is in effect the creation of a tableau vivant. In the Shackelford photographs, the landscape and built environment of northwest Alabama—churches, schools, trees, and fields—served as stages. In this case, the setting is the Covin schoolhouse. Those pictured, the actors, arrived at the photo session formally dressed in suits, elegant skirts and blouses, and hats trimmed with flowers. Under the direction of the Shackelford photographers, they made decisions about how to arrange themselves and pose, standing and sitting so everyone can be seen. The oldest people pictured are seated at the center of the frame, which was often a place of emphasis in the Shackelford family's group photographs. Props were included as well. The bearded man in the center of the group, the young man standing fourth from the right, and the man at the far right each displayed an open book. Once this tableau was crafted, those pictured held their positions while this performance was preserved with the Shackelford family's camera.

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[5] Barthes describes photography as "a kind of primitive theater, a kind of *Tableau Vivant*." Barthes, *Camera Lucia*, 32.
[6] See Robert M. Lewis, "Parlor Theatricals in Victorian America," *Revue Française d'Études Américaines* 36 (1988): 280-291.
[7] David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 16-18.

The photograph that resulted from this tableau became a personal keepsake and a document of African American life in Fayette County. Yet, even if the camera had not been present to preserve it, this performance would nonetheless have been a meaningful cultural act. Taylor's work is helpful here as well, as she makes the important distinction between what she names the *archive* and the *repertoire*—two terms that are useful for understanding how the photographic tableaus performed by black people in Fayette County were culturally significant in and of themselves, independently of the portraits they helped to produce. Taylor uses the term *archive* in reference to material artifacts from the past like letters, maps, films, objects, newspapers, official records, and of course photographs. The *repertoire* is made up of ephemeral, fleeting, and embodied acts and performances, such as speaking, dancing, music-making, walking, and acting, that constitute our everyday lives and define a culture or society.[8]

The archive of early twentieth century African American life in Fayette County consists of the tangible primary sources referenced throughout these pages—the Shackelford family's glass plate negatives, newspaper articles, government documents, church meeting minutes, school records, and so forth. Fayette County's repertoire includes the mundane daily activities that took place throughout this black community, such as singing in a field, attending a church service, or marching with a fraternal order. In historical research, the artifacts that make up the archive of a given time and place are easy to acquire, but to truly understand the lives of a community past, we must access the fleeting performances that constituted its repertoire, for, as Taylor suggests, these were essential techniques of knowledge creation and identity. In this chapter, the photographic

[8] Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 19-23.

archive that is the Shackelford Collection is used to recapture a primary component of the Fayette County's black repertoire—posing for a picture.

Such an approach to the Shackelford photographs has two primary advantages. First, this method highlights the agency of those pictured. As discussed above, all portraits involve at least two authors—the photographer and the person or persons photographed. A performance approach provides an opportunity to hone in on the contributions of those standing in front of the camera. In turn-of-the-century northwest Alabama, the majority of black people could not afford the photographic equipment or training that the Shackelfords were able to acquire. They did not have the means to become photographic "artists." Yet, posing for a portrait could undoubtedly be a type of creative expression and one that required no special skills or training. It was an everyday mode of performance whose conventions people could easily learn under the direction of a photographer and by looking at the countless portraits they encountered in their daily lives. Though they certainly took instruction from the Shackelfords while having their pictures made, each person who posed for these photographers was the only one who could project his or her distinct emanation, who could perform his or her self.

The second advantage of a performance approach is that it recovers the repertoire of African American photography in early twentieth century Fayette County, the performance of a photographic tableau that was enacted while the picture was taken. The common vernacular in visual studies refers to the methodological act of "reading the image," of analyzing a picture to understand its cultural and historical messages and impact. Here, the goal is to read the performance, to step *through* the photographs to

understand the performances responsible for them, privileging this process over the photograph, accentuating the repertoire more than the archive.

It is with this in mind that I turn to the photograph in figure 3.1 to unpack the ways portrait photography served as an essential performance strategy for nourishing collective ideologies and constructing community. The day this group posed for their portrait, a gathering was taking place at the Covin schoolhouse.[9] It could have been a social event, such as a school meeting or church revival, or the Shackelfords could have been taking pictures at the schoolhouse that day, as they were known to do.[10] Either way, twenty-five people congregated in front of the schoolhouse to pose for the portrait in figure 3.1. The only identified individuals in the picture are C. I. Hewitt, the teacher and minister introduced in detail in the following chapter, and Geneva Shackelford. Hewitt stands to the far left of the frame with his sons Joe and Rufus while Geneva Shackelford stands third from the left with her right hand on her hip.[11] Though their names remain unknown, many of the others seen here are men and women whose faces appear most frequently in the Shackelford Collection photographs, indicating that they are Fayette County locals and not visitors from elsewhere. Those present may have all lived in Covin, as did C. I. Hewitt and Geneva Shackelford, or some may have come from other parts of the region. Either way, this is a portrait of community.[12]

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[9] In an interview with the author, Clyde Wilson, who was born and raised in Covin, identified the building in figure 3.1 as the Covin schoolhouse. Clyde Wilson, interview by author, September 15, 2011.
[10] Warda Prewitt, interview by author, March 21, 2012.
[11] 1910 U.S. Census, Fayette County, Alabama, Population Schedule, Precinct 1, page 12B, dwelling 127, accessed via ancestry.com May 5, 2014.
[12] As will be further detailed in the chapters that follow, black people from across Fayette County and other parts of northwest Alabama were linked to one another by kinship and social networks formed by institutions like church associations, schools organizations, and singing associations. They also traveled to one another's communities to attend a series of regional events. In turn, the region's African Americans were members of local communities that took shape around the church and school and a more expansive

In the photograph in figure 3.1, like so many in the Shackelford collection, photographic performance is being used to narrate a number of shared values and ideologies. To begin, those pictured are accentuating a primary value—each other. They were enacting the communal body itself, the personal bonds among them. This is the most immediately identifiable aspect of this performance. Black people from in and around Fayette County had assembled to stand and sit side-by-side, to be seen as a multitude in front of one their central public spaces. Within this larger group, there were several families. For example, C. I. Hewitt posed with his two sons Joe and Rufus. The oldest of the boys leaned back onto the legs of his father, who placed his right arm around him while resting his left hand lovingly on the head of his youngest son. There were other children in the group as well, and in the back row a mother held a toddler in her arms. Likewise, a smiling couple stood near the center, the man resting his arm on the shoulder of his wife.[13] In this tableau, those pictured were defining themselves as family, spouses, and friends, emphasizing the smaller kinship units and relationships woven together to produce the community writ large. In addition, the poses here are more relaxed and informal than the portraits discussed in the previous chapter; members of this group are physically articulating the comfort that comes with interpersonal familiarity. Their confident facial expressions and the faint smiles scattered throughout the crowd project a pride in their community and a joy found in their collective lives and accomplishments.

As outlined in chapter 1, in the small communities scattered across Fayette County's countryside, black people established churches, schools, and fraternal orders

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regional black community. Those seen in figure 3.1, who appear so often in the Shackelford Collection photographs, are in turn members of a community, though we do not know if it is local or regional in nature.

[13] This unidentified couple appears multiple times in the Shackelford Collection photographs. See photo 877.460 and photo 877.326, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs, Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts.

and relied on these organizations as institutions of self-help used to navigate the challenges Jim Crow. An element of collective support was in turn a defining aspect of these black communities. To produce this photograph, a large group of black people—some of whom were old enough to have been former slaves—convened in front of a black schoolhouse to have their picture taken by a black photographer. They were enacting and recording the existence of their community, which was a simple yet significant act in and of itself.

In their communities, African Americans in Fayette County also crafted counterhegemonic strategies for racial advancement. Performance, in the form of the politics of respectability, was chief among them. As illustrated in the previous chapter, the politics of respectability were indeed at play in the Shackelford family portraits. Two examples will likewise illustrate that throughout the region this form of racial self-definition and self-representation was a widely adopted method for subverting white supremacy. When speaking at the 1909 meeting of the Davis Creek and Holly Spring Baptist Association, George Brent, a sixty-two-year-old former slave, minister, and respected elder in Fayette County said:

> We are here representing a great cause for the Master and for the advancement of the race. As a denomination we should become strong, the denomination is suffering for leaders who are able to defend the doctrine and *represent our cause to the public as a race* [emphasis added] and we should play our part in the great struggle of advancement. . . . Brother we the negro of west Alabama need to arise and fall into line and play our part in the great struggle for advancement.[14]

Nine years earlier, an editorial in a local black newspaper addressed this same strategy. Published in Walker County, Alabama, which bordered Fayette County to the east, the *Patton Pointer* was the only known black paper in northwest Alabama during the early

[14] Minutes of the Third Annual Session of the Davis Creek and Holly Spring Baptist Association, Alabama African American Baptist Annuals, 1873-1994, Reel 6, Samford University Library Special Collections.

twentieth century. The paper's editor, James T. Nall, was a child of former slaves who was born in Fayette County in 1865.[15] In the August 10, 1900, edition of the newspaper, Nall wrote the following in a weekly column called "Race Review":

> Capital is what the race needs, and not until we can learn to take care of ourselves financially can we expect to get the recognition which we desire. We must learn to conduct ourselves in an orderly and decorous manner wherever we are. By doing so we will win the respect of those with whom we come in contact…. We must learn to rely upon our own resources and not upon the resources of other people. That is one of the surest and best methods to demand recognition.[16]

Just as Brent encouraged local blacks to "represent our cause to the public as a race," Nall's statement that "we must conduct ourselves in an orderly and decorous manner wherever we are" to "win the respect of those with whom we come in contact," was a public promotion of the politics of representation as an uplift strategy. It is also worth noting that Nall's editorial's emphasis on using capital and economic self-sufficiency as a means of gaining "respect" and "recognition" speaks to another and related model for uplift in the region, which was Booker T. Washington's economic program.[17]

The group portrait in figure 3.1 and others like it represent how the politics of respectability manifested itself in Fayette County on the photographic stage. Such photographic performances were acts of self-validation whose intended audience included the surrounding black community, the local white community, and of course the family and friends who would see and perhaps receive a copy of this picture. The role of dress and pose in such portraits was addressed in the previous chapter. What is of interest here is the use of objects in this tableau, namely three books. The Shackelford family

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[15] In his memoir *Freeborn Slave*, James T. Nall's brother Jasper Rastus Nall identifies James as the editor of the *Patton Pointer*. Nall, *Freeborn Slave*, 87. 1910 U.S. Census, Walker County, Alabama, Population Schedule, Precinct 18, page 2, dwelling 29, accessed via ancestry.com May 5, 2014.
[16] *Patton Pointer*, August 10, 1900.
[17] Fayette County blacks' engagement with Washington's model is further detailed in the following chapter.

photographers emphasized the incorporation of objects into their portraits, and it was a practice that their customers engaged in regularly. Throughout the Shackelford Collection, people can be seen posing with pocket watches, parasols, pins and broaches, horses and buggies, automobiles, and musical instruments. While posing for the Shackelfords, people unlocked new utilities for mundane objects. Individuals and groups used objects in ways that extended beyond their original purpose, turning everyday artifacts into storytelling devices.

Of the various objects used in the Shackelfords' portraits of African Americans, books, pads, and writing utensils appear most frequently. In the portrait in figure 3.1, the elderly man at the center of the frame rests an open book in his lap. A young man near the center of the image—with a book or notepad in his left hand and a pen or pencil in his right—acts as though he is writing. And, the man standing at the far right displays an open book in his left hand. It is unfortunately impossible to ascertain exactly what books these three men were displaying. Other group photographs from the era and prevailing cultural traditions in the region would lead one to believe that at least one of these volumes was a Bible, which would unlock a range of meanings for this performance. At the end of the day, however, knowledge of the precise words written on these texts is not a necessity for comprehending the various messages that are communicated by these books.

In figure 3.1, books are being used to highlight a central value of this community and a primary facet of the politics of representation—learnedness. After emancipation, black people in northwest Alabama, like those across the South, immediately started schools to educate children and the countless adults who craved they literacy they were

denied during slavery. Learning to read and write was both a pathway for autonomy and an ideological expression of freedom.[18] By prominently featuring books in this photographic tableau, those in figure 3.1 were defining their community as one of learned people, as a body of African Americans who not only possessed and cherished books, but also, thanks to the young man with the pad and pen at the center of the image, people who knew how to comprehend and utilize the written word. Of the countless objects they could have chosen to display in this performance, it was books—and several of them—that this group opted to use in their photograph. These were objects that they held dear, and the presence of books in this performance has important implications.

Those pictured in figure 3.1 were acting out more than literacy; they were performing civic readiness. It is worth revisiting here the fact that Alabama's 1901 constitution disfranchised black voters in part by making the passage of a literacy test—administered by local officials and easily tampered with—a prerequisite for suffrage.[19] In 1908, only two or three years before this photograph was taken, only twelve black men in Fayette County were registered to vote.[20] Yet here, in one photograph, were three black men articulating their possession of a primary suffrage requirement and the fact that they were knowledgeable people capable of making sound decisions in the voting booth.

Just as literacy was in and of itself a tremendous advantage for daily African American life in the era of Jim Crow, posing for a portrait with a book was an immediately understood expression of intelligence and cultural sophistication used by

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[18] See Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 52-57.
[19] See Rogers et al., *Alabama: History of a Deep South State*, 343-354, and Sarah A. Warren, "1901 Constitutional Convention," in *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Article.jsp?id=h-3030, accessed October 27, 2013.
[20] List of Registered Voters, 1908, Fayette County, Alabama, Local Government/County Records on Microfilm, Box LGM 0009, Reel 05, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

black people throughout the nation.[21] Doing so communicated civility, refinement, and an alignment with high culture. The symbolic connection between books and these traits in Fayette County was clearly articulated at the 1893 annual meeting of the Canaan-Pickensville Baptist Association, a district association that included churches from three northwest Alabama counties—Fayette, Lamar, and Pickens. During his report as chair of the association's education committee, A. G. Johnson summed up the representative power of a book by announcing, "We must Educate! . . . We know that there is not a better safe-guard to our reputation than the love of good books."[22] Here is yet another example of black discourse from northwest Alabama that reiterates the importance of gaining recognition and respect from the white community, phrased in this instance as safeguarding the reputation of the region's black community.

Time and again, African Americans stood or sat in front of the Shackelfords' camera to perform the "love of good books." Two portraits taken at the Shackelford home illustrate this trend. The portrait in figure 3.2 is one of literary action. Here, a man sits in front of the Shackelford porch with his left foot on his right knee. He looks thoughtfully into the distance, with a pen resting in his right hand and an open pad in his left. He is reflecting, choosing his words before putting pen to paper. The woman pictured in figure 3.3 chose a different approach for her literary performance. Rather than interacting with the book in her right hand, she displays it, holding it up for all to see. Her

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[21] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham points out that black magazines of the era frequently included portraits of people reading. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "Rethinking Vernacular Culture: Black Religion and Race Records in the 1920s and 1930s," in *The House That Race Built: Black Americans, U.S. Terrain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), 163. In addition, multiple portraits of African Americans posing with books can be found in Emory University's expansive Robert Langmuir African American Photographs Collection. See for example Box 72, Image 337; Box 72, Image 671; Box 73, Image 74; Box 73, Image 235; and Box 73, Image 335. Multiple portraits of whites posing with books in the late nineteenth century can be found in Briggs, *A Victorian Portrait*, and Linkman, *The Victorians*.

[22] Minutes of the Eighteenth Annual Session of the Canaan-Pickensville Baptist Association, Alabama African American Baptist Annuals, 1873-1994, Reel 5, Samford University Library Special Collections.

Figure 3.2. Unidentified portrait, ca. 1910s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.263); photograph by the Shackelford family.

Figure 3.3. Unidentified portrait, ca. 1910s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.106); photograph by the Shackelford family.

tome works along with her dress and the purse dangling from her forearm as part of an overall performance of feminine gentility. Each of these examples is a one-person tableau in which those pictured speak through objects, using books to define themselves as literate, learned, and sophisticated.

To return to figure 3.1, we see three books used for these same purposes, but in a group portrait. The repeated appearance of these symbols of learnedness in a single photograph reiterates their positive associations. These three books do not represent only the men holding them; they identify the entire community as one of learned and intelligent African Americans. Moreover, as is the case in figure 3.2 and 3.3, this portrait represents an active literary performance, as the young man in the center demonstrates his ability to use the tools of knowledge he is displaying. As yet another early twentieth-century photographic convention with Victorian origins, posing for a portrait with a book was a photographic convention carried out by white and black Americans in equal measure. However, because of the social context in which their portraits were produced, doing so had dramatically different meanings for whites and blacks. A cornerstone of the racism upon which Jim Crow rested was that the black race was biologically unintelligent and uncivilized. When they interacted with not one but three books in their tableau, those seen in figure 3.1 joined black people across the nation in using books to question prevailing racial ideologies by demonstrating their intellectual acumen.

The portrait in figure 3.1 and the other examples discussed above indeed exemplify the politics of respectability in action in northwest Alabama, but these performances simultaneously constructed local black identity and culture. While producing their portraits, the African Americans pictured here used books to generate

their individual and group identities. Scholars of material culture studies have revealed how the mundane objects that populate our lives—the things large and small that we make, buy, and use—do more than represent or symbolize our personal interests and livelihoods. Rather, such artifacts play vital roles in the very formation of our identities, in making us who we are. In the words of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "The body is not large, beautiful, and permanent enough to satisfy our sense of self. We need objects to magnify our power, enhance our beauty, and extend our memory into the future."[23] Objects help us to make sense of ourselves and to define our identities and the cultures in which we live. In the early twentieth century, the camera's multitude of capabilities included the ability to animate everyday artifacts. As we have seen in the example of books used in the portraits discussed here, the camera transformed objects designed for a specific purpose into tools of identity formation, cultural production, and social transformation.

This dramatic portrayal in the portrait in figure 3.1 was made all the more consequential by the stage upon which it was undertaken—a schoolhouse. Buildings and other geographic locations become culturally significant social spaces only when particular communal activities are repeatedly carried out in, on, or around them. Tim Cresswell cogently articulates the social production of place by writing, "[Places] are produced as much as they are producing. Indeed they are performed. Every single day,

[23] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Why We Need Things," in *History from Things: Essays on Material Culture*, ed. Steven Lunbar and W. David Kingery (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 1993), 28. For other works that address the relationship between objects and identify formation see Daniel Miller, ed., *Material Cultures: Why Some Things Matter* (London: Routledge, 1997), and Robert Paynter and Randall H. McGuire, eds., *The Archaeology of Inequality* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991).

everywhere, places need to be reproduced."[24] The schoolhouse seen here was simultaneously a site of black performance and a social space brought into being by black performance. Without the social activities that occurred within its walls—classes, school exhibitions, community meetings, speeches, and concerts—this building would have been devoid of all meaning, a hollow combination of wood, glass, and nails.

By gathering outside of the schoolhouse to pose for the portrait in figure 3.1, this group was undertaking one of many performative acts that gave life to this building. Having their presence there visually documented was a way of linking themselves to this sacred space; it was a reiteration of their ownership of this structure and a tribute to its import in their daily lives. The sight of the schoolhouse behind this group makes this a geographic performance, an act of place making. Those pictured were demonstrating who they were as people as well as where they gathered to strengthen their personal bonds and communal ideals, identifying the Covin schoolhouse as a place of black self-help and uplift.

The Shackelford family frequently traveled throughout Fayette County and beyond to photograph African Americans in the region. In doing so, they gave members of multiple black communities an opportunity to carry out similar performances, to interact with their built environs and stand with their black spaces in geographic performance. For example, the Shackelford family produced a number of photographs of students and teachers posed in front of schoolhouses like that seen in figure 3.4. Figure 3.5 exemplifies a similar category of portrait made up of photographs of African American congregants outside of church buildings. In this particular instance, those

[24] Tim Cresswell, "Introduction: Theorizing Place," in *Mobilizing Place, Placing Mobility: The Politics of Representation in a Globalized World*, ed. Ginette Verstraete and Tim Cresswell (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 23.

Figure 3.4. Unidentified school group, ca. 1920s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.561); photograph by the Shackelford family.

Figure 3.5. Unidentified church group, ca. 1910s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.400); photograph by the Shackelford family.

pictured opted to photographically record their relationship to their church building before its construction had been completed, as scaffolding was still secured to the right side of its roof. Though the type of buildings pictured have not been identified, the photographs in figures 3.6 and 3.7 showcase similar performances, in which large groups of African Americans from one or more community dramatized their collective ties in front of a particular structure.

All of these examples, along with the group portrait at the center of this chapter, represent what Michel De Certeau termed "spatial stories," geographic narratives produced by inhabitants of a particular place in their daily activities, whether they be walking, speaking, writing, singing, making music, or posing for a photograph. De Certeau maintains that spatial stories bring places to life, arguing that geographic locales—landscapes, citiscapes, the built environment—are transformed into meaningful social spaces when people on the ground enact spatial stories in and around them.[25] The performance in figure 3.1 along with those in figures 3.4 through 3.7 are spatial stories that activated these structures as sites of black celebration, knowledge production, safety, mutual aid, and uplift.

These photographic tableaus, along with local music, speeches, plays, and other acts of spatial storytelling, bring into being what Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods would call Fayette County's "black geography," a constellation of cartographies, narratives, and geographic ways of knowing locally produced and experienced by black people.[26] For her part, McKittrick defines black geographies as "subaltern or alternative

[25] De Certeau, "Spatial Stories," in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 115-130.
[26] Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, "No One Knows the Mysteries at the Bottom of the Ocean," in *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, ed. Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007), and Katherine McKittrick, "I Lost an Arm on my Last Trip Home: Black

Figure 3.6. Unidentified group, ca. 1910s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.052); photograph by the Shackelford family.

Figure 3.7. Unidentified group, ca. late 1910s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.748); photograph by the Shackelford family.

Geographies," in *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) 1-36.

geographic patterns that work alongside and beyond traditional geographies and cite a terrain of struggle."[27] She likewise accentuates the idea that various forms of black creative expression and performance bring black geographies into existence.[28] I am arguing that in Fayette County, posing for a photograph was one such geographic mode of performance that helped turn portions of an otherwise hostile landscape into home for the region's black inhabitants.

When viewed as a body of work with these spatial stories in mind, the negatives produced by the Shackelford family take on a cartographic quality. Together, the African Americans who enacted the tableaus etched into these glass plates and the Shackelford family photographers who developed them produced a lasting visual map of early twentieth-century African American life in northwest Alabama, identifying and charting through tableau and the photographic process the spaces they had made their own. Thus, while federal and state agencies and private corporations designed maps of this agricultural locality that served economic and governmental interests by tracing boundary lines, marking roads and railroad tracks, and identifying soil types, African Americans who lived there were busy fashioning an alternate map—made of the Shackelfords' portraits—that constructed their local culture and visually preserved their interactions with the places that defined their everyday lives.

The photograph in figure 3.1 preserves a performance in which multiple individuals and families created a photographic tableau in front of a community-defining edifice to express their bonds, their commitment to self-help, and their investment in the politics of respectability. This photograph is not a rarity and is in fact just one document

[27] McKittirck, *Demonic Grounds*, 7.
[28] Ibid., 21.

in an expansive national archive of portraits produced by turn-of-the-century African Americans who used photography to perform their communities into being. Taken in an unknown location around the same time as the photograph in figure 3.1, the cabinet card in figure 3.8 serves as an example. The similarities between this image and the portrait of taken at the Covin schoolhouse speak for themselves. Here, sixty-three formally dressed African Americans convened for a photograph in front of a building whose exact use is unknown. However, the sheer number of people in the image and the number of young people indicate the likelihood that it is a community structure such as a schoolhouse. The three oldest men pictured sit leisurely in the foreground, as the younger men, women, and children stand shoulder-to-shoulder in rows behind them. As is the case in the portrait taken in Covin, three members of this group hold up books in an explicit expression of learnedness and civic readiness. Two young women and one young man standing on a bench or platform in the back row displayed these bound volumes, stretching their arms forward to ensure that the books were captured by the camera's lens.

The real photo postcard in figure 3.9 captures a similar performance, but in a town rather than a rural setting. Around 1910, in an unidentified location in the United States, forty-two African Americans of all ages convened to pose for this photograph. Some of the town's buildings—a general store, a restaurant, and other unidentified establishments—served as the backdrop for this scene. Those pictured stood in the street, on the sidewalk, and on the porch of the store. As is the case in the photograph in figure 3.1, there is an emphasis here on the family unit, which is accentuated by the presence of two babies and a pram in the foreground of the image. A book appears here as well, but in a more understated fashion than the two previous examples. The woman

Figure 3.8. Unidentified group, ca. 1910. Courtesy of Emory University Manuscripts, Archives, & Rare Book Library, Robert Langmuir African American Photograph Collection (MSS1218_b013_i014); photographer unknown.

Figure 3.9. Unidentified group, ca. 1910. Courtesy of Emory University Manuscripts, Archives, & Rare Book Library, Robert Langmuir African American Photograph Collection (MSS1218_b072_i049); photographer unknown.

standing fourth from the left holds a handbag in her left hand and has wedged two books between her left arm and torso.[29]

Though extensive research and historical context are needed to conduct in-depth analyses of the images in figures 3.8 and 3.9, they are significant here because they highlight the fact that those pictured at the Covin schoolhouse were engaged in a national black tradition of photographic community development. The similarities among the photographic performance in Fayette County seen in figure 3.1 and the community portraits in figures 3.8 and 3.9 are striking. In each performance, a large communal body made up of smaller family and friendship units stands together to have a photograph taken. All three tableaus reflect the ties among those pictured and represent pointed efforts to associate African American communities with positive traits. In each instance, these performances were given in front one or more structures that made up a local built environment. Whether or not these buildings were owned by those pictured in figures 3.8 and 3.9 is inconsequential. These photographs are spatial stories, and posing in front of these edifices activated them as part of the landscape of the daily lives of those pictured. The poses held by the men, women, and children in these community photographs, along with the clothes they wore, reflect an adoption of national cultural practices and the politics of representation. In each performance, objects are used to enhance visual narratives, and books are chief among these storytelling artifacts. These three photographs are all archival records of local repertoires. They represent brief but pointed

[29] As an aside, another object, a pocket watch, is used in this tableau as well, as a woman in the center of the frame holds the timepiece out in her right hand, subtly displaying this possession. A discussion for another time, pocket watches, like books, were objects African Americans commonly used in photographic tableaus, and these timepieces can be seen throughout the Shackelford Collection photographs.

embodied performances that were primary forms of community development during a time when black communities were essential for everyday survival.

To complete this analysis of the types collective black performances that the Shackelford family photographed, an additional aspect of these expressive deeds must be addressed. These photographic tableaus were enacted in front of live audiences, increasing their impact as community-building strategies in and of themselves, regardless of whether or not the photographs were ever developed. Understanding this facet of Fayette County's photographic repertoire begins with the communal nature of the Shackelford family's photo sessions. It has already been established that families and other groups came to the Shackelford home to have their pictures taken, making the Shackelfords' portrait sessions social events. When an individual or group posed for the Shackelfords, they often did so in front of their friends, family, and other community members. A close look at the dry plate negatives the Shackelfords left behind, with an emphasis not on the individuals posing for these portraits but instead on the onlookers in the background, allows this crucial aspect of the Shackelfords' photography to be recovered.

When the Shackelford family developed their photographs, they did so using exposed five-by-seven glass negatives and often cropped the images to remove extraneous background and produce a refined final product. The prints housed at the Birmingham Public Library were developed from the Shackelfords' negatives in the late 1980s and were not cropped, thereby displaying the entirety of each dry plate, everything captured by the camera when the negative was exposed. As a result, these prints preserve the Shackelfords' portraits while also revealing the social quality of the portrait sessions

themselves. Returning to the photograph at the center of this chapter, figure 3.1, the most curious placement of individuals in this image involves the two women seated in the background at the far left of the frame. They may have been placed there as part of the overall group portrait, but a more probable hypothesis that they were either onlookers or portrait seekers waiting their turn to be photographed. In this instance, the Shackelford photographers would have cropped these the two women out of the photograph during the development process.

An additional example further illustrates the point. The portrait in figure 3.10, which appears to be of an extended family, is typical of the Shackelfords' work. With the side of a building serving as a backdrop, four women are seated on a bench—three holding children and the oldest holding, once again, a book. Four men of varying ages stand behind them. To the right of the frame, around the side of the building, we see a group of mostly female bystanders. When developing this photograph, the Shackelfords would have cropped out the people to the right, leaving only the family portrait. The presence of this crowd in the print seen here, though, uncovers a crucial component of the performance of portraiture in Fayette County. This portrait was taken during a gathering, whether it was a community event or just a day when the Shackelfords had announced that they would be taking pictures. The individuals seen at the side of the building could have been waiting in line, next up in front of the camera. Or, they could have simply been talking and milling about. Either way, they bore witness to this family's photographic performance. They were audience members who saw this tableau enacted in the flesh.

This is a critical facet of the Shackelford family's portrait sessions that sheds significant light on the family's photographs of African Americans. When one considers

Figure 3.10. Unidentified portrait, ca. 1910s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.076); photograph by the Shackelford family.

how frequently the Shackelfords' customers posed in front of other community members, it becomes clear that even the Shackelfords' portraits of individuals are at times records of collective, community-building performances. A series of photographs will illustrate this essential characteristic. Using an inexpensive adaptor that fit inside their camera, the Shackelfords were able to expose between two and four small images onto a single five-by-seven inch negative. The examples in figures 3.11 through 3.16 indicate the use of such a device and represent six dry plate negatives that carry a total of twenty portraits. The Shackelfords also often inscribed numbers on their negatives with a crayon in order to connect the names of their customers to the faces in the portraits. These numbers can be made out faintly and in reverse in the top left hand corners of the portraits in these six examples. The presence of the same portion of a single building in the background of these pictures, along with the fact that the numbers the Shackelfords wrote on the

Figure 3.11. Unidentified portraits, ca. 1910s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.420); photograph by the Shackelford family.

Figure 3.12. Unidentified portraits, ca. 1910s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.327); photograph by the Shackelford family.

Figure 3.13. Unidentified portraits, ca. 1910s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.421); photograph by the Shackelford family.

Figure 3.14. Unidentified portraits, ca. 1910s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.371); photograph by the Shackelford family.

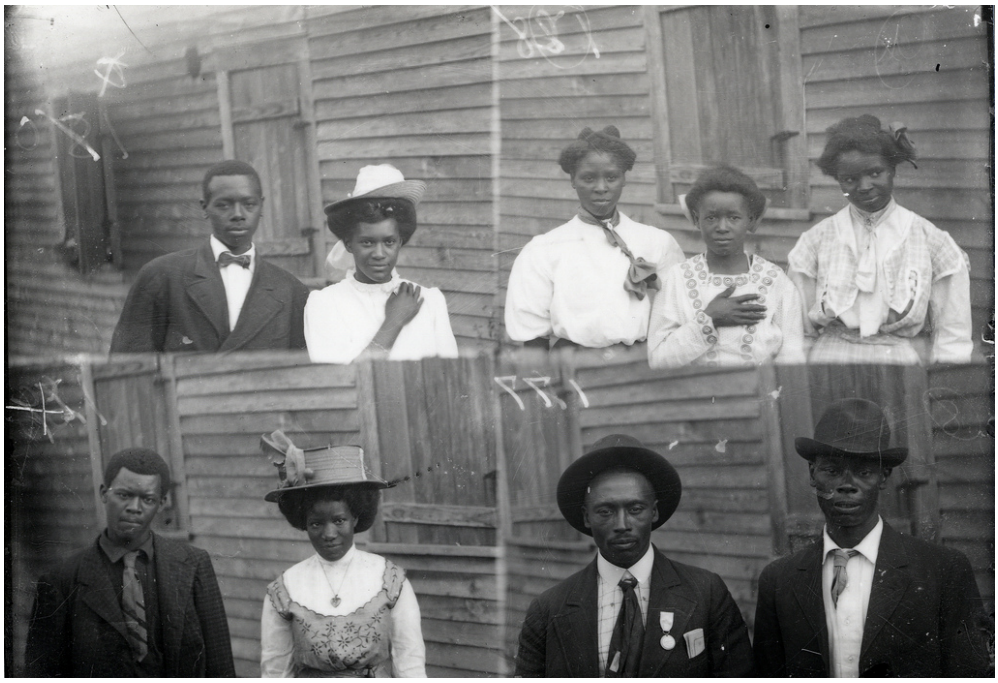

Figure 3.15. Unidentified portraits, ca. 1910s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.422); photograph by the Shackelford family.

Figure 3.16. Unidentified portraits, ca. 1910s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.426); photograph by the Shackelford family.

negatives range consecutively between 155 and 173, make it clear that the portraits in figures 3.11 through 3.16 were part of a single photo session. The building in the photographs could be a school, church, or home. Regardless of what type of building it was, a community gathering was taking place, and the Shackelfords had set up their camera to serve those who wanted a picture made.

Arranging and viewing these portraits in the order that the Shackelfords numbered them allows us to experience this portrait session as it played out that day and access the social nature of photographs that, once developed and sent their separate ways, would otherwise appear to have been taken with only the photographers and subjects present. Glimpses of people socializing are caught in the backgrounds of the portraits on the right hand side of figure 3.12 and the top right corner of figure 3.14. Individuals waiting their turn to step up and be photographed can be seen in the background of the photographs in the bottom left corners of both figures 3.12 and 3.13.

Contrary to what the final products developed and disseminated by the Shackelfords would lead us to believe, each of these portraits represents a single social gathering that included multiple individual and small group performances. Let us imagine this event as it took place. At least forty African Americans came together outside of a home, school, or church in northwest Alabama. These sharecroppers, laborers, and landholding farmers were finely dressed, and many had adorned themselves with broaches, pocket watches, and buttons. The Shackelford family had set up their camera on its tripod at the side of the building. Those having their picture made waited their turn, and often watched the people in front of them pose for their portraits, perhaps getting ideas about how they would themselves act once their turn came. In various

configurations, these men, women, and children stepped in front of the camera and arranged their bodies—arms behind the back, a finger to the cheek, a pipe in the mouth—to perform tableaus, to stilly and silently use their poses, clothes, and accouterments to theatrically produce themselves. Looking into the camera, their facial expressions were equal parts proud, pleasant, and welcoming.

Once this portrait session ended, the Shackelfords cropped the negatives and developed a series of individual portraits that went their separate ways. But, as enacted live, each of these photographic performances was shaped by and forever linked to the others as part of one communal event. The individuals pictured in these examples did not pose separately so much as they posed in stages, as part of a composite production in which they took turns walking to side of the building to present and account for themselves before returning to the group. Moreover, each of these performances reflects the enactment of the same themes found in the in figure 3.1 and so many other images in the Shackelford Collection. For example, those pictured in figures 3.11 through 3.16, like those in figure 3.1, were acting out their relationships to one another. They stood together to visually represent and record their personal bonds as husbands and wives, parents and children, siblings, and friends. These are of course portraits, and photographically recording personal relationships is a timeless and defining aspect of the medium. But, these particular family and friendship portraits were part of a larger social event that was itself about communal bonds. In posing for these photographs, those present dramatically presented the kinship ties and other interpersonal relationships that were the building blocks of their broader local and regional black communities.

As was the case in figure 3.1, community-defining traits like civility, cultural sophistication, and civic readiness were demonstrated in each of these tableaus. The clothing worn by those pictured identified them as fashionable, dignified, and sophisticated participants in the national marketplace. Several of those pictured also struck the stock Victorian poses described in the previous chapter. Many hold their hands over their hearts in a simple but evocative pose that appears time and again in the Shackelford family photographs. For black southerners, who had been removed from American civic life and denied suffrage and other rights of citizenship, this straightforward yet evocative patriotic expression was a method for displaying civic readiness by indicating the personal possession of two of the most important attributes of a good national citizen—love of country and loyalty.

In the photographs in figures 3.11 through 3.16, we see the preservation of the repertoire of photographic portraiture in Fayette County. These portraits document live performances in which attendees at a social event took turns repeating a series of visual statements about themselves and their community in front of the camera and their peers. When posing for their portraits, those pictured focused on the themes they wanted to convey and watched their friends and families do the same. One at a time, these individuals, couples, friends, and families dramatically demonstrated the shared system of beliefs that gave rise to their community, performing the ties that bound them as well as their shared ideals and goals.

It is the repetition of these theatrical gestures—the embodied reiteration of key values—that makes these performances so effective as strategies of community development. Well before the Shackelfords' took these negatives into their darkroom,

these dramatic portrayals of collective beliefs had already done their work as a single community-strengthening exercise. Each person in these portraits enacted the same positive messages articulated by others who had their picture taken that day and the multitude of African Americans in the region who performed these same identities and ideals in front of Shackelfords at different times and in different places. Due to the repeated performance and photographic documentation of these tableaus, these themes became principal attributes of the community itself, both in regard to the local community where this photo session took place and the broader multi-county black community of northwest Alabama. In photographically reiterating their collective values, these black southerners were celebrating who they were, what they had accomplished, and their ability to thrive while living under such structurally repressive circumstances.

When people enacted the tableaus photographed by the Shackelford family, they did so with a reverence for the final products brought into being by these dramatic exercises—the photographs themselves. Pictured in figure 3.17 is a man who appears in several portraits in the Shackelford Collection. In this particular example, he is seated with his legs crossed in a chair positioned in front of a screen hanging from the side of the Shackelford home. He wears a suit and tie, and, at first glance, it appears as though he is posing alone. Upon further inspection, however, it becomes clear that he has hung a pocket watch from his coat, and, more importantly, stuffed the corner of a photograph into his pocket to make it a clearly visible component of his personal tableau (Fig. 3.17a). Although it is a bit blurry, we can see that this is a portrait of a woman. This photograph within a photograph could be of his mother, his sister, his girlfriend, his wife, or perhaps his daughter. What matters most is that he wanted her likeness to be seen with him, to be

Figure 3.17. Unidentified portrait, ca. late 1910s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.764); photograph by the

Figure 3.17a. Detail from figure 3.17.

a part of his picture, taking the time to situate the photograph just so on his lapel before having a seat in front of the camera. She is attached to him, quite literally. Of the various objects African Americans in northwest Alabama used in their portraits, in this instance it is another photograph that enhances this photographic performance.

As is so often the case with the acts seen in the Shackelford Collection photographs, the portrait in figure 3.17 does not represent a rare photographic practice or one unique to the Shackelfords' photography. Taken in the 1910s in an unknown location in the United States, the real photo postcard in figure 3.18 portrays a black man and his two children in front of a wooden home or other building. The two children pose on their knees on either side of their father, who sits on a stool and rests a photograph on each knee—one framed and one mounted on a cardboard back. Again here, both photographs

Figure 3.18. Unidentified portrait, ca. early 1920s. Courtesy of Emory University Manuscripts, Archives, & Rare Book Library, Robert Langmuir African American Photograph Collection (MSS1218_b072_i320); photographer unknown.

are studio portraits of women, and there is the possibility that they are two different pictures of the same woman. This real photo postcard is clearly a family portrait, but there is no mother pictured, making the most likely hypothesis the fact that at least one of the portraits held by this man is his wife and the children's mother, who had passed away or was otherwise unable to be present to join her family in this picture.

Photographs were among the countless objects turn-of-the-century African Americans opted to incorporate into their portraits. In these two examples, the mimetic capabilities of the camera enabled each of these men to be photographed with someone dear to him, to have his likeness preserved alongside the photographic emanations of a loved one who was unable to be there in the flesh. When African Americans in Fayette County and across the United States posed for portraits in the early twentieth century, they did so with a reverence for the personal, social, cultural, and political impact of the photographic medium.

In the early twentieth century, people across the United States regarded the expressive act of posing for a photograph as a thoughtful moment of cultural production and identity formation. This chapter has detailed how African Americans in Fayette County strengthened their local communities by posing for a photograph and in turn highlighting their relationships with one another, defining their collective beliefs, and articulating their interactions with valued geographic locations. A key aspect of this study has been the fact that these photographic tableaus were successful in accomplishing these community-building tasks in large part because they reiterated a set of community values and positive traits—family, perseverance, collective self-help, cultural sophistication, economic autonomy, and learnedness—that are found throughout the Shackelford

Collection and early twentieth century photographs of African Americans taken across the nation.

Chapter 4 – "A Good Band is a Credit to Any Place"

At the outset of the twentieth century, the unnamed African American brass band based in the countryside outside of the Fayette County township of Covin made music for many of the dances, concerts, school fundraisers, and other events that constituted African American social life in and around Fayette County. A nine-piece group composed of male and female farmers and teachers, the Covin band performed in its home community and at venues throughout northwest Alabama.[1] As was the case for countless black brass bands scattered throughout the United States at the time, the songs the Covin band performed were much more than entertainment. As this chapter will describe, these songs were community-defining melodies of celebration and racial pride, as well as performance strategies black southerners used to participate in middle-class American culture at a time when they lived as systematically oppressed sub-citizens.

One day around 1917, the Covin band's members decided that the sounds of their music were not enough. Instruments in hand, the ensemble posed shoulder-to-shoulder in front of the home of Mitch and Geneva Shackelford to have its picture taken by a member of the Shackelford family (Fig. 4.1). A reusable printed sign hanging on the bass drum announced an evening concert while pointing to the some of the nuances of race relations in the region. It read:

BIG CONCERT
TONIGHT AT THE
COVIN SCHOOL-HOUSE
GIVEN BY THE BRASS BAND
BEGINNING AT 7:30 O'CLOCK

[1] The African American brass band in Covin did not have a name, and the sign in figure 4.1 indicates that the ensemble was known simply as "the brass band." For the sake of clarity and rhetorical efficiency, I refer to the band throughout this dissertation as "the Covin band." That said, the band performed not just in Covin but throughout Fayette County and across the region.

Figure 4.1. The Covin brass band in front of the home of Mitch and Geneva Shackelford in Covin, Alabama, ca. 1917. The four identified members of the ensemble are James Nall, far left; Curtis Shackelford, second from left; Roxie Shackelford, center with trombone, and Ollie Shackelford, third from right. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.394); photograph by the Shackelford family.

SEATS FOR OUR
WHITE FRIENDS
ADMISSION ONLY 10¢

As an act of cultural expression, the band's posed, silent performance in front of the Shackelfords' camera carried the same cultural weight as its music, and the resulting photograph preserved and made portable the ensemble's musical acumen along with the individual and communal identities of its members. When placed in its appropriate local, historical, and cultural context, the Shackelfords' photograph of the Covin band tells the story of this rural ensemble and speaks volumes about the group's import.

Even though they left behind no known audio recordings, the Covin band's history, music, and cultural significance can be gleaned from sources that include interviews, memoirs, educational documents, newspaper articles, sheet music, and photographs. This chapter uses the Covin band as a case study for demonstrating the vital role a musical ensemble in the Jim Crow South could play in constructing a rural black community while also aiding in that community's struggle for racial advancement. Along the way, the Shackelford family's photograph of the Covin band is analyzed alongside similar portraits from across the United States to illustrate how black musicians in varying genres used photography to imbue their music with a visual dimension capable of carrying their messages to places their melodies could never reach.

Brass band music was a ubiquitous popular art form in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. Modeled after military marching bands, brass bands were civic ensembles made up of musicians playing cornets, alto and tenor horns, slide trombones, and other brass instruments. Technological improvements to these horns made them easier to play than ever before, while mail-order houses like Sears, Roebuck,

and Company acted as one-stop shops where aspiring musicians in remote corners of the country could purchase everything needed to start a band—affordable instruments, uniforms, sheet music, and instructional method books.[2] Brass bands were community institutions, and even America's smallest towns and villages boasted local bands that marched in parades, gave concerts, played at political rallies, and performed at various outdoor celebrations.[3] The standard repertoire included marches, waltzes, classical standards, and renditions of popular songs. Band performances, featuring tunes like *Yankee Doodle*, *Hail Columbia*, and the *Star Spangled Banner*, were inherently patriotic events, opportunities for citizens to display the cultural and social sophistication of their town along with their collective adherence to democratic values.

A local band was a symbol of a town's Americanness.[4] William H. Dana, in his 1878 musical instructor *J. W. Pepper's Practical Guide and Study to the Secret of Arranging Band Music*, summed up this sentiment: "A town without its brass band is in as much need of sympathy as a church without a choir. The spirit of a place is recognized in its band."[5] More accessible than upper-class genres like classical music and opera, brass band music was the music of the people, what folklorist Alan Lomax deemed "the

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[2] In addition to its primary mail-order catalog, Sears, Roebuck, and Company issued a special catalog dedicated solely to band instruments and supplies. According to the company, the *Band Instruments and Supplies* catalog "contains large illustrations and full descriptions of our four splendid lines of brass instruments." This brass music catalog also "tells you how to select and purchase your band instruments and how to organize and manage your band, and gives a table showing correct instrumentation for bands of all sizes." Sears, Roebuck, and Company catalog, Spring 1908, page 248, accessed via www.ancestry.com November 8, 2013.

[3] For histories of brass band music in the United States, see Raoul Camus, "Bands," in *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, Vol. 2, ed. H. Wiley Hitchcock and Stanley Sadie, 127-136 (New York: Grove's Dictionaries of Music, Inc., 1986); Richard K. Hansen, *The American Wind Band: A Cultural History* (Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc., 2005); and Margaret Hindle Hazen and Robert M. Hazen, *Music Men: An Illustrated History of Brass Bands in America, 1800-1920* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 1987).

[4] Hazen and Hazen highlight the link between brass band music and notions of democracy and civic virtue. See *Music Men*, 13.

[5] Quoted in Camus, "Bands," 133.

ne plus ultra of American small-town entertainment."[6] By the turn of the twentieth century, brass band mania and its accompanying ideology were alive and well in northwest Alabama. There were several town bands in Fayette County alone, and a 1911 newspaper mention of the band in the town of Fayette emphasized the civic value of a brass ensemble: "The boys of the Fayette Band are to be congratulated upon the splendid showing they are making…. A good band is a credit to any place, and many a town larger than Fayette would willingly pay for a band as good as we have, yet the members of our band have in most part borne the expense."[7]

Though turn-of-the-century town bands in Alabama and elsewhere in the United States were primarily white ensembles, African Americans contributed to America's marching band tradition from its inception, starting brass troupes as early as the 1810s in places like Philadelphia, New Orleans, and New York.[8] After the Civil War, emancipated African Africans throughout the South joined this musical fray, and the performances of black brass ensembles became more significant than ever before. In adopting the marches, songs, uniforms, and styles of white bands, black brass ensembles used their performances to participate in the national musical pastime and exhibit their cultural literacy at a time when African Americans endured persecution that rested on the ideology that they were unintelligent, uncivilized, and unfit for status as United States citizens. Southern black brass musicians participated in the national marching band

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[6] Alan Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 163.
[7] *Fayette Banner*, July 20, 1911. The town of Fayette was not the only municipality in Fayette County that boasted a brass band. In 1900, the editors of another Fayette County newspaper, *The Weekly Recorder*, posted the following admonishment of the band in the small township of Berry: "Music by the brass band is a thing of the past in Berry. What's the matter boys?" *The Weekly Recorder*, November 7, 1900.
[8] Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 66.

tradition while simultaneously crafting a unique musical style—which eventually became jazz—that had its own sound, repertoire, and ideology.

The types of music made by the countless pre-jazz black bands in the South are too varied to categorize into a particular genre but nonetheless share defining characteristics and came from the same combination of black and white sources.[9] Black brass bands were often "reading bands" who learned from sheet music and performed the same standards as white musicians. Other southern black groups were self-trained ensembles whose members learned by ear and played on their horns field hollers they sang at work, hymns from church, and ballads and blues they heard performed on guitar and other instruments. It was in fact common for a black band in the South to perform a range of musical styles. A single group could have in its repertoire selections learned from sheet music—marches, patriotic songs, ragtime tunes, and other marching band standards—as well as dance music and songs picked up aurally from the aforementioned black sources. A band's listeners were often as diverse as its repertoire, and it was common for a black band to perform for both black and white audiences.[10] Regardless of the music they played or for whom they played it, the South's black brass bands were stylistically linked by this blend of source material and the existence of musical characteristics with African roots—especially an emphasis on complex rhythm and syncopation—that distinguished their music from that of their white counterparts.

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[9] Though most published histories of jazz address the pre-jazz African American brass band tradition of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there is a surprising dearth of studies dedicated solely to the subject. Detailed accounts of pre-jazz brass music can be found in Jacqui Malone, *Steppin' on the Blues* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 127-146; William Schafer, *Brass Bands and New Orleans Jazz* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977); and Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 257-259.

[10] Scholarly literature is replete with examples of black brass bands in the South who maintained such diverse repertoires and played for both black and white audiences. For two examples see Schafer, *Brass Bands and New Orleans Jazz,* 7, and Lomax, *Land Where the Blues Began*, 165.

Although they have not received the same scholarly attention as urban bands, African American brass bands associated with particular plantations, fraternal orders, churches, or communities played for picnics, dances, church socials, school exhibitions, baseball games, and other events throughout the rural South.[11] The black brass bands in the rural South may have shared stylistic traits and repertoire with white musicians across the United States, but the tones they produced conveyed a distinct cultural and ideological message. Black brass band music in the South—because of the history and realities of everyday life in the region and the experiences and personal histories of the musicians who played it—was inherently linked to expressions of freedom. Since the music of enslaved African Americans was controlled or prohibited altogether by white slaveholders, the sounds of a black brass band echoing across the post-emancipation countryside were in and of themselves aural signifiers of independence.

The South's black fraternal orders, which were indispensible arbiters of black autonomy and cultural expression, exemplify this use of brass instruments. Such organizations often formed their own bands to provide music for their parades and other events celebrating black freedom and heritage. Brass bands were likewise key components of Emancipation Day celebrations that were held throughout the nation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[12]

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[11] In the 1950s, folklorist Frederic Ramsey conducted the most in-depth research to date of African American bands in the rural South. In addition to making field recordings of rural bands, Ramsey interviewed older black brass musicians in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, allowing him to access the history of rural brass music dating back to the 1860s. See Ramsey's essay "Country Brass Bands" in his collection of brass band field recordings *Music from the South, Vol. 1: Country Brass Bands*, Folkways Records FA 2650, 1955.

[12] See Giggie, *After Redemption*, 69, and Glymph, "'Liberty Dearly Bought,'" 116.

The cultural and racial significance of black brass band music in the South was enhanced by one of the primary characteristics of brass instruments—they were *loud*.[13] Trumpets in particular had long served as symbols of liberation in both African American religious thought and traditional music. The popular spiritual *Joshua Fit De Battle of Jericho* illustrates the point. The song is a retelling of the Old Testament story in which the Israelite army, led by Joshua, conquered the walled city of Jericho using sound—trumpets played by seven priests along with the voices of the Israelite soldiers—to topple the city walls. In the worldview of enslaved African Americans, the walls of Jericho represented their bondage and the destruction of these walls their freedom. *Joshua Fit De Battle of Jericho*, with its lyrical refrain "And the walls came tumbling down," was a veiled expression of enslaved African Americans' desire for liberation. In the song's lyrics, horns were the instruments, quite literally, by which freedom was achieved:

> Up to the walls of Jericho,
> He marched with spear in hand
> Go blow them ram horns Joshua cried,
> 'Cause the battle is in my hand!
>
> Then the lamb-ram-sheep horns began to blow,
> The trumpets began to sound,
> Joshua commanded the children to shout
> And the walls came tumblin' down.[14]

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[13] Both Ramsey and Schafer emphasize sheer volume as a primary attribute of brass instruments. Schafer, *Brass Bands and New Orleans Jazz,* 6, and Ramsey, "Country Brass Bands," 3.

[14] As is often the case with folk music, there exists an array of lyrical and melodic variations of *Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho*. The passage used here is printed in Harold Courlander, *Negro Folk Music, U.S.A.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 46. The lyrical imagery of *Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho* remained significant during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Martin Luther King, Jr., for example, called upon the same stanzas quoted above in a speech given on the steps of the Alabama state capitol at the conclusion of the march from Selma to Montgomery on March 25, 1965. See Martin Luther King, Jr. "Address at the Conclusion of the Selma to Montgomery March," in *A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Clayborne Carson and Kris Shepard (New York: Warner Books, 2001), 127-128.

Black brass music was in turn a multi-faceted art form capable of expressing dedication to a set of national values—patriotism, democracy, civic virtue—while simultaneously representing a distinct black culture that celebrated black autonomy and opposed white supremacy.

It is within this cultural and historical context that Covin's black brass band formed around 1915. Four of the musicians in the ensemble have been identified and are pictured in the photograph in figure 4.1. Three of the musicians—Curtis, Ollie, and Roxie Shackelford—were children of Mitch and Geneva Shackelford and, as discussed in chapter 2, were among the photographers responsible for the family's collection of images. The fourth known member of the band, James Nall, was the band's founder and, like the ensemble's trombone player Roxie Shackelford, was a local teacher.

In his 1936 memoir, James Nall's father, Jasper Rastus Nall, reveals the origins of the Covin band while pointing to one of the group's distinguishing characteristics. When discussing his son James, Nall wrote:

> At the age of 17, he began teaching school. He organized brass bands at different places where he taught. In one school at Covin, Alabama, he organized a band and substituted two girls to play the trombone and alto horns. This mixed band turned out to be even more successful than some others he had trained with all boys. Those girls played so well, they added to the attraction of the band, and they traveled a part of the time and furnished music for different school occasions.[15]

As it turns out, the band's status as a "mixed band" made up of both male and female members was a rare and noteworthy feature.[16] Nall's passage also indicates that the

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[15] Jasper Rastus Nall, *Freeborn Slave: Diary of a Black Man in the South* (Birmingham, AL: Crane Hill Publishers, 1996), 98-99.

[16] In their history of brass band music, Hazen and Hazen indicate that bands with both male and female members were rare in the United States. Hazen and Hazen, *The Music Men*, 57. Bookmarking it as a topic for future study, the topic of women's participation in black brass band music—both generally and in regard to the Covin band—warrants further investigation but is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Covin band was a "school band" whose performances aided black educational life in Covin and throughout northwest Alabama.

Brass band music became part of black school life in Alabama as early as the 1890s, when black land grant colleges like the Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical Institute and most famously the Tuskegee Institute established marching bands that were vital to these universities' educational and cultural pursuits. The marching and music of these bands were expressions of discipline, civility, and cultural acumen, which were important aspects of the ideology of African American education writ large. Out in the northwestern Alabama countryside, the Covin band was molded in the image of these educational ensembles. That is not to say, however, that the Covin band's members were all school-aged. Some of the younger members were likely students at the Covin school when the band was put together, but others, like Curtis and Ollie Shackelford, were the same age as or older than the teacher and founder of the group James Nall. Moreover, the band remained active from the mid-1910s to the 1930s, and as the members of the group aged into adulthood, the ensemble continued its role as the Covin school's most visible musical representative.

Even though Jasper Rastus Nall emphasized the band's status as a school band, people born and raised in Covin who were interviewed for this project remember the ensemble playing a variety of locations and events. Ruth Anthony, one of Mitch and Geneva Shackelford's granddaughters, has childhood memories of the band playing dances at the Shackelford home. Clyde Wilson recalls his father, who was a farmer in Covin, going to the Shackelfords' dances on holidays like Christmas and New Year's Eve, which were especially festive affairs. Warda Prewitt remembers the group playing at the

local schoolhouse and, like Jasper Rastus Nall, mentions the fact that they traveled away from Covin, performing in neighboring Lamar County and other parts of the region.[17] Since at least two of the musicians in the band—Curtis and Ollie Shackelford—were members of Covin's black Masonic lodge, the possibility that the ensemble provided music for the fraternal order's parades and other events must be considered. As for the group's audiences, the sign in the Shackelfords' photograph of the ensemble in figure 4.1, with its reference to "seats for our white friends," makes clear that the band performed for black and white audiences and even both at the same time.

But what kind of music did the group play? The Covin band came to life at a time when marching band music was falling out of favor with American audiences. Aside from school and military bands, in the World War I era brass bands became dance ensembles, and brass instruments were increasingly associated with jazz and, in turn, black culture.[18] The musicians in the Covin band, born in the 1890s and early 1900s, grew up surrounded by white town bands like Fayette's civic ensemble. Likewise, the region was home to a rich rural black brass band tradition that began at the end of the Civil War and was made up of bands that learned from ear and played dance music.[19] The Covin band thus stood with one foot in the marching band tradition of the past and the other in the nascent pre-jazz style.

The Covin band was a reading band that learned from printed musical notation. Roxie Shackelford's copy of *Jenkins' Beginner's Band Book and Instructor* for solo

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[17] Ruth Anthony, interview by author, June 20, 2011; Clyde Wilson, interview by author, September 15, 2011; Albert Abrams, interview by author, September 15, 2011; Warda Prewitt, interview by author, March 21, 2012.
[18] Camus, "Bands," 134.
[19] In the 1950s, folklorist Frederic Ramsey identified eleven such rural black bands that dated back to the 1860s and were active roughly seventy-five miles to the south of Fayette in Hale, Perry, and Green County Alabama. Ramsey, "Country Brass Bands," 3.

trombone—the only known extant sheet music used by the group—provides clues to the ensemble's repertoire and points to its participation in the national marching band tradition. Published in Kansas City, Missouri, by J. W. Jenkins' and Sons Music Company and available from mail order houses such as Sears, Roebuck, and Company, the song folio "contains the national melodies and twelve original compositions—marches, waltzes, and one overture." As a primer "arranged for Bands just starting," the Jenkins' book includes tuning instructions, scales and other practice exercises, a discussion of the elements of music, and notation for brass standards like *Yankee Doodle*, *Hail Columbia*, and *Old Folks at Home*. The instructor was small enough to be attached to a player's horn for sight reading, and alternate versions of the booklet were available for twenty-six different brass instruments, making it a powerful teaching tool and an example of the do-it-yourself nature of brass bands of the time.[20]

The Covin band's repertoire evolved with the times, and by the 1920s the group was performing dance music and jazz in addition to the marching band standards of the day. Submitted by an unknown member of Covin's black community to the county newspaper, the *Fayette Banner*, a 1928 account of a basketball game between the Covin school and the nearby Corona school includes the following description:

> Corona arrived at Covin Saturday at 1 P.M. with their colors waving high in the air with songs of victory ringing from hill to hill, and boastful expressions on their faces. The Covin school board accompanied the team as they went to the cars to greet them and as the band played, the would be victorious team of Corona sprang

[20] First published in 1910, *Jenkins' Beginner's Band Book and Instructor* was available for purchase from the Sears, Roebuck, and Company Catalog from 1916 through 1922. Sears, Roebuck, and Company catalog, Fall 1916, 944; Fall 1917, 1179; Fall 1918, 1024; Fall 1919, 989; Fall 1920, 977; Spring 1921, 648; and Spring 1922, 525, accessed via www.ancestry.com November 8, 2013. Roxie Shackelford's copy of *Jenkins' Beginner's Band Book and Instructor* is now owned by her great niece, Annie Shackelford, and was uncovered by the author while visiting Mitch and Geneva Shackelford's now vacant home with Ms. Shackelford. Digital scans in possession of the author, used with permission.

> from their cars with their togs already on and by the snappy jazz of the band they did the Charleston.[21]

Whether performing the patriotic standards of the day or the "snappy jazz" described in the newspaper, every note the Covin band played, every beat of the drum, meant something. The Covin band's performances gave shape to the community while also contributing to its goals of black self-definition and uplift. This was the community band, a musical representative of African Americans throughout northwest Alabama whose rhythms and melodies simultaneously entertained local residents and conveyed an array of messages.

An analysis of the band's role in educational development in the region, along with an explication of one of its school concerts, will illuminate this connection between the group's music and the worldview and goals of many blacks in Fayette County. When the Covin band was established, rural black communities throughout the region were entrenched in a grassroots movement to educate their children in an era when the white planter class and the political economy it implemented aimed to deny them such opportunities.[22] Black educational improvement efforts were about more than literacy and academic advancement—these campaigns were enmeshed with community development and notions of racial self-help and independence. Educational development *was* community development, and in the rural South the local school, along with the church, was a foundational institution of community life.[23]

A detour to address the intricacies of local black engagements with the region's educational infrastructure will set the stage for the discussion below of the Covin band

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[21] *Fayette Banner*, February 16, 1928.
[22] See Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 105-109.
[23] See Mary F. Hoffschwelle, "Local People and School-Building Campaigns," in *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South* (Gainesville: University Press, 2006).

and its performances. As was the case for African Americans across the South, black Alabamians struggling to improve schooling did so with limited public funds and within the prevailing education infrastructure. In the early twentieth century, state policies in Alabama placed the allocation of public education funds in the hands of county governments, which often funneled monies to local white schools and left black schools grossly underfunded.[24] However, Alabama's black communities did have access to resources for what became known as "industrial education." Implemented throughout the South and designed specifically for African American students, the industrial model was developed and maintained by a conglomerate of institutions that included the federal, state, and county governments, northern philanthropic organizations such as the Anna T. Jeanes Foundation and the Julius Rosenwald Fund, and the Tuskegee Institute. Under the leadership of Booker T. Washington, the Tuskegee Institute trained many of Alabama's black teachers and managed the state's black educational programs.

The governmental and private entities that designed the industrial model touted a paternalistic approach and crafted a curriculum for black students that was driven by social, economic, and racial factors. Though progressive in theory, the industrial model was intended to maintain the existing racial order and bolster the New South economy by preparing black southerners for life as laborers in the factory and field rather than as active, upwardly mobile participants in the political economy.[25] On the ground, the

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[24] See Gordon Harvey, "Public Education in the Twentieth Century," in *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-2601, accessed May 26, 2015.

[25] For an in-depth study of the development and ideological foundation of the industrial model, see Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. An example of the aims of industrial education can be found in a 1918 letter sent to the Alabama State Council of Defense by Arthur Fleming, a section chief for the United States Council of Defense. Fleming wrote: "We call your attention to the enclosed publication of the United States Chamber of Commerce on the economic value of Negro education. This lays particular stress, as you will note, on the value of agricultural and industrial education [emphasis in original] in solving many of the Negro problems. Some of the southern states have already

industrial curriculum offered basic academic instruction, but the real emphasis was on industrial and especially agricultural activities like planting school and home gardens and forming agricultural clubs for boys and homemakers clubs for girls. The industrial curriculum was also designed to teach black children the building blocks of citizenship—refined behavior, clean deportment of the person and home, and high moral character.

It would be a mistake to view the industrial curriculum only as a mechanism of social control thrust onto black southerners. Many black Alabamians joined African Americans across the South in using industrial education as a mechanism for community development and self-help.[26] The industrial work aligned with pre-existing values held by many African Americans in the state and strategies for group advancement espoused by the nation's premier black leader and one of the architects of the industrial model—Booker T. Washington. For Washington, industrial education was part of a broader strategy for African American uplift. In Washington's economic model, by continuing to work in the South's fields and factories, blacks in the region could slowly begin to accrue wealth, purchase land, and gain the respect and eventually the acceptance of white America through a combination of economic gains and consistent displays of refined, dignified behavior, patriotism, learnedness, and other qualities associated with civic responsibility.[27] To Washington, industrial education was part of a slow but steady climb

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done notable work in affording such educational opportunities to the Negroes of the State and interesting them to remain on the farm." Arthur Fleming to Alabama State Council of Defense, 12 June 1918, Alabama State Council of Defense (1917-1919), Administrative Files, Box SG018899, Folder 6, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

[26] For a study of industrial education as a mechanism for black community-development, nation-building, and women's activism, see Angel David Nieves, "'To Erect Above the Ruined Auction-Block . . . Institutions of Learning': 'Race Women,' Industrial Education, and the Artifacts of Nation-Making in the Jim Crow South," *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics* 1, no. 3 (2005): 277-293.

[27] Outlining an approach that was economic rather than social or political, Washington urged black southerners to abandon efforts to achieve electoral participation and end segregation. In his famed speech at the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta, Georgia, Washington called on black

to social equality and the end of oppression, not a mechanism for lifelong black subordination.[28]

Though Washington's accomodationist approach drew sharp criticism from W. E. B. Du Bois and other black leaders of the era, he remained one of the most popular black leaders in the South. This was certainly true in Fayette County, where there was support for industrial education as an avenue for both community development and racial advancement. The county's most influential educational leader, C. I. Hewitt, had in fact studied at the Tuskegee Institute before returning home to Fayette County to promote Washington's program.[29] Hewitt was a landholding, middle-class farmer, teacher, and Baptist preacher who lived in the community of Covin. In a 1920 announcement for a "Meeting of Colored Teachers," published in the *Fayette Banner*, Hewitt wrote a passage that points to a local commitment to the industrial model and an emphasis on the link between educational life and community development writ large. In Hewitt's words:

> Much stress is being laid upon adopting the school work to the *general need of the community* [emphasis added]. Much good is being derived from the meetings. All teachers should attend. Too much credit cannot be given directors of the educational cause, and especially our broad hearted superintendent who is doing so much for the educational development of all the people, which is destined to accomplish much in the solution of the great race problem, which confronts us in this great southland today. Parents and teachers should unite in giving the colored youth a practical training which will render them more useful, honest, and respectful, which is truly our future hope as a race.[30]

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people in the South to begin the struggle for racial equality at "the bottom of life," to "cast down their buckets" at home, and to "dignify and glorify common labor" by continuing to work in the region's fields and factories. Booker T. Washington, "Speech to the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition, 1895," in *Say it Plain: A Century of Great African American Speeches*, ed. Catherine Ellis and Stephen Drury Smith (New York: The New Press, 2005).

[28] On Washington see Robert Jefferson Norrell, *Up From History: The Life of Booker T. Washington* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2009).

[29] In addition to the Tuskegee Institute, Hewitt also studied at Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University in Huntsville and Birmingham Baptist College. See Hewitt's obituary in *Northwest Alabamian*, July 20, 1950.

[30] *Fayette Banner*, February 12, 1920.

Hewitt's mention of "educational development" as the "solution of the great race problem" and his suggestion that "giving the colored youth a practical training which will render them more useful, honest, and respectful, which is truly our future hope as a race" are cut from the mold of Washington's strategy for black uplift. Equally important is the fact that in Hewitt's estimation, as well as that of many in the community, the school was an institution whose impact reached beyond the education of children—it was a mechanism for the development of the entire community and a vehicle for displaying local African Americans' worthiness of respect, citizenship, and equal rights.

Across the region, black people participated in the various activities that constituted the industrial model. They started school farms, homemakers clubs, boys clubs, and, as will be detailed below, held school exhibitions and fundraisers that touted industrial education and its impact on personal character and community life.[31] That said, some Fayette County residents eschewed certain aspects of the industrial curriculum, illustrating an emphasis on communal autonomy and self-help, along with a corresponding ability to tip their hats to the educational desires of the state while also making the system work for their interests.

The experience of Cherrie Price, who was appointed Fayette County's Jeanes Industrial Supervisor in 1916, will illustrate the complexities of regional engagements

[31] In 1915, there were three school farms in Fayette County and ten homemakers clubs whose membership included fifty-eight girls and forty-two mothers. List of Alabama School Farms, Correspondence of the Rural School Agent, Box SG015466, Supervising Industrial Teachers and Agents of Homemakers Clubs Alabama 1915 Folder, Alabama Department of Archives and History, and 1915 Preliminary Report of Homemakers' Clubs for Negro Girls, Correspondence of the Rural School Agent, Box SG15462, Homemakers Clubs Folder, Alabama Department of Archives and History. In 1914, there were at least two boys clubs in Fayette County. List of Fayette County Boys Club Members, Jeanes Teachers Homemakers Work, 1914 Folder, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

with the industrial model.[32] In her first months on the job, Price was having a rough go of it. Early in her tenure, she reached out to James Sibley, Alabama's State Supervisor of Rural Schools and her boss in Montgomery. She wrote:

> I don't like to complain so much but conditions here are forcing me to do so. Very little work has been done in the county this summer. The people are nice to me and I get over the county fairly well, but they don't work much. I thought at first it was the weather and condition of the crop that kept them away from the meetings, but I find in a good many cases they are mad at each other and don't want to go back to each other's homes or some other little thing.[33]

Price went on to discuss what she perceived as a lack of initiative on the part of community members when it came to canning, planting home gardens, and other manual activities proscribed by the Alabama Department of Education. Of what she termed the "so called leading people" in the county, Price wrote, "They think I am sent out to work for them. One woman sent her fruit to me to can and another sent her children to the field after we had started the work of canning beans."[34] What Price interpreted as a misunderstanding of her role by Fayette County blacks is instead best described as an example of what James C. Scott terms infrapolitics, expressions of agency and resistance that disrupt but do not overtly challenge a given framework of power.[35] In this view,

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[32] Industrial education throughout the southern states was overseen on the county level by a cadre of young black women whose salaries were paid in part by county departments of education and in part by funds provided by the Philadelphia-based Anna T. Jeanes Foundation. Ostensibly serving as agents of black community development, these Jeanes Supervisors were assigned to counties throughout the South to assist black teachers and oversee the industrial and agricultural work of rural black schools. The task of a Jeanes Supervisor was not so much to encourage academic instruction as it was to start homemakers and agricultural clubs and promote activities like canning, basket weaving, the plowing of school farms, and the planting of home gardens. See Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 153.

[33] Cherrie Price to James Sibley, 17 August 1916, Alabama Department of Education, Correspondence of the Rural School Agent, Box SG015447, Folder P-Q, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

[34] Ibid.

[35] See James C. Scott, "The Infrapolitics of Subordinate Groups," in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 183-201. In his research on the politics of the black working class, Robin D. G. Kelley uses Scott's framework to illustrate how a range of behaviors by black people in the Jim Crow South operated as examples of infrapolitics. For a regionally pertinent example, see Kelley's essay on the behavior of working-class blacks on public transportation in

when Fayette County blacks sent fruit to their Jeanes Industrial Supervisor to can or ordered their children to the fields upon her arrival, they were in fact engaging in coded refusals to fully adopt or adhere to the industrial paradigm and insisting upon undertaking the work on their own terms.

In the same letter to Sibley, Price explained that there were also efforts to replace her with a teacher from Fayette County. She wrote: "Some are trying to get in a young girl at Covin. The preacher there and some others have complained to [Fayette County Superintendent] Prof. Smith. I don't know how much truth there is to this but it makes me feel very unsettled. I would rather give up the work than have so much confusion."[36] Price's concerns were warranted, and the "young girl" Price was referring to was Roxie Shackelford, the Covin band's trombone player. After receiving Price's complaint, James Sibley wrote the following to Fayette County Superintendent Alex Smith:

> You will remember, upon my visit to you, we talked about Cherrie Price as supervising industrial teacher, and also, about the Shackelford girl. At a subsequent visit to Tuskegee I saw this young woman and she impressed me as being too inexperienced as yet to be placed in charge of the work. I think the principal demand for her is from the Covin negroes who have always wanted to keep the supervisor as a resident of that community.[37]

Sibley replied to Price as well and urged her to carry on with her duties, stating, "I note what you say regarding the difficulties under which you are working. We have already regarded Fayette County as a most difficult field because the people there are so backward, and it is very hard for a supervisor to get satisfactory results."[38]

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post-World War I Birmingham. Kelley, "Congested Terrain: Resistance and Public Transportation," in *Race Rebels*, 55-76.

[36] Cherrie Price to James Sibley, 17 August 1916, Alabama Department of Education, Correspondence of the Rural School Agent, Box SG015447, Folder P-Q, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

[37] James Sibley to Alex Smith, 21 August 1916, Alabama Department of Education, Correspondence of the Rural School Agent, Box SG015447, Folder S, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

[38] James Sibley to Cherrie Price, 21 August 1916, Alabama Department of Education, Correspondence of the Rural School Agent, Box SG015447, Folder P-Q, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

Much can be gleaned from this handful of letters. First, many black people in Fayette County abjectly refused to participate in the community- and educational-development activities that defined industrial education, a choice that may have been exacerbated by the everyday arguments and feuds that define all communities. Second, though there was support in the county for the industrial program, some insisted on a certain level of autonomy and that the industrial work be led by one of their own. Third, because of their location in a sparsely populated rural region and the infrapolitical assertions described above, Fayette County's black educational advocates were seen as being "backward" by the man responsible for overseeing rural black education and other state administrators.

It is with this in mind that the discussion returns to the role of the Covin band in Fayette County's grassroots campaign to improve black education. In January of 1917, amid the circumstances described above, a black educational campaign was in full swing in northwest Alabama. Black educators in Fayette County had joined forces with their counterparts in neighboring Lamar County to form the Fayette-Lamar County Teachers' Association. C. I. Hewitt—the area's educational and religious figurehead—had been named president of the new organization, and James Nall, the Covin band's cornet player and founder, served as one of three teachers on the association's executive committee.[39]

In February of that year, the nascent organization held a mass meeting that illustrates just how integral the Covin band and musical performance in general were to

[39] Hewitt and Nall are among the officers of the Fayette-Lamar County Teachers' Association listed in a report on the January 10-13, 1917, Fayette-Lamar-Walker County Negro Teachers' Institute sent from Alabama State Conductor for Negro Teachers G.W. Trenholm to state superintendent William Feagin. G.W. Trenholm to William Feagin, 15 January 1917, Alabama Department of Education, Administrative Files, Box SG015613, Folder 14, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

local educational and community development efforts. Tucked into the February 15, 1917, edition of the *Fayette Banner* was the following announcement:

> The colored school teachers of Fayette County will hold a County Association at the Covin Colored School Saturday, February 24th, 1917. Supt. Berry will address the teachers at noon and a very interesting program will be rendered. A concert will be given by the school and band at night.[40]

Throughout Fayette County, teachers' meetings such as these were community-wide happenings at which African Americans not only raised money and promoted awareness for their schools, but also reified and celebrated their communities while reiterating shared ideologies and goals. Black people in northwest Alabama had long invited local whites to attend and participate in these meetings, making such gatherings strategic opportunities for black people to highlight for themselves and a broader audience the sophistication of their teachers and schools as well as the values and accomplishments of their community as a whole.[41] Held at the Covin schoolhouse with the white county superintendent as its featured speaker, the February 24, 1917, Fayette-Lamar County Teachers' Association meeting represented not just the local black schools, but also an extensive black community, a regional network of individuals and families from two counties working to improve the lives of their children, upgrade their schools, and affirm their collective values and accomplishments.

The program for this meeting of the Fayette-Lamar County Teachers' Association speaks volumes about the essence of the event and the people it represented (Fig. 4.2). In

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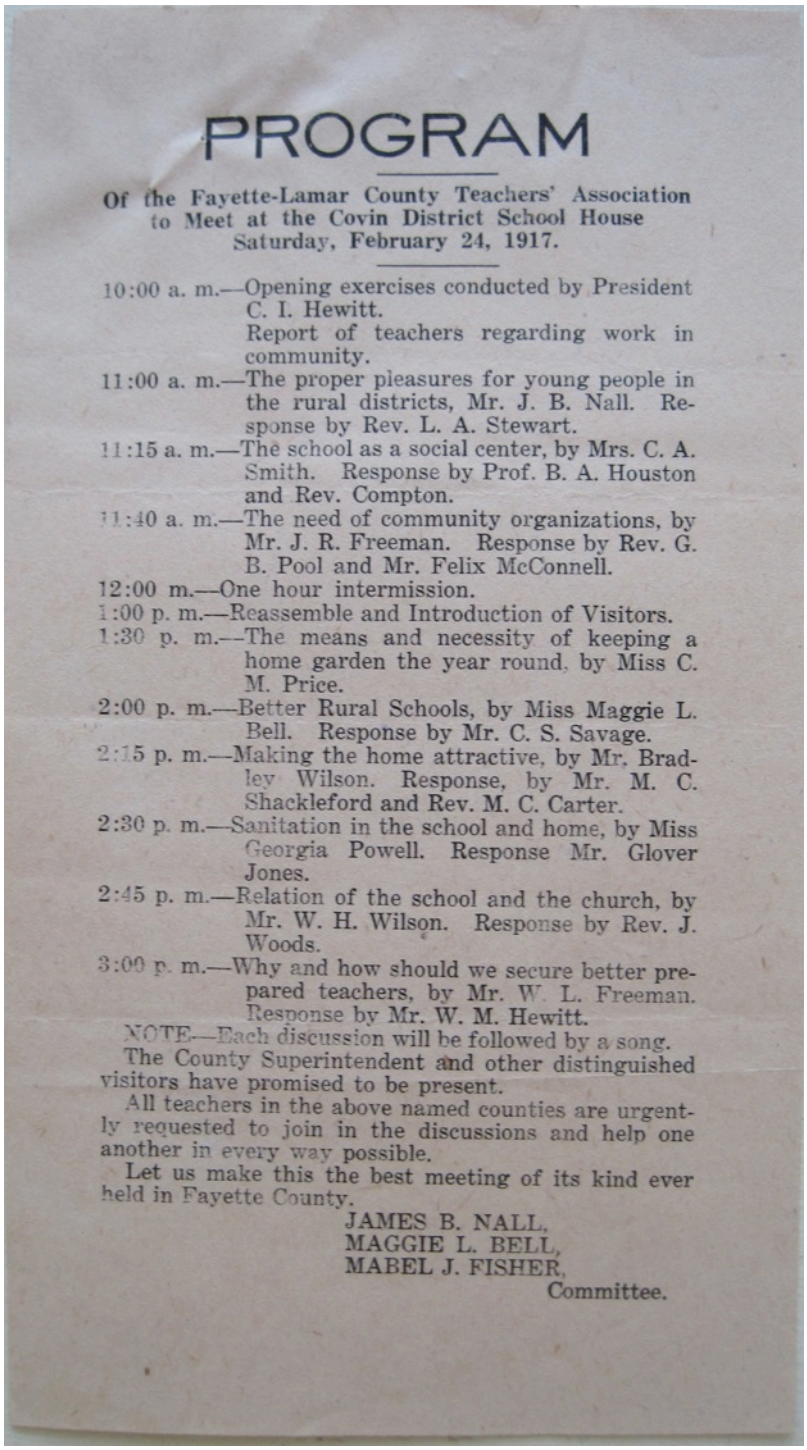
[40] *Fayette Banner*, February 15, 1917.

[41] African Americans in Fayette County had invited local whites to attend and speak at their school meetings for decades. For example, the November 26, 1897, edition of *The Fayette Sentinel* newspaper includes an account of a black school meeting in Fayette County at which a white farmer was among the speakers. Likewise, missionary societies from Fayette County's white churches attended and spoke at a fundraiser for a Fayette County training school held on November 30, 1916, just three months before the meeting in Covin discussed above. See Cherry Price to James L. Sibley, 20 November 1916, Alabama Department of Education, Correspondence of the Rural School Agent, Box SG15447, Folder P-Q, Alabama Department of Archives and History.



PROGRAM

Of the Fayette-Lamar County Teachers' Association to Meet at the Covin District School House Saturday, February 24, 1917.

10:00 a. m.—Opening exercises conducted by President C. I. Hewitt.
Report of teachers regarding work in community.

11:00 a. m.—The proper pleasures for young people in the rural districts, Mr. J. B. Nall. Response by Rev. L. A. Stewart.

11:15 a. m.—The school as a social center, by Mrs. C. A. Smith. Response by Prof. B. A. Houston and Rev. Compton.

11:40 a. m.—The need of community organizations, by Mr. J. R. Freeman. Response by Rev. G. B. Pool and Mr. Felix McConnell.

12:00 m.—One hour intermission.

1:00 p. m.—Reassemble and Introduction of Visitors.

1:30 p. m.—The means and necessity of keeping a home garden the year round, by Miss C. M. Price.

2:00 p. m.—Better Rural Schools, by Miss Maggie L. Bell. Response by Mr. C. S. Savage.

2:15 p. m.—Making the home attractive, by Mr. Bradley Wilson. Response, by Mr. M. C. Shackleford and Rev. M. C. Carter.

2:30 p. m.—Sanitation in the school and home, by Miss Georgia Powell. Response Mr. Glover Jones.

2:45 p. m.—Relation of the school and the church, by Mr. W. H. Wilson. Response by Rev. J. Woods.

3:00 p. m.—Why and how should we secure better prepared teachers, by Mr. W. L. Freeman. Response by Mr. W. M. Hewitt.

NOTE.—Each discussion will be followed by a song.

The County Superintendent and other distinguished visitors have promised to be present.

All teachers in the above named counties are urgently requested to join in the discussions and help one another in every way possible.

Let us make this the best meeting of its kind ever held in Fayette County.

JAMES B. NALL,
MAGGIE L. BELL,
MABEL J. FISHER,
Committee.

Figure 4.2. Program for the Fayette-Lamar County Teachers' Association Meeting in Covin, Alabama, February 24, 1917. Courtesy Alabama Department of Archives and History. Attached to Cherry Price to James L. Sibley, 24 November 1917, Box SG15448, Folder 23.

addition to Superintendent Berry's talk, the day's agenda consisted of lectures by black teachers and leaders from Fayette County and Lamar County on topics that reflected both the educational and moral principles of many in the community. There were speeches that dealt directly with education, such as W. L. Freeman's discussion "Why and how should we secure better prepared teachers" and Maggie Bell's talk "Better rural schools." Most of the day's addresses, however, spoke to issues dealing with black community life in general. Several of the lectures lauded the value of community institutions, including C. A. Smith's "The school as a social center," Jonas Freeman's "The need of community organizations," and W. H. Wilson's "Relation of the school and the church." There was likewise a series of talks focusing on personal comportment and aesthetic refinement. James Nall spoke on "The proper pleasures for young people in the rural districts"; Georgia Powell discussed "Sanitation in the home and school"; and Bradley Wilson gave a talk entitled "Making the home attractive," which included a response by Mitch Shackelford, who indeed had one of the most attractive homes in the area.

Through the topics they chose and the delivery of their orations, these individuals established and reiterated a community-defining ideological framework. The array of topics addressed at the meeting reveals that although educational advancement was ostensibly the order of the day, it was the black community at large that was being developed and showcased. Many of the event's speakers were teachers in Fayette or Lamar County.[42] However, the meeting's presenters came from all walks of life, indicating that a diverse array of participants that crossed boundaries of social class

[42] In addition to C. I. Hewitt and James Nall, Maggie Bell and Georgia Powell were also teachers. Fayette County Board of Education Monthly Payroll, January 1917, Alabama Department of Education, Annual and Quarterly Financial Statements of County Superintendents and Other Financial Records, Box SG11945, Folder 4, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

contributed to these educational and community development efforts. Census records reveal that landowners like Mitch Shackelford and Cornelius Savage were given the floor, but so were Landon Stewart, a sharecropping farmer in Covin, and Felix McConnell, a laborer at a local sawmill.[43]

Although his name is buried at the bottom of the program, the presence of W. M. Hewitt is essential to understanding the character of the Fayette-Lamar County Teachers' Association meeting. Known locally as Willie Hewitt, Hewitt was the brother of C. I. Hewitt and a wage worker on the Shackelford farm who played a vital role in the area's African American communities as a premier singer and singing instructor.[44] It is likely that Willie Hewitt served at the county teacher's association meeting not just as respondent to the day's last presentation, but also in his capacity as song leader. Nestled at the bottom of the meeting's program was a brief reminder about the event's order of operations: "NOTE—Each discussion will be followed by a song."

As it turns out, the Fayette-Lamar County Teachers' Association meeting was a melodic event, and musical performance was integral to the gathering in the literal sense, with singing integrated into the agenda between the various addresses. Over the course of the convening, a performance cycle was established and repeated. To begin, a man or

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[43] According to Fayette County's 1917 tax digest, both Mitch Shackelford and Cornelius Savage owned more than 150 acres of land and held real estate and personal property assessed at more than $800.00. Fayette County Tax Book 1917, Fayette County Courthouse, Fayette, Alabama. In the 1920 U.S. census, Landon Stewart is listed as a farmer who works rented land. 1920 U.S. Census, Fayette County, Alabama, population schedule, Precinct 21, page 1, dwelling 6; digital image, www.ancestry.com, accessed July 13, 2013. In the same census year, Felix McConnell's occupation is listed as "laborer" and his place of work as "lumber mill." 1920 U.S. Census, Fayette County, Alabama, population schedule, Precinct 1, page 16, dwelling 367; digital image, www.ancestry.com, accessed July 13, 2013.

[44] Willie Hewitt's World War One draft registration card lists his occupation as "farming" and "M.C. Shackelford" as his employer. World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, Fayette County, Alabama, serial number 453, order number 426, Willie Matthew Hewitt; digital image, www.ancestry.com, accessed July 13, 2013. In interviews with the author, Warda Prewitt and Ruth Anthony mention Willie Hewitt's prominent role in local singing in the early twentieth century. Ruth Anthony, interview by author, June 20, 2011 and Warda Prewitt, interview by author, March 21, 2012.

woman would deliver an oration on a topic of significance to African American life in the area. Then, after one or two individuals expounded on the subject at hand with a brief response, those present would break out in communal song. We will never know exactly what songs were sung that day, but given the prevailing local musical traditions, the most probable selections were spirituals, lined out Dr. Watts hymns, or hymns from shape-note songbooks. These musical performances provided a coda for each of the meeting's lectures, both enabling a moment of reflective transition from one discussion to the next and serving as an aesthetic, emotive, and community building exercise that was as essential to the meeting as the day's various addresses.

Over the course of roughly six hours, those in attendance took part in communal song at least ten times and as many as four times in one hour. Simply put, that is a lot of singing. The Fayette-Lamar County Teachers' Association meeting was a daylong performance with a significant musical component. Those in attendance spoke and sang—performed—their community into existence, defining for themselves and showcasing to all present a number of shared beliefs, behaviors, and aspirations. Regardless of whether or not every member of the community subscribed to and lived by the ideas espoused that day, the teachers' meeting reveals how a combination of middle- and working-class rural blacks used musical performance to establish a system of values and behavior, inspire community members to adhere to these principles, and publicly articulate these community-defining characteristics to local whites.

As indicated by the announcement in the *Fayette Banner*, the closing of the teachers' meeting did not bring an end to the community's musical performances, for that night at the schoolhouse there was singing by the students and a concert by the brass band.

As we have already seen, two members of the Covin band—James Nall and Roxie Shackelford—were teachers working on the front lines of local efforts for educational progress, with Nall also being one of the organizers of day's meeting. At the schoolhouse that evening, the band represented the entire black community, not just the teachers or the Covin school, an idea emphasized by the fact that the group's known adult members—teachers and farmers—were not schoolchildren but community leaders in their late teens and early twenties.

The selections played by the band at the schoolhouse concert can only be suggested, not established. The event was advertised in the *Fayette Banner* not as a dance but as a "concert," a term that implies a refined, sit-down event. The "national melodies" found in Roxie Shackelford's copy of *Jenkins' Beginner's Band Book and Instructor* — patriotic standards, overtures, and waltzes—would reiterate the themes of the meeting earlier in the day. Just as the teachers' meeting was an expression of moral values, the corresponding evening concert was intended to convey an air of decorum and civility; it was a demonstration of musical respectability. Selections from the standard American brass band repertoire were ideal for this purpose. It is possible that the Shackelfords' photograph of the Covin band in figure 4.1 was taken the day of this particular meeting, and the sign's announcement of a "big concert tonight" could indeed refer to the schoolhouse concert that followed the teachers' meeting. We will never know. Either way, the concert at the schoolhouse is certainly the type of event that would warrant an invitation to the area's "white friends," an assertion supported by the fact that the concert was promoted in the local newspaper.

The Covin band's practice of playing from sheet music enhanced the educational

and cultural messages of the teachers' meeting. In an era when African Americans were excluded from the national citizenry on the ideological foundation of their race's presumed intellectual and cultural inferiority, the Covin band publicly transformed printed musical notation into America's popular music, exhibiting a form of literacy and cultural fluency that combined with the band's musical skill to foster a sense of national and regional belonging.

It is worth restating that in the national psyche of the time, a brass band validated and elevated a community while signifying its participation in American life and culture. The previously discussed words of the editor of the *Fayette Banner* have particular relevance in this context: "A good band is a credit to any place." Although they did not represent a township or municipality per se, the Covin band's schoolhouse performance, along with its other appearances, was a place-based event, yet another spatial story. The concert venue—the Covin schoolhouse—was itself a defining structure in this rural black community's built environment. During the concert, the band reified and represented northwest Alabama's broader black community, whose members were bound by shared histories and experiences. The ensemble's music provided an affective experience that reinforced these bonds while validating the black community for all present. This good band was a credit to the black people of this place.

The Covin band's performance at the schoolhouse was not an anomalous occurrence; in northwest Alabama music had been an integral component of African American meetings of all sorts since the days of slavery, and concerts were a common component of educational mass meetings in the early twentieth century.[45] In fact,

[45] To offer another example, on November 30, 1916—just three months before the meeting in Covin—a fundraiser for an African American county training school was held in the county seat of Fayette.

schoolhouse concerts were a fundraising and educational development strategy suggested by the state's most recognizable black institution. In 1915, the Tuskegee Institute's Extension Department published *The Negro Rural School and Its Relation to the Community*—a step-by-step guidebook intended to help African Americans secure funding for and build schoolhouses. In the brochure, the authors suggest concerts as effective fundraising and promotional strategies. "Old and young folks not only enjoy looking on the concert," wrote the brochure's authors, "but to really 'act' themselves is great fun. A paid cash admission to the concert is a good plan to raise money."[46] The details of the February 24, 1917, meeting of the Fayette-Lamar County Teachers' Association illustrate how musical performance, and brass band music in particular, could be used as a framework for educational development, community development, and racial self-definition.

As valuable as its school concerts were, it would be inaccurate to portray the Covin band's impact as being tied to this one particular type of performance, for the ensemble's cultural work was as varied as the array of musical styles it played. To elucidate the significance of the musical group in the region, the discussion turns now not to another concert, but to a performance by the band that was visual in nature. In Fayette County, the Covin band's musical and aesthetic contributions were part of a broader

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According to the meeting's program, the fundraiser included a keynote by one of Alabama's most well known black leaders, James Eason, discussions of the value of a training school, and reports from black schools throughout the county. Members of the missionary societies of the white churches were invited, and the white president of a local bank was asked to speak. Willie Hewitt served as one of two leaders of the opening devotion. As was the case in religious services, devotions at African American mass meetings in the area included both a prayer and a song. After the fundraiser's attendees broke for supper, there was "Music conducted by Mr. R. Rice." See program for "A Training School for Colored Children" attached to Cherry Price to James L. Sibley, 20 November 1916, Alabama Department of Education, Correspondence of the Rural School Agent, Box SG15447, Folder P-Q, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

[46] Extension Department, Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, *The Negro Rural School and Its Relation to the Community* (Tuskegee, AL: Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute Extension Department, 1915), 78.

intermedial project in which creative expression was used to convey pointed ideological messages, give shape to the region's black community, and achieve a series of race-conscious, counterhegemonic goals. As described in chapters 2 and 3, the Shackelford family and the hundreds of people the family photographed approached this mission visually, using the camera in moments of self-definition and community validation. The Shackelfords' photographs and the music of the band were spokes on the same wheel—expressive modes working together to reinforce ideological motifs and spread far and wide the message that black people in northwest Alabama were upstanding and dignified contributors to society. One of the many moments when photography and musical performance merged was on the unknown day when the Covin band's members grabbed their instruments and arranged themselves in front of the Shackelford home to pose for the photograph in figure 4.1.

As was the case with the music the Covin band produced, the group's photo-musical performance in figure 4.1 can be understood only in the cultural and historical context in which the image was produced, for the Covin band was by no means alone in its desire to visually preserve its musical accomplishments. In the first decades of the twentieth century, posing for photographs with instruments, hymnals, and other musical signifiers was a common practice throughout the United States and beyond, indicating that musicians from various walks of life conceived of music as something to *see* as well as hear. With sound recording equipment expensive, difficult to operate, and hard to come by, cameras provided musicians a more accessible, albeit visual, means of musical recording. When posing for photographic portraits, people often incorporated musical instruments in deliberate, performative acts of cultural production that transmitted their

individual, familial, and communal identities.

A few examples will illustrate the widespread nature of this practice. Pete, Paris, and Neal Hammons were white musicians who lived with their families in the hills of Webster County, West Virginia. The three brothers never made an audio recording of their music, but in 1906 an unknown photographer snapped a picture of them posing in front of Neal's home holding a fiddle, a rifle, and a gramophone (Fig. 4.3).[47] The fiddle and the gramophone alone serve as symbols of the significance of music in Pete, Paris, and Neal's lives and their familiarity with American musical culture beyond the

Figure 4.3. Pete, Paris, and Neal Hammons at Neal's home in Webster County, West Virginia, ca. 1906. Courtesy of Gerry Milnes; photographer unknown.

mountains. When placed in the semiotic environment created by the brothers' confident, challenging poses, by the rifle in Paris's lap, and by the brothers' location by the side of a

[47] Gerry Milnes provides details about the Hammons brothers and the circumstances under which this picture was taken. See Gerry Milnes, *Play of a Fiddle: Traditional Music, Dance, and Folklore in West Virginia* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1999), 147-149.

cabin with a saw hanging above them, these two musical objects—the fiddle and the gramophone—become essential components of a photographic construction of identity in which masculinity is linked to an ability to own and operate both musical instruments and firearms.

In the photograph in figure 4.4, a black family of twelve in Hammond, Louisiana, also sits for a portrait in front of their home, but this group relies on musical instruments to convey a different semiotic message. The violin, cello, and parlor guitar held by the three men certainly symbolize a certain type of masculinity, but in this image the instruments also act as distinct signifiers of material status and cultural sophistication.

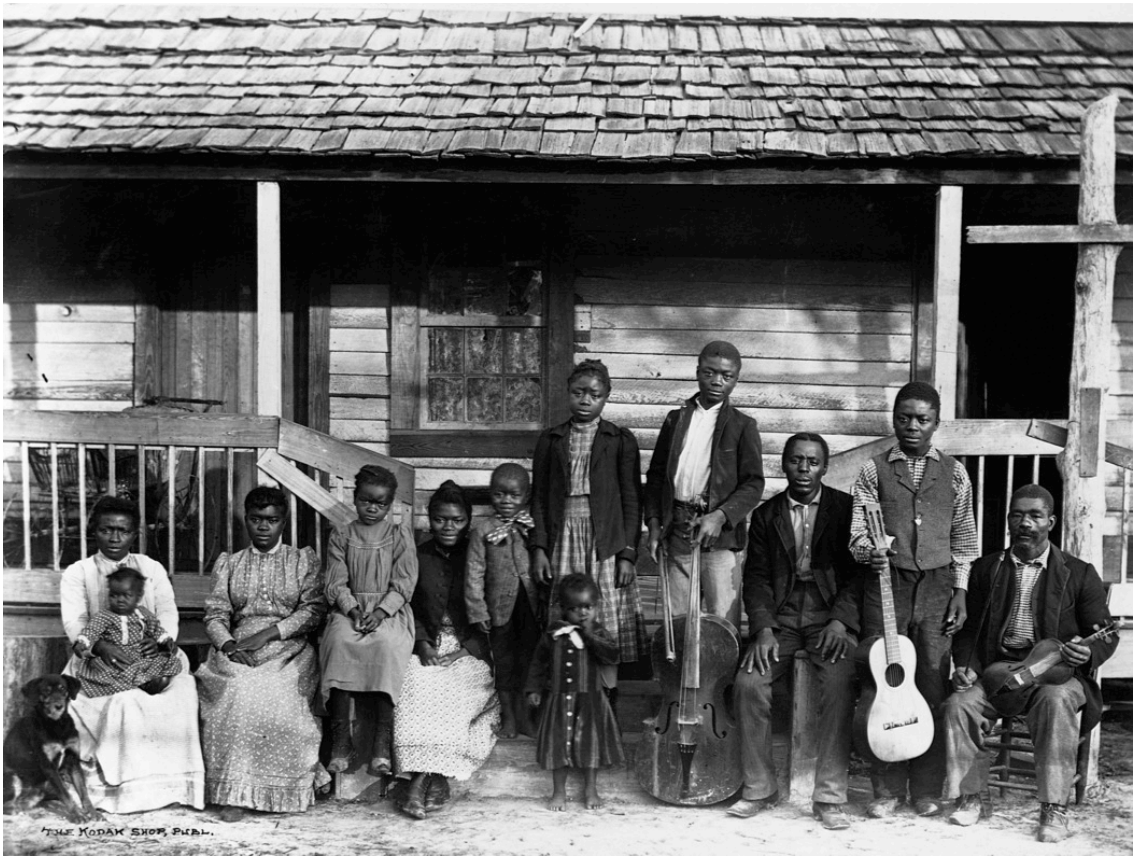

Figure 4.4. Unidentified family, Hammond, Louisiana, ca. 1900. Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Witteman Collection (LC-USZ62-26015); photographer unknown. The words "A Musical Family, Hammond, Louisiana" are written on the back of the photographic print.

With much of the house visible in the background, a pram on the front porch, and men, women, and children of all ages in the photograph, the portrait links music to family, domesticity, and home. One thousand miles away, near Lawrence, Kansas, another extended black family incorporated musical instruments into a similar portrait, with the men proudly displaying a mandolin, a violin, a banjo, and guitars (Fig. 4.5). Again here musical instruments symbolize prosperity, family, and refinement.

The Shackelford family photographers were in touch with this widespread photographic convention and produced several photographs of musicians and musical instruments. The photograph in figure 4.6 illustrates the Shackelfords' use of musical instruments as symbols of prosperity and refinement. In the photograph, an unidentified girl who is likely Roxie Shackelford plays the Shackelford family parlor organ on the porch of their home. Parlor organs, also known as pump organs, enjoyed great popularity in the early twentieth century. The presence of an ornate organ in a family's living room was a symbol of cultural sophistication, refinement, and feminine grace.[48] As was the case with brass band music, owning and playing parlor organs enabled African Americans to musically express their adherence to the Victorian morals and values that the instrument itself symbolized.

The Shackelfords' photograph of the girl playing the organ—who is almost certainly Roxie Shackelford—illustrates how the camera could be used to preserve and convey the cultural meanings that come with playing music. Since there was no electricity in the Shackelford family home at the time, the Shackelfords moved the organ to the porch in order to have sufficient light to make the photograph. That act alone,

[48] Kenneth Ames draws these conclusions in his material culture analysis of the turn-of-the-century pump organ. See Kenneth Ames, "Material Culture as NonVerbal Communication: A Historical Case Study," *Journal of American Culture* 3, no. 4 (2004): 619-41.

Figure 4.5. Unidentified extended family near Lawrence, Kansas, ca. 1920. Courtesy Kansas State Historical Society, Alfred Lawrence Collection (No. 0969); photograph by Alfred Lawrence.

Figure 4.6. Unidentified girl playing the Shackelford family parlor organ, ca. 1910. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.458); photograph by the Shackelford family.

dragging the massive instrument out of the house and onto the porch, speaks to just how important it was to the Shackelford family to photographically document their ownership of the organ and the skill of the player. Wearing a decorous white dress and floral hat, the girl sits at the instrument with an upright posture and her fingers resting on the keys, displaying her faculty with the organ by simulating the act of playing. With her eyes fixed on the sheet music, the organ player, like the Covin band at their schoolhouse concert, exhibits a form of musical and cultural literacy through her ability to convert printed notes to sound. In this case, however, the expression of cultural fluency is photographic and therefore reproducible and mobile.

My readings of these three photographs are indeed cursory at best, and each warrants in-depth analysis elsewhere. What matters most for present purposes is the fact that the Covin band posed for its portrait in the context of a far-reaching photographic discourse in which musical instruments were used to construct and convey individual and group identities. Such photo-musical performances were particularly significant for black southerners, who lived under the yoke of violence and the structural denial of social and political rights and everyday respect that defined the Jim Crow era. The ideology of white supremacy and the Jim Crow system were undergirded by the pervasive and dehumanizing discourse in popular culture outlined in chapter 2. The denigration of black music and musicians was a keynote of this white supremacist project, with cultural texts and performances incorporating African American music in the creation and repetition of negative stereotypes in multiple mediums.

Beginning in the nineteenth century, white minstrel musicians throughout the

United States blackened their faces with burnt cork and performed musical caricatures of African American plantation songs, reinforcing stereotypes depicting African Americans as simple, untrustworthy, and childlike. Minstrel shows were put on in the nation's largest cities and smallest hamlets and quickly became one of America's most popular forms of entertainment. On stage, blackface minstrels lampooned African American culture with dances and musical numbers meant to discredit black music and musicians and with comedic skits in which the everyday ineptitude of African Americans was the inevitable punchline. The minstrel stage gave birth to many an African American stereotype, including the characters of Zip Coon, the dandy who made a fool of himself in his failed efforts to mimic white culture, and the carefree Sambo, the child-like slave who lived a happy and content life made possible by the structure of his bondage. [49]

Blackface minstrelsy and its accompanying themes continued into the twentieth century, especially in the South and including Fayette County. For example, in 1928 students at a white junior high school in Fayette County put on a "Glee Club Program and Negro Minstrel" under the direction of one of their teachers and as a fundraiser for their school. According to an announcement in the *Fayette Banner*, this performance was made up of two "black face skits" full of "musical crossfire and gags" and populated by characters with names like "Julius Jazzbo Jackson."[50]

In the 1890s the "coon song" craze joined minstrelsy in the musical denigration of black people. In addition to musical performances, sheet music folios for hundreds of

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[49] For book-length studies of the history and cultural impact of blackface minstrelsy, see Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); William J. Mahar, *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1998); and Robert Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

[50] *Fayette Banner*, January 19, 1928. In the context of singing and brass band music at the black teachers' meeting discussed above, it is worth noting here that this particular white school used the musical and performative denigration of black people and culture as a showcase for its students and fundraising strategy.

coon songs were published in northern urban centers and disseminated throughout the nation, often with stereotypical representations of African Americans on their covers. In coon songs, which were syncopated cakewalks and marches intended to mimic black music, the stereotypes shifted in emphasis, moving from portrayals of black people as being ignorant yet harmless to caricatures that depicted them as being violent, razor-wielding savages.[51] Together, blackface minstrelsy, coon songs, and other musical genres that appropriated and attempted to demean black culture undertook the discursive task of maintaining the ideological foundation on which white supremacy and the corresponding oppression of black people rested.

A visual discourse composed of playbills, posters, postcards, and other mass-produced, illustrated ephemera accompanied and reinforced this musical hegemony. Produced by the Courier Lithograph Company in Buffalo, New York, the 1899 poster for Gorton's Original New Orleans Minstrels in figure 4.7 illustrates the point. In the caricature, the trombone player is dehumanized via the exaggerated size of his lips and feet, while his outlandish and ill-fitting clothes—with bright colors, mismatched patterns, pants that are too short, and miniscule hat—signify an interest in drawing attention to himself along with a corresponding inability to accurately adopt the sartorial styles of the day. Both the minstrel troupe's white founder and manager, Joseph Gorton and Charles Larkin, oversee the musician, with their likenesses embedded in the top right-hand corner of the poster. The white duo's refined dignity operates as a foil that accentuates the trombone player's supposed subhuman status and cultural ineptitude, while their position

[51] James Dormon offers a detailed exploration of the transition from the "safe figures" stereotyped in minstrel performances to the more brutal and savage depictions of African Americans in coon songs. James H. Dorman, "Shaping the Popular Image of Post-Reconstruction Blacks: The 'Coon Song' Phenomenon of the Gilded Age," *American Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (1988): 450-471.

Figure 4.7. Lithograph poster for Gorton's Original New Orleans Minstrels, ca. 1899. Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Performing Arts Posters Collection (LC-USZ62-67338); produced by Courier Lithograph Company, Buffalo, New York.

in the image communicates to the viewer their control of the inferior musician.

A pointed regional message could also be found in this expansive visual discourse, with an array of images portraying African American musicians contently living in a pastoral and fictitious "Old South." In the version of antebellum life portrayed in such images, slavery was not a violent, oppressive regime, but was instead a paternalistic system whereby whites provided child-like African Americans the structure and support they needed to live comfortably. Illustrated ephemera from the early twentieth century frequently depicted black people as being culturally frozen in the antebellum South in an effort to convey the idea that post-emancipation black southerners, rather than living in a violently suppressive regime, longed for the simple life of the Old South.

Musical signifiers were often called upon in this project, resulting in a vast body of depictions of southern black musicians happily playing symbolically antiquated instruments such as the fiddle and the banjo. An illustrated image from the 1909 postcard folio *Souvenir Folder of the Sunny South: "The Land of King Cotton"* exemplifies these discursive conventions (Fig. 4.8). In the postcard, an elderly man plays the fiddle while sitting in a bucolic setting, with a patch of flowers by his side, a field behind him, and lush oaks cutting across the skyline. The illustration's caption—"A Happy Fiddler From Dixie Land"—enhances its overall message. The phrase "Dixie Land" signifies the fiddler's position in both time and space. Geographically, the musician is in the southeastern United States, while the term "Dixie" also connotes a particular place in time—the old, pre-Civil War South. The caption ensures that the viewer knows the

Figure 4.8. Illustration from the postcard folio *Souvenir Folder of the Sunny South, "The Land of King Cotton,"* ca. 1909. Author's collection; folio produced by Curt Teich & Co., Chicago, Illinois.

fiddler's emotional disposition; he is happy in the Old South, content in the era of slavery. The postcard folio's inclusion of the lyrics to the song "Dixie Land" further clarifies this overarching message. Born on the minstrel stage and written in black dialect, the lyrics to "Dixie Land" reflect the presumed black singer's longing for the simple, happy times of slavery. As printed in the postcard folio, the singer's proclamation "I wish I was in de land ob cotton, Old times dar am not forgotten" enhances the illustrated fiddler's message that black southerners' sense of longing for the old days and the old ways is so powerful that, in their hearts, minds, and culture, they choose to remain there.[52]

The postcard in figure 4.9 conveys a similar message. Here a man stands in front of his dilapidated home wearing patched, tattered clothes and playing a banjo, which was

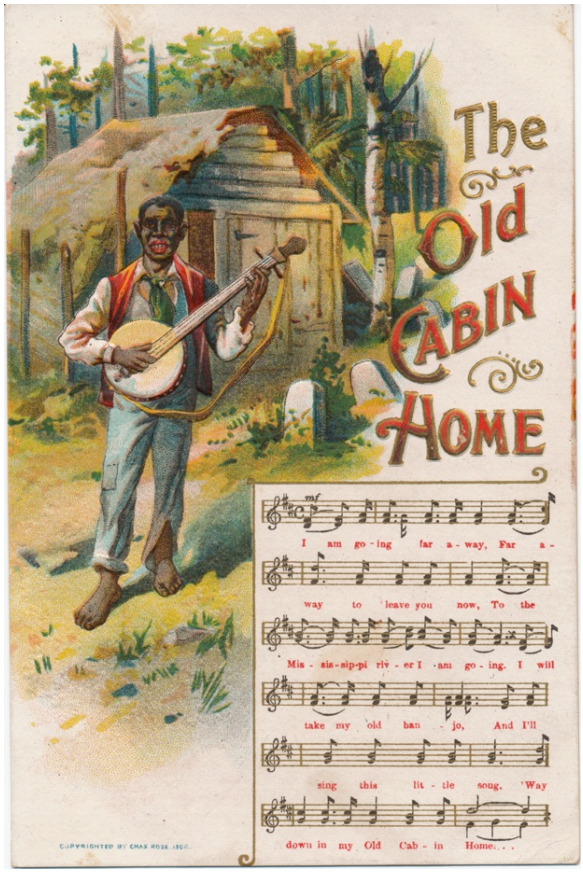

Figure 4.9. Postcard, ca. 1908. Author's collection; produced by Charles Rose.

[52] These lyrics to "Dixie Land" were printed in the postcard folio *Souvenir Folder of the Sunny South, "The Land of King Cotton,"* produced by Curt Teich & Co., Chicago, Illinois, ca. 1909.

the instrument of choice for blackface minstrels and one that, with its African roots, had come to symbolize the negative stereotypes applied to African Americans. Musical notation and lyrics for the first stanza of the song "The Old Cabin Home" are embedded in the bottom right-hand corner of the postcard. Although not printed in full on the postcard, the lyrics to "The Old Cabin Home" tell the story of an aged black traveling musician who has returned to finish his days "Away down in my old cabin home." As exemplified by the song's last stanza, the lyrics here paint a picture of the post-emancipation South as a utopian land where black people are happy in their oppression and in a role subservient to whites:

> 'Tis there where I roam away down on the old farm,
> Close by the side of the Old Cabin Home,
> Where all the darkeys am free,
> O merrily sound the banjo for de white folks round de room,
> Away down my Old Cabin Home.[53]

The illustrations in figures 4.8 and 4.9, along with countless others like them, were part of an expansive visual project in which portrayals of southern black musicians were used to construct and perpetuate the idea that African Americans were simple, backward, incapable of participating in American culture and society, and content with their station in life. It is difficult to overstate the ubiquity of such illustrations. Moreover, the frequent appearance of such pictures on postcards, which continued well into the twentieth century, enabled these stereotypes to travel throughout the United States and beyond.

It was in this discursive context that the Covin band stepped in front of the Shackelfords' camera (Fig. 4.1). In the group's photographic performance, the musicians'

[53] This stanza comes from a nineteenth century song sheet for "The Old Cabin Home" printed in New York, New York by the publisher H. De Marsan. "The Old Cabin Home" song sheet, American Song Sheets, Series 1, Volume 7, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; digital image, www.memory.loc.gov, accessed July 1, 2103.

pose, dress, and instruments, as well as the Shackelford home in the background, work together to tell a story that counters the narrative constructed by the endless parade of caricatures of black musicians intended to define and demean southern black culture. The band members stand in a line, having arranged themselves according to the instruments they play. Each member of the group stands upright with his or her horn tucked tightly under the arm with military precision. Heads held high, everyone looks into the lens with facial expressions that exude cool, self-assured pride. The arrangement of these musicians and the contrast in colors of their clothing reiterate what Jasper Rastus Nall identified as the band's defining characteristic—its two female members. Roxie Shackelford and the unidentified alto horn player stand in the center of the frame holding open, straightforward poses. The female duo's position in the line along with the contrast between their white dresses and the men's dark suits emphasizes the fact that both women and men contributed to the band's musical performances and community-building efforts.

The Covin band members' deliberate positioning of their bodies in this photo-musical performance is best illustrated through a comparison to the only other known photograph of the ensemble. Between 1915 and 1917, Jeanes Industrial Supervisors and other employees of the Alabama Department of Education photographed rural black educational life throughout the state and submitted their pictures to James Sibley, the Alabama State Agent for Rural Schools. Most of these photographs captured black Alabamians engaged in the Department of Education's prescribed agricultural and industrial work, depicting scenes like women displaying preserves and baked goods, teachers at training workshops, and students sewing in the classroom.

Among the 690 prints collected by Sibley is a snapshot of the Covin band taken by an unknown photographer (Fig. 4.10). The band's pose for the Department of Education employee is quite different than its performance in front of the Shackelfords' camera. Eyes are hidden beneath the brims of hats; suits are not as pressed and buttoned up as they are in the Shackelfords' photograph; body language conveys an air of impatience; and the overall arrangement of the group—with the unidentified bass drummer and Ollie Shackelford drifting off to the left and right sides of the line—is not tightly coordinated. To be sure, the band members' self-assured confidence still comes across in the State Agent for Rural Schools photograph, but the end result is nonetheless a picture that has the quality of a snapshot, as though the group was interrupted by an outsider and asked to gather together and pose for a quick picture.

When placed alongside the State Department of Rural Schools photograph, it becomes clear that the Shackelfords family's portrait portrays the group of musicians

Figure 4.10. The Covin brass band, ca. 1918. Courtesy Alabama Department of Archives and History, State Agent for Negro Schools Rural Schools Photograph Collection (LPP 14, Box 3, Folder 2); photographer unknown.

photographed in their home community by one of their own, and the ensemble uses this opportunity to create a pointed expression of race-conscious pride and accomplishment. Everyone in the group wears the fashions of the day rather than the marching band uniforms of the past, indicating that they are steeped in and contributing to contemporary American culture. Traditional instruments like the fiddle and the banjo—with the latter being inextricably linked to blackface minstrelsy—are nowhere to be seen. Instead, the Covin band members—who are farmers, laborers, and teachers in a remote corner of Alabama—play industrially produced horns purchased from Charles Williams Stores, Inc., a mail order house in New York City that imported brass instruments produced in Europe.[54] These well-polished symbols of the Machine Age stand in contrast to the photograph's pastoral setting, defining the southern countryside as a space for the utilization of modern instruments and understandings of modern musical forms. At the same time, the musical instruments, like the musicians' clothing, highlight the band members' middle-class status and engagement in contemporary culture via the international marketplace. Without playing a note, the Covin band's photo-musical performance contests stereotypical illustrations that depict rural black southerners as out of touch with modern life and forever frozen—musically and in turn culturally—in the antebellum South.

The band members' choice to include the sign on the bass drum in their photograph adds a textual component to the portrait. It was common practice at the time for a brass band to parade around town the day of a concert to literally drum up interest in the evening's performance, and the Covin band's professional, reusable sign was ideal for

[54] The only known remaining instrument used by the band is a cornet owned by Annie Shackelford and found by the author in the Shackelford family home. Stamped on the bell of the instrument are the words, "Charles Wilson Special Class B."

this purpose. Whereas the band's sign was a marketing tool to promote its concerts, in the Shackelfords' photograph the printed text gives the group's portrait a geographic component that would otherwise be absent. With its mention of "the Covin school-house," the sign tells the viewer where the band is and where it performs, clarifying the location of the ensemble's home community.

The sign's mention of "seats for our white friends" is equally important. For many local blacks, building relationships with whites was both an act of friendliness and part of an overall approach to racial advancement. When the Covin band marched around the countryside promoting its concert, its sign made it clear that everyone in the community was welcome. Likewise, the term "white friends" was itself an extension of goodwill and a mainstay in the local vernacular of racial uplift.[55] More importantly, since band's music frequently communicated the value and progress of the region's black community, the sign's invitation worked to ensure that local whites were present to hear these melodies of respectability. At the same time, the precise language on the sign indicates that social and legal mores of segregation would be upheld at the concert, with certain "seats" set aside for white attendees. In the Shackelfords' photograph, the bass drum sign tells the viewer where this band is located and where it performs while also offering a glimpse into the ensemble's approach to race relations and racial uplift.

It may not appear at all musical upon first glance, but the Shackelford family's farmhouse, which looms large in the background of the Covin band's portrait, plays a vital role in conveying the picture's cultural message. Although the house certainly

[55] For example, as discussed in detail in the following chapter, published descriptions of northwest Alabama's emancipation celebrations of the late nineteenth century often included phrases like, "A large number of our white friends visited our gathering which we were glad to see." *Vernon Courier*, May 17, 1889.

serves as a symbol of the Shackelford family's economic status achieved in part through home and land ownership, the home's significance in the photograph becomes clear when we consider its role as a vibrant local site of cultural production. In addition to taking and developing photographs at their house, the Shackelfords held dances and parties attended by local residents and those who made the trip from other parts of the area, with the brass band often providing music for these celebrations. Even today, parties held by the Shackelfords one hundred years ago, especially on holidays such as Christmas and New Year's Eve, hold legendary status in Fayette County. Upon arriving at a dance at the Shackelford house, guests would open the door to find the band playing in the front hall. Revelers could opt to dance in one of the two adjacent rooms, but, according to Ruth Anthony, the granddaughter of Mitch and Geneva Shackelford, in the hallway, with the band, was the place to be.[56]

The style of music the band played at the Shackelford home and the style of dance the guests engaged in remain unclear. The parties could have included waltzes and other decorous dances or been livelier affairs where revelers did modern steps like the Charleston. There is also the possibility that the type of music the band played at the Shackelford home, as well as the dance steps performed by guests, evolved with the times. Also, the Covin band's members were not the only musicians who played in the Shackelford home, as guitar players and other musicians were known to play for those in attendance.[57] What matters most, and what we do know, is that the Shackelford home was a space of musical production—a center for black cultural expression.

Likewise, the Shackelfords' work as photographers contributed to their house's

[56] Ruth Anthony, interview by author, June 20, 2011.
[57] Ruth Anthony, interview by author, June 20, 2011.

status as a musical performance space, as people often incorporated musical objects into the portraits they posed for at the Shackelford house. The unidentified duo in the photograph in figure 4.11 poses outside the Shackelford home. The man standing displays his guitar proudly, angling it away from his body to make the entirety of the instrument visible. In another example, the man in the portrait of an unidentified couple in figure 4.12 opts to hold his guitar as though he is playing it, with the fingers of his right hand poised to pluck the strings. A glass or metal slide—a must-have implement for blues guitar players—rests on the musician's little finger. It is worth noting here that this image points to the fact that in addition to the middle-class melodies played by the brass band, working-class folk genres such as the blues were also present in the area and at the Shackelford home. The guitar and slide in figure 4.12 work together in the portrait to become more than props; they are material expressions of this man's musical craftsmanship.

The portraits in figures 4.11 and 4.12, and others like them, reveal the Shackelford home to have been a cultural site that facilitated the performance of music in multiple formats. The house's front hall provided a space for music to be performed and experienced aurally, while the family's camera enabled people to step outside and create a visual record of their musical skill.

As we will see in the following chapter, the Shackelfords also photographed singing events across northwest Alabama. Their camera thereby preserved black music in the area and rendered it portable in a way that would not otherwise have been possible. The Shackelfords' development of such photographs on postcards enabled black musicians in rural Alabama to create counter-images that ideologically contested

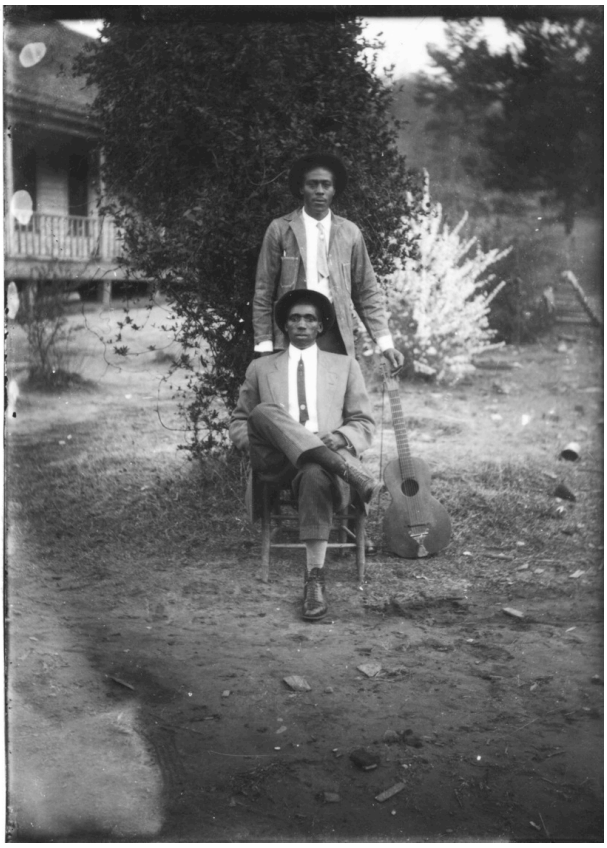

Figure 4.11. Unidentified portrait, ca. 1920s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.857); photograph by the Shackelford family.

Figure 4.12. Unidentified portrait, ca. 1920s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.844); photograph by the Shackelford family.

commercially produced caricatures, as both circulated throughout the nation. When the photograph of the Covin band is viewed through this lens, the Shackelford home takes on new significance, filling the frame and standing as a local monument, as the epicenter of one small community's participation in a larger national project of black self-representation and cultural resistance.

Whereas the band's participation in Covin's campaign for educational advancement allowed the group to contribute to community development at home, the Shackelfords' photograph of the ensemble connected the band to a broader populace, an imagined community of black people using music—aurally and visually—as a form of racial expression and counterhegemonic performance. As we have already seen in figures 4.4 and 4.5, African Americans in rural Louisiana and Kansas used stringed rather than brass instruments to likewise construct an identity linking music to family, home, region, prosperity, dignity, and refinement. With its ability to preserve, reproduce, and make tangible and mobile a moment in time, the camera connected the Covin band to these unrecorded black musicians and countless others who chose to visually record their musicianship and ownership of musical objects, enabling a grassroots movement of African Americans using music in acts of self-definition and self-assertion.

The result is a robust photographic counterarchive created by black musicians that emphasizes an array of positive traits—family, community, religion, dignity, refinement, cultural literacy, and so many more—that ideologically push against the negative illustrations found on so much ephemera, in turn publicly and repeatedly calling into question the oppressive regime of white supremacy that rested on this negative ideology. Just as damaging stereotypes of African Americans were propelled forward by the

recurrence of select harmful themes and tropes, the vast grassroots photographic discourse produced by black musicians relied on the repetition of these visual signifiers along with the positive messages about black people and black culture that they communicated to the viewer.

Throughout the South, rural black communities used varying genres of music and an array of musical instruments as essential performances and objects in their community development efforts. The Covin band's musical and photo-musical performances exemplify the manner in which one style of music in a particular rural black community could be used to build community and navigate the dynamics and struggles of life in the Jim Crow South. The ensemble offered moments of celebration, opportunities to mold community-defining ideologies, and occasions for black people in Covin to display their worthiness of equality to black and white people in the region.

Chapter 5 – "A Torrent of Sacred Harmony"

Born in 1908, Laddie Prater was a white man who grew up on a farm just west of the Fayette County line in the Lamar County, Alabama, community of Kingville.[1] When looking back on his youth while in his early nineties, Prater retrieved a vivid memory of African American life in his rural community. From his position as an outsider, Prater recalled the following:

> There were two black Baptist churches in the vicinity. Temple Star was located north of Hell Creek about a mile from Crossville. The other, New Hope was in "Roggy." They attended each other's services when convenient. I remember the times when the Temple Star people would be returning from night meeting at New Hope. Above our house was a section of road on which there were no houses, and when the wagon loads of them came to that place they would start singing, barely audible at first, gradually becoming louder and they could really sing! It seemed that everyone joined in. This would always be late at night when we were already in bed. When that singing came in through our open windows, it sounded kind of weird or unreal but beautiful almost beyond description. As they passed our house they would stop or sing softly, I suppose so as not to disturb anyone. But they would start again when they passed the house and gradually fade from hearing as they went across Prairie Creek.[2]

Singing was an integral aspect of African American culture in early twentieth century northwest Alabama. Black people in the region sang at home, in the field, in church, at school, and while traveling through the night in horse-drawn wagons.

With sacred singing as its focus, this chapter continues the discussion of African American music in Fayette County, addressing two types of religious singing that were among the most widely practiced in northwest Alabama—Dr. Watts singing and shape-note singing. Unlike the concerts of the Covin band, in which a handful of instrumentalists made music for others to hear, in each of these two singing traditions the

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[1] 1920 U.S. Census, Lamar County, Alabama, Population Schedule, Precinct 16, page 5A, dwelling 80, accessed via www.ancestry.com August 24, 2014.
[2] Laddie Prater, "Black Families in the Kingville Community," *Heritage of Lamar County Alabama*, ed. Lamar County Heritage Book Committee (Poca, WV: Heritage Books, 2000), 195.

performers and audience were one in the same. Everyone present could participate, making singing one of the most inclusive and accessible black creative practices in the region and a primary method of community development.

The following pages detail how blacks in Fayette County and their counterparts across the South used Dr. Watts singing and shape-note singing to stay connected to their forbearers, to facilitate group participation in contemporary ideologies of black religious culture, and to consistently engage in creative performances that fostered group solidarity. Moreover, this chapter's analysis of a handful of Shackelford family portraits that feature hymnals highlights the fact that singing in the region was multisensory experience. Voices were heard, words and music were seen on a page, hands felt the weight of songbooks, and entire bodies were used to enact song in front of the Shackelfords' camera. Since musical performance is best understood when experienced, a webpage has been created that contains a handful of samples of the song styles discussed in this chapter. Specific musical samples will be referenced below and can be heard at http://www.andrewlnelson.com/withsightandsound.

Before turning to Fayette County's turn-of-the-century vocal practices, it should be noted that black singing in the region was undertaken at a time when vocal music had already been nationally established as an expressive form with potent community development and racial uplift capabilities. A troupe of black student performers from Nashville's Fisk University popularized this melodic strategy. Led by George White, Fisk University's white treasurer, choirmaster, and the troupe's founder and champion, in

1871 the Fisk Jubilee Singers headed north on a singing tour to raise money for their fledging university, which was in dire need of operational funds.[3]

The Jubilee Singers' repertoire included white American and European songs as well as sacred spirituals crafted by their enslaved ancestors. It was the latter, what W. E. B. Du Bois called the "sorrow songs" of slavery, that brought the Fisk singers international acclaim and reached northern white audiences, whose previous encounters with black culture on the stage consisted primarily of blackface minstrel shows that lampooned antebellum southern black culture.[4] What these audiences heard instead were nine young African Americans, some of whom had themselves been enslaved, singing traditional black religious music. The slave spirituals sung by the Fisk Jubilee Singers were an indigenous African American song type, folk music brought to life on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century antebellum plantations by a combination of west African musical customs, European religious lyrics, and the struggle of bondage itself.[5] On this first tour and subsequent excursions throughout the United States and Europe, the Fisk singers used America's prevailing cultural framework to elevate the slave spiritual by bringing this song style to the stage of the concert hall, singing spirituals alongside white and European standards, and showcasing their own formal musical training.

The spirituals performed by the Fisk singers should not be confused with and were in fact distinct from the two songs types—Dr. Watts singing and shape-note singing—detailed in this chapter.[6] The Jubilee Singers are nonetheless important to this

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[3] For a book-length history of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, see Andrew Ward, *Dark Midnight When I Rise: The Story of the Fisk Jubilee Singers* (New York: Amistad, 2001).
[4] Ibid., 128.
[5] Walter F. Pitts, Jr., *Old Ship of Zion: The Afro-Baptist Ritual in the African Diaspora* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 79.
[6] Ibid. What is today known as the "spiritual" is a song style that was created when slaves sang religious lyrics of British or American origin, often rooted in the Old Testament, to African melodies.

discussion because by the end of the 1880s they had demonstrated to black people across the United States that they could use their traditional music to publicly honor their ancestors, celebrate their racial heritage, uplift the race, and build community.[7]

The Jubilee Singers also demonstrated an understanding of the powerful relationship between music and photography. They created photographic portraits on postcards and cabinet cards, using visual imagery to promote their singing troupe and spread its message of cultural sophistication and uplift. To offer an example, the photograph in figure 5.1 reflects the myriad characteristics of black photographic and photo-musical performance laid out in previous chapters—formal dress, Victorian poses,

Figure 5.1. The Fisk University Singers, ca. 1870s. Courtesy Howard University, Moorlan-Spingarn Research Center, Prints and Photographs Department; photographer unknown.

[7] In terms of community building, the Jubilee Singers' tours of the 1870s were markedly successful as fundraising endeavors, garnering over $150,000 for Fisk University. Doug Seroff, "'A Voice in the Wilderness': The Fisk Jubilee Singers' Civil Rights Tours of 1879-1888," *Popular Music & Society* 25, no. 1 (2001): 131.

the elevating power of the organ, and the symbolic presence of the book placed on the keys of the organ and under the elbow of Ella Shepard, the Jubilee Singers' organist and leader. The Jubilee Singers may be the most well known group of African Americans who used their voices to laud their racial heritage, but throughout the United States other black communities, including those in Fayette County, Alabama, were using different types of sacred singing in a similar manner.

In early twentieth-century Fayette County, Dr. Watts singing was one of the vocal traditions that undertook this cultural work. Also known as "lining out" or "the old one-hundreds," Dr. Watts singing has it roots in the seventeenth century when the Puritans transported the practice of lining out hymns from Great Britain to the colonies of New England. Driven by a commitment to minimalistic congregational singing with no musical accompaniment, in their worship services these white Protestants sang the lyrical poems found in the Bible's Book of Psalms to the melodies of English folk songs.[8] Since congregants were often illiterate and without songbooks, the psalms were sung by the practice of "lining out," in which a deacon or other church leader used a hymnal to speak or sing a line or couplet of text that would then be repeated in unison by the congregation.

In 1707, the publication of English theologian Isaac Watts's *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* revolutionized Protestant hymnody. A departure from the fidelity to the Biblical psalms found in the hymnals that preceded it, Watts's hymnal contained plainspoken translations of psalms along with original hymns written by the author himself.[9] By creating new hymns that incorporated the use of first person, metaphor, and descriptive

[8] Cauthen, "Hark the Doleful Sound," 8.
[9] In his book-length study of Dr. Watts singing, William Dargan highlights the "plainspokenness" of Watts's psalm translations and hymns. See Dargan, *Lining out the Word*, 93.

imagery, Watts transformed congregational singing into a personal and emotive act of religious devotion.[10]

Lining out hymns was a hybrid musical tradition made up of lyrics disseminated via the written word and melodies learned aurally. Like other hymnals before it and countless hymnals that would follow, Watt's *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* was a text-only hymnal that contained no musical notation. Songs in such hymnals were numbered but were not given titles, being referred to instead by the first line of their lyrics. For each of the songs found in their pages, text-only hymnals list only the song's author, its lyrics, and an initialed indication of its meter—the number of syllables on each line. These metrical abbreviations—C.M. for common meter, L.M. for long meter, and S.M. for short meter—enabled song leaders to select tunes from their local musical traditions that would fit the lyrics of the songs in the hymnals. As such, the words to a particular song found in a single hymnal were sung to tunes that varied from region to region and even congregation to congregation.[11]

The popularity of Watts's *Hymns and Spirituals Songs* ushered in a "Golden Age of English Hymnody" in the eighteenth century, as a flurry of British hymnists wrote original religious songs and published new hymnals.[12] Beginning in the 1800s, a reform movement of hymnody aimed at elevating the musical form took hold in the United States. This reform promoted the use of musical notation in singing and strove to achieve a more culturally sophisticated Protestant hymn tradition. As a result, as early as the mid-

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[10] Nicholas Temperley, "Music of the Congregational Church," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd. ed., vol. 6, ed. Stanley Sadie, 295-300 (New York: Grove's Dictionaries of Music, Inc., 2001), 297.
[11] Cauthen, "Hark the Doleful Sound," 9.
[12] Ibid.

nineteenth century, the practice of lining out was already referred to as the "old way of singing."

In the South, beginning with the Great Awakening of the eighteenth century and continuing to emancipation, missionaries and southern slaveholders led enslaved Africans in the singing of lined out hymns as a foremost method of Christian conversion. With black literacy seen as a threat to the slave system and with slaves rarely being allowed to learn to read and write, lining out the hymns found in Watts's hymnals and others enabled slaveholders and missionaries alike to preach the gospel to the enslaved without teaching them to read.[13] By the mid-eighteenth century, Watt's *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* had become an indispensible volume for white missionaries throughout the South who sought to convert the enslaved.[14] From the beginning, enslaved Africans embraced the singing of lined out hymns. During his eighteenth-century efforts to convert slaves in Virginia, Presbyterian minister Samuel Davies wrote the following oft-quoted words about enslaved Africans' keenness for this singing style:

> The books were all very acceptable; but none more so than the 'Psalms and Hymns' [Watts's 1707 hymnal], which enabled them to gratify their peculiar taste for Psalmody. Sundry of them have lodged all night in my kitchen; and, sometimes, when I have awakened about two or three a-clock in the morning, a torrent of sacred harmony poured into my chamber. . . . In this seraphic exercise, some of them spend almost the whole night.[15]

In part because it replicated musical practices found in west African cultures, especially call-and-response singing, slaves quickly transformed the lining out of hymns

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[13] Dargan, *Lining Out The Word*, 109-114, and Pitts, *Old Ship of Zion*, 76-77.
[14] Pitts, *Old Ship of Zion*, 77.
[15] Quoted in Deena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 104.

into an African American musical tradition and theology.[16] In the following passage, William T. Dargan cogently articulates this point, describing how slaves, much as they did with the spiritual, altered the white lined out singing style and the hymns themselves to fit their own heritage and worldview:

> Therefore, as the slaves memorized the hymn texts, the given Anglo-American melodies were revised to suit variously African musical structures and ritual patterns. In this course, the texts of Watts and Wesley remained at the center of a developing African American regional style complex which would later subvert the Protestant orthodoxy of hymn texts to surreptitious pleas for deliverance from the injustices of slavery. This subversion came not so much in outright protest, but in texts that spoke to the existential problems of suffering and death with which slaves were familiar.[17]

At camp meetings and brush arbor services in the recesses of southern plantations, slaves crafted a way of singing these songs that fit their cultural heritage and enabled them to covertly speak against the injustices of slavery and express their longing for freedom.

Following emancipation and into the twentieth century, the popularity of "the old way of singing" grew in the newly established black churches of the South. Though all of the lined out hymns they sang were by no means written by Isaac Watts himself, blacks in the South soon began to refer to this sacred style as "Dr. Watts" singing, and by the turn of the twentieth century it had become a full-fledged African American musical phenomenon.[18] In the early twentieth century, Dr. Watts hymns were sung across the United States in black Baptist and Methodist services. In black Baptist churches across the South, the devotion was led by a deacon and consisted of the lining out of one or two hymns, the reading of scripture, and prayer. The purpose of the devotion was to call the

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[16] For a detailed discussion of the links between the musical traditions of west African cultures and the lining out of hymns, which is a topic beyond the scope of this dissertation, see Dargan, *Lining out the Word*, 56, and 132-135.

[17] William T. Dargan, "Texts from Lloyd's Hymn Book in the Quiltwork of African American Singing Styles," in *Benjamin Lloyd's Hymn Book: A Primitive Baptist Song Tradition*, ed. Joyce Cauthen (Montgomery: Alabama Folklife Association, 1999), 36.

[18] Cauthen, "Hark that Doleful Sound," 10, and Dargan, *Lining Out The Word*, 1.

congregation to order and prepare churchgoers for worship, bringing them to the appropriate frame of mind and transforming a group of individuals into one communal body.[19] The lining out of hymns was an indispensible facet of this custom.

Due in large part to the lining out structure, Dr. Watts hymns were slow, dirge-like, and melismatic.[20] Though little is known about the recording, including its date, location, or those whose voices are heard, music sample 1 exemplifies these elements of Dr. Watts singing (http://www.andrewlnelson.com/withsightandsound). Titled "Before this time, another year," in this song a male deacon or other parishioner is heard intoning the first line—"Before this time, another year." The congregation's response is then heard in unison, as they slowly sing out the words, dragging their syllables. The deacon then sings the next line—"I'll be dead and gone"—and the song continues in this call-and-response fashion. It is then followed by a prayer, during which several congregants continue to sing.

Descriptions of early twentieth century Dr. Watts singing written by people from both inside and outside the musical tradition further bring the song style to life. In 1943, white musicologist George Pullen Jackson described Dr. Watts singing this way:

> A deacon or the elder "lines out" a couplet of the text in a sing-song voice and at a fair speaking pace ending on a definite tone. This "tones" the tune. The deacon then starts singing, and by the time he has sung through the elaborately ornamented first syllable the whole congregation has joined in on the second syllable with a volume of florid sound which ebbs and flows slowly, powerfully and at times majestically in successive surges until the lined-out words have been sung. Without pause the deacon sing-songs the next couplet and the second half of the four-line tune is sung in the same manner. . . . It seems perfectly simple and easy for the singers. But the listening white person is utterly confused, cannot make musical head or tail out of what he hears. His concepts of melody, rhythm, music, fail to help him through the maze. He cannot even check the trend by the

[19] On the devotion see Pitts, *Old Ship of Zion*, 13-18.
[20] *Melisma* is a musical term used to describe a melodic phrase in which several notes are sung using only one syllable of a song's lyrics.

> words he has heard lined out; for the singing surges on with so many graces and strings of graces (entwined about longer notes which he feels must be parts of an unfolding melody), that all words, syllables even, lose their identity and evade recognition.[21]

Writing from the perspective of an outsider, Jackson articulates several key elements of Dr. Watts singing, including the lining out of the hymn, the slow ebb and flow of the unison singing, and the loud, surging quality of these songs. Jackson also highlights the fact that this is not an accessible or inclusive singing style that someone from beyond the community can simply arrive and join. To participate, one needs to be raised in this musical tradition, to be familiar with its unique characteristics. Bernice Johnson Reagon, a musicologist and lifelong participant in a number of African American sacred singing traditions, explained this by writing, "The tunes are learned and disseminated orally and through practice, rather than through organized rehearsal. . . . Learning the form requires apprenticeship to and within a congregation."[22]

Moaning—a vocal practice with west African roots—was likewise a primary quality of Dr. Watts singing. With their moans, individual songsters added flourish to the music while also expressing emotion that transcended words.[23] Johnson Reagon describes moaning as follows: "The singers actually share a communal moan that encircles the depth of struggle and pain and rises in peaks of celebration—joy—and, sometimes, shouting."[24]

Because it depended on participatory unison singing and because the combined sound of numerous voices created a cohesive, stirring, and evocative sound, Dr. Watts singing was in and of itself an act of community development, a singing ritual that

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[21] Quoted in Cauthen, "Hark the Doleful Sound," 7.
[22] Johnson Reagon, "The Lined Hymn as a Song of Freedom," 6-7.
[23] On moaning in Dr. Watts singing, see Dargan, *Lining out the Word*, 34-39.
[24] Johnson Reagon, "The Lined Hymn as a Song of Freedom," 6.

melded individuals into a collective whole. A second description from the early twentieth century speaks to this point. In 1925, white folk music scholar Abbe Niles conducted extensive interviews with W. C. Handy, an African American musician born in Alabama in 1873 who would go on to be named "the Father of the Blues." In the introduction to *Blues: An Anthology*, a collection of music and commentary that Niles and Handy co-wrote in 1926, Niles described the early influence Dr. Watts singing had on Handy's music and in turn provided further description of a black congregation's responsive singing after a deacon has lined out a couplet:

> For every note each singer would start a vocal journey of his own, wandering in strange pentatonic figures, but returning together at the proper moment to the next note of the melody. If one had succeeded in attracting attention by an exceptional note or striking rhythmic figure, a dozen others would attempt, starting from the next to, to outdo him. To an unaccustomed listener close at hand, the result would be chaos, but at a distance the sounds merged into a strange and moving harmony.[25]

With these words, Niles captures the primary goal of Dr. Watts singing, to take individuals who are on their own "vocal journeys" and merge their voices into a heterophonic yet unified whole.

In the late nineteenth century, the Dr. Watts tradition blossomed in Fayette County, just as it did in black communities across the nation.[26] Minutes of the annual meetings of the Canaan Pickensville Colored Baptist Association from the 1880s and 1890s exemplify the preponderance of Dr. Watts singing among Fayette County's Missionary Baptists. Founded by former slaves in 1875, the Canaan Pickensville Association was a regional Baptist organization composed of churches from Fayette,

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[25] Quoted in Eric J. Sundquist, *The Hammers of Creation: Folk Culture in Modern African-American Fiction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 50.

[26] See Minutes of the Annual Session of the Canaan Pickensville Baptist Association, 1883, 1886, 1890, 1892, and 1895, Alabama African American Baptist Annuals, 1873-1994, Reel 5, Samford University Library Special Collections.

Lamar, Pickens, and Tuscaloosa counties. The association's annual meetings were held every fall at a different member church and brought Baptists from across the area together to worship, reify their faith, craft their theology, and engage in projects of self-reliance. Over the course of these gatherings, every time attendees reconvened for a session after a night's rest, a daytime break, or a shared meal, "devotional exercises" that included the lining out of two hymns were carried out to prepare attendees for the work at hand. The names of these hymns and often their number in the hymnal used to lead them were recorded in the minutes for the annual meetings. The fact that the Canaan Pickensville Association so frequently noted the titles of the hymns in its minutes speaks to the value of these songs to the meetings themselves. Just like the sermons, officer elections, committee reports, and other meeting activities, the Dr. Watts songs sung at devotion were an indispensible component of the Canaan Pickensville Association meetings that warranted recording, they were to be written down and preserved.

Table 5 lists the hymns recorded in the minutes of five late nineteenth-century annual meetings of the Canaan Pickensville Baptist Association, along with their authors. Of the twenty-one different hymns named in the minutes from these five meetings, twelve were written by Isaac Watts himself and were included in his 1707 *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, the hymnal so often used to convert slaves to Christianity. The sheer number of different songs sung at these five meetings—eleven different songs in the 1883 meeting alone—speaks to the vibrancy of this tradition in the late nineteenth century.

In addition to being used in religious services and at the meetings of regional Christian organizations, in northwest Alabama the lining out of hymns transcended

Table 5
Dr. Watts Hymns Lined Out at Annual Sessions of the Canaan Pickensville Baptist Association, 1883, 1886, 1890, 1892, and 1895

Meeting Year	*Song Title*	*Song Author*
1883	"I love thy Kingdom, Lord"	Timothy Dwight
	"Alas, and did my Saviour bleed"	Isaac Watts
	"That awful day will surely come"	Isaac Watts
	"Why do we mourn departed friends"	Isaac Watts
	"Dismiss us with they blessing, Lord"	Joseph Hart
	"Oh for a closer walk with God"	William Cowper
	"Come ye that love the lord"	Isaac Watts
	"Am I a soldier of the cross"	Isaac Watts
	"I'm not ashamed to own my Lord"	Isaac Watts
	"My Saviour, my almighty friend"	Isaac Watts
	"How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ears"	John Newton
1886	"My God, the spring of all my joys"	Isaac Watts
	"Am I a soldier of the cross"	Isaac Watts
	"I'm not ashamed to own my Lord"	Isaac Watts
	"Amazing grace how sweet the sound"	John Newton
	"Go preach my Gospel, saith the Lord"	Isaac Watts
	"In my Lord's appointed ways"	John Ryland
1890	"Come, let us join our cheerful songs"	Isaac Watts
	"Blest be the tie that binds"	John Fawcett
	"I love thy kingdom, Lord"	Timothy Dwight
	"Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing"	Charles Wesley
	"As on the cross the Savior hung"	Samuel Stennett
	"My God, the spring of all my joys"	Isaac Watts
1892	"Bless be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love"	John Fawcett
1895	"A charge to keep I have"	Charles Wesley
	"Alas, and did my Savior bleed"	Isaac Watts
	"And must this body die"	Isaac Watts

Source: Minutes of the Annual Session of the Canaan Pickensville Baptist Association, 1883, 1886, 1890, 1892, 1895, Alabama African American Baptist Annuals, 1873-1994, Reel 5, Samford University Library Special Collections.

religious practice and was a valued custom used to begin any number of community events, from educational meetings to emancipation celebrations. Collectively singing religious songs written by white British and American men in a musical style developed by slaves was a ritual blacks in the region used to come together. When black people in the area gathered at a number of events, the lining out of hymns was a musical signal that it was time to unify and focus on the tasks at hand, whatever they may be.

An example resides in the lining out hymns at northwest Alabama's annual emancipation celebrations of the late nineteenth century. Organized by an African American fraternal order called the B.E.W. (full name unknown), the most heavily attended and extensively recorded emancipation celebration in northwest Alabama in the 1880s and 1890s was the annual Grand Celebration of the Emancipation of Slaves, a daylong gathering held every year on May 8 just over the border from Fayette County at Lamar County's New Hope Church, the oldest black church in the area.[27]

At the Emancipation Day celebration, attendees came from "Lamar and adjoining counties" and were known to number close to 400 people.[28] Those present would crowd into the wooden church for a day of singing, speeches by black leaders on topics such as "the emancipation of slavery" and "the improvement of the colored race," lectures by invited white leaders, and dinner on the grounds.[29] Thematically, the celebration focused on the past, present, and future lives of the area's African Americans, reflecting the joy of

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[27] For blacks in northwest Alabama and eastern Mississippi, May 8 was recognized as Emancipation Day because on that day in 1865, General Richard Taylor, who led the Confederate Army's Department of Alabama and Mississippi, surrendered his forces at Citronelle, Alabama, eliminating the final barrier between slaves in east Mississippi and west Alabama and their freedom. The Lamar County newspaper the *Vernon Courier* often printed a recap of the May 8 Emancipation Day celebration that was written and submitted by a B.E.W. officer. Together, these articles offer detailed insight into these festivities. See the following issues of the *Vernon Courier*: May 5, 1887; May 18, 1888; May 17, 1889; May 7, 1891; May 25, 1893; and May 17, 1894.

[28] *Vernon Courier*, May 25, 1893, and May 17, 1889.

[29] Ibid.

emancipation and lauding the social and educational progress they had made since being granted their freedom. At the 1894 celebration, for example, a former slave offered the audience "sketches of the past," while a local black educator gave a talk entitled "how far we have come and what are we?"[30] Every year residents from Fayette County were among the celebration's attendees, speakers, and organizers.

These emancipation celebrations almost always started with the singing of a hymn lined out in the Dr. Watts style. Newspaper descriptions submitted by the event's organizers often began with phrases like "the meeting was called to order . . . then devotional exercises and prayer," "services opened by singing and prayer," or "the audience was called to order by singing."[31] In 1887, the B.E.W.'s secretary went so far as to include the name of the event's opening hymn in his account of that year's May 8 celebration. He wrote to the *Vernon Courier*'s editors, "Will you please find space in your paper for a few dots of the colored people's celebration. We celebrate the 8th of May on account that we were set free on that day years ago." He then began his description of the meeting as follows: "The audience was called to order by singing 'Arise and shine O Zion fair, behold the light is come.' Prayer by Rev. J. W. Brent. The house announced ready for business."[32]

The naming of the song sung at the beginning of the this celebration combined with what we know about these emancipation events and Dr. Watts singing itself enables the scene that day to be recreated. As usual, the 1887 emancipation celebration was held at New Hope Church and was attended by African Americans from throughout the region. Once those in attendance had congregated either inside or outside of this hilltop church, a

[30] Ibid., May 17, 1894.
[31] *Vernon Courier*, May 18, 1888; May 17, 1889; and May 17, 1894.
[32] *Vernon Courier*, May 5, 1887.

minister, deacon, or community leader came to the front of the crowd and announced in song the metaphorical arrival of a new day, intoning the words, "Arise and shine, oh Zion fair, behold thy light is come." To this single voice, tens or hundreds of blacks from across northwest Alabama sang their response in unison, repeating these words of exaltation loudly and slowly, dragging out their syllables and adding moans or other flourishes. In this call-and-response fashion, the attendees worked their way through the hymn, and the song's first stanza makes it immediately understood why it was chosen for the occasion:

> Arise and shine, O Zion fair,
> Behold thy light is come;
> Thy glorious conq'ring King is near
> To take his exiles home:
> The trumpet sounding through the sky,
> To set poor captives free;
> The day of wonder now is nigh,
> The year of jubilee.[33]

The singing of this song was a collective expression of the joy of freedom, of the end of the nightmare of slavery. Those present were singing only twenty-two years after emancipation, and many who sang these words had themselves been captives, they were the exiles who had been taken home, and they were singing together to begin a daylong celebration of the year of Jubilee. Those present had taken a song written in the eighteenth century by a white Methodist minister and made it their own, singing it in an African American style and using their particular experiences and worldviews to give these lyrics a meaning that stretched well beyond their author's original intention.[34]

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[33] William C. Buck, ed., *The Baptist Hymn Book: Original and Selected in Two Parts* (Lexington, KY: J. Eliot & Co., 1842), 853.

[34] "Arise and shine, O Zion fair," was written by John A. Granade, a white Methodist minister born in 1770 in New Bern, North Carolina. Lenoard Ellinwood, "John A. Granade," www.hymnary.org, http://www.hymnary.org/person/Granade_JA1, accessed February 1, 2015.

The 1887 emancipation celebration may have been held at a Baptist church, but it was not a Baptist worship service. This was an interdenominational affair that welcomed black people from all walks of life; it was a day to reflect on black struggle and survival and foster solidarity and uplift. Black people from throughout northwest Alabama had come together to celebrate their freedom and were joined by "a great many white friends."[35] The day was begun with a song whose lyrics and inclusive singing style simultaneously brought about a moment of united celebration and remembrance while also preparing those present for the day's program. Perhaps the most important phrase in *Vernon Courier* account of this meeting is the last—"The house announced ready for business." No business was undertaken that day until attendees first merged their voices, turning themselves into a unified body.

As scholars like Elsa Barkley Brown and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham have articulated, in the early twentieth century the singing of Dr. Watts hymns was at the center of changes in black religious culture that were taking place across the United States. [36] Led in large part by middle-class uplifters, many black churches were emphasizing emotional restraint and learnedness in their worship services in order to distance themselves from the spiritual customs of slaves and to convey an air of religious respectability. An emphasis on the written word was a key component of such a shift, and many churches moved away from the lining out of hymns and adopted hymnals, which in

[35] *Vernon Courier*, May 5, 1887.
[36] See, Elsa Barkley Brown, "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom," *Public Culture* 7 (1994): 135-137, and Higginbotham, "Rethinking Vernacular Culture," 159-164.

turned required congregants not only to be able to read music, but also to be able to read period.[37]

The illiterate could therefore find themselves marginalized in their parishes, as their abilities to participate in worship services were curtailed. In 1897, black poet Daniel Webster published a poem titled "De Linin' ub de Hymns," that was written in dialect from the perspective of an older churchgoer and addresses this shift to the printed page. It reads as follows:

> Dar's a mighty row in Zion, an' de debbil's gittin' high
> ……..
> 'Twuz 'bout a bery leetle thing—de linin' ub a hymn.
> De Young folks say 'tain't stylish to lin' um out no mo';
> Dat dey's got edikashun, an' dey wants us all to know
> Dey likes to hab dar singin' books a-holin' fore dar eyes,
> An' sing de hymns right straight along 'to manshuns in de skies'
> …….
> An' ef de ol' folks will kumplain 'cause dey is ol' an' blind,
> An' slabry's chain don' kep' dem back frum larnin' how to
> read—
> Dat dey mus' take a corner seat, an' let de young folks lead.
> ……
> De ol'-time groans an' shouts an' moans am passin' out ub
> sight—
> Edikashun changed all dat, an' we belebe it right,
> We should serb God wid 'telligence; fur dis one thing I plead:
> Jes' lebe a leetle place in church fur deme z kin not read.[38]

Written from the perspective of an older congregant, Webster's poem addresses this shift to a written culture, its generational connotations, as well as its effect on Dr. Watts singing and its accompanying "groans an' shouts an' moans."

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[37] Higginbotham, "Rethinking Vernacular Culture," 161-162.

[38] Daniel Webster Davis, "De Linin' Ub De Hymns," *'Weh Down Souf and Other Poems* (Cleveland: The Helman-Taylor Company, 1897), 54-56, quoted in Higginbotham, "Rethinking Vernacular Culture," 162. Though the version of Webster's poem above was quoted in Higginbotham's essay, Barkley Brown first reprinted and analyzed it in "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere," 136.

In early twentieth-century Fayette County, there was indeed a call for religious uplift led by members of the middle and working class, but the lining out of hymns continued. In his 1909 address at the annual meeting of the Davis Creek and Holly Spring Baptist Association, C. I. Hewitt, who was serving as moderator, spoke of the elevating power of education—and by default literacy itself—in regard to local religion.[39] Using the rhetoric of uplift, Hewitt called for an elevation of church and school life, which were intertwined vehicles for community development and racial advancement in the region. He stated:

> Our pulpits are suffering for want of better prepared men, our school rooms are suffering for want of more and better prepared teachers. It is a very plain fact and does not need any argument, that no people nor race of people can rise above its leaders. Therefore we are here to lay plans by which our leaders may be *elevated* [emphasis added] and our race brought upon a higher standard.[40]

However, in the age of the New Negro, the "old way of singing" continued in Fayette County. At the same four-day meeting of the Davis Creek Association, Dr. Watts hymns were lined out to begin each session. Table 6 lists each song lined out at the 1909 annual meeting along with its author. The majority of the songs sung were the same seventeenth-century hymns sung in Fayette County during slavery and in the late nineteenth century. A number of Watts's hymns were sung, and certain songs like "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds," "Am I a soldier on the cross," I love thy kingdom, Lord," and "Blest be the tie that binds" had become local standards. In singing these ancient tunes, black people in the region retained the vestiges of the oral culture of their

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[39] Established in 1906, the Davis Creek and Holly Spring Association was made up of Baptist churches from Fayette and Lamar County, many of which were previously members of the Canaan Pickensville Association discussed above.

[40] Minutes of the Third Annual Session of the Davis Creek and Holly Spring Baptist Association, Alabama African American Baptist Annuals, 1873-1994, Reel 6, Samford University Library Special Collections.

forbearers and kept open a pathway of religious participation for the illiterate, young and old.

Table 6
Dr. Watts Hymns Lined out at the 1909 Annual Meeting of the Davis Creek and Holly Spring Baptist Association

Song Title	*Song Author*
"How sweet the name of Jesus sounds"	John Newton
"Did Christ o'er sinners weep"	Benjamin Beddome
"Oh for a closer walk with God"	William Cowper
"Come ye that love the Lord"	Isaac Watts
"By and by when the morning comes"	Charles Tindley
"Show pity Lord"	Isaac Watts
"Go preach my Gospel"	Isaac Watts
"Alas and did my Saviour bleed"	Isaac Watts
"I heard the voice of Jesus say"	Horatius Bonar
"There is not a friend like lowly Jesus"	Johnson Oatman
"Oh for a closer walk with God"	William Cowper
"More like Jesus would I be"	Fannie Crosby
"Am I a soldier on the cross"	Isaac Watts
"Nearer my God to thee"	Sarah Flower Adams
"I love they kingdom, Lord"	Timothy Dwight
"Blest be the tie that binds"	John Fawcett
"I saw one hanging on a tree"	John Newton

Source: Minutes of the Third Annual Session of the Davis Creek and Holly Spring Baptist Association, Alabama African American Baptist Annuals, 1873-1994, Reel 6, Samford University Library Special Collections.

The nineteenth-century tradition of using Dr. Watts singing as a form of meditative collectivity also continued in the early twentieth century. The first four stanzas of one of the most lasting songs in Fayette County's Dr. Watts repertoire—"Blest be the tie that binds"—reflect the link between this singing style and group solidarity that continued into the twentieth century:

> Blessed be the tie that binds
> Our hearts in Christian love;
> The fellowship of kindred minds
> Is like to that above.
>
> Before our Father's throne

We pour our ardent prayers;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,
Our comforts and our cares.

We share our mutual woes,
Our mutual burdens bear;
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear.

When we asunder part,
It gives us inward pain;
But we shall still be joined in heart,
And hope to meet again.[41]

In the lyrics to this one song reside the theme of early twentieth century Dr. Watts singing in Fayette County—binding individual hearts, prayers, fears, hopes, woes, and burdens into one.

In addition to religious events and services, Dr. Watts hymns also continued to be used in at a number of secular events dedicated to community life. In a variety of contexts, when blacks in the area came together to focus on their collective lives, they readied themselves by singing in unison the songs of their ancestors. For example, on Thanksgiving Day 1916, educational campaigners in Fayette County held a daylong fundraiser to raise money for the construction of an Industrial Training School to train the county's black teachers. Meant to address "Fayette County's crying need," this meeting consisted of reports from representatives of the county's fifteen black schools, talks by local education leaders about the positive effects of a training school in the church, home,

[41] Basil Manly, ed., *The Baptist Psalmody: A Selection of Hymns for the Worship of God* (New York: Sheldon & Co., 1850), 684.

and community, and a speech by the fundraiser's distinguished guest James Eason, who the president of the Alabama Colored Baptist State Convention.[42]

Before all of this, the meeting began with singing. According to the program, "Devotion will be conducted by Rev. G. W. Brent and Mr. W. H. Hewitt."[43] Brent was a former slave, preacher, and religious elder in the county, and Willie Hewitt was the area's lead singing instructor.[44] Just as they had in the nineteenth century, here again blacks in northwest Alabama were using the devotion and its inclusion of Dr. Watts singing to begin an otherwise secular event aimed at improving black community life.

As exemplified by the portrait in figure 5.2, in the early twentieth century, African Americans in northwest Alabama also preserved the aged song style that was Dr. Watts with modern technologies and cultural practices. Taken by the Shackelford family in the first decade of the 1900s, this portrait depicts what appear to be a couple and their daughter. Formally dressed and standing in front of a building, all three look into the camera. The woman in the center of the frame holds her right arm behind her back and has placed her left arm around her daughter. However, it is the pose of the man in this photograph and particularly the book in his right hand that are of interest. At this point, the appearance of books in the Shackelford family's photographs is a familiar sight. We have already seen in chapter 3 that African Americans photographed by the Shackelford family commonly used books in their performances, and chapter 4 described the local black culture's engagement with the photo-musical performance that was occurring

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[42] Program for the Fayette County Industrial Training School Fundraiser, November 23, 1916. Attached to Cherrie Price to James Sibley, 20 November 1916, Alabama Department of Education, Correspondence of the Rural School Agent, Box SG15448, Folder P, Alabama Department of Archives and History.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Brent received his license to preach in 1878, and the license named him as minister at Shady Grove Church, which was one of the region's oldest black churches. Fayette County Deed Record 3, page 3. Fayette County Courthouse, Fayette, Alabama. Hewitt's status as a singing instructor will be detailed below.

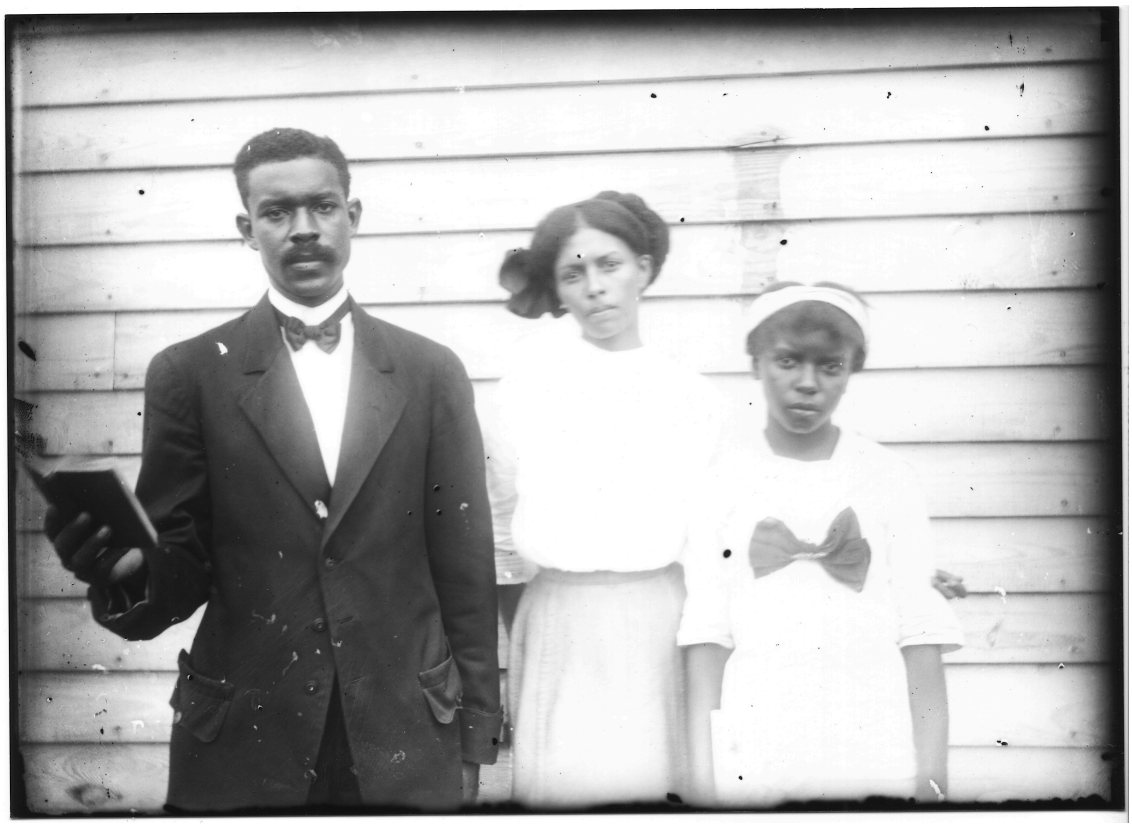

Figure 5.2. Unidentified portrait, ca. 1910s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.639); photograph by the Shackelford family.

throughout the world at the time. Here we see both. The book's diminutive size —it is dwarfed by the man's hand—reveals it to be one of the small worded hymnals used in the lining out of hymns and points to the possibility that the man himself was a deacon.[45] Regardless, he opted to feature this hymnal in his family portrait, holding it out delicately in his hand, with three fingers supporting it in the back and his thumb and little finger keeping it open in the front.

[45] I am indebted to two individuals for bringing to my attention the likelihood that the book seen in this image is a text-only hymnal. The first is Joey Brackner, who is the Executive Director of the Alabama Center of Traditional Culture and an expert on hymnals used in rural Alabama. The second is an unidentified black Baptist woman who attended a lecture I gave on the Shackelford family photographs at Troy University Dothan in February 2013. The woman unfortunately left the lecture before I could speak with her, but the moment I projected the photograph in figure 5.2 on the screen during my talk, she mentioned that she was a Baptist and identified the book in the man's right hand as a "deacon's hymnal."

In this photograph, the Dr. Watts tradition was being presented photographically; "the old way of singing" was being kept alive by modern technology. This man's photographic performance also brings to mind the words uttered by the unnamed speaker at the center of Daniel Webster poem "De Linin' ub de Hymns," who had the following to say about the "young folks":

> De Young folks say 'tain't stylish to lin' um out no mo';
> Dat dey's got edikashun, an' dey wants us all to know
> Dey likes to hab dar singin' books a-holin' fore dare eyes,
> An' sing de hymns right straight along 'to manshuns in de skies.'

Here indeed, this young man wants to be seen holding his singing book before his eyes, but his book of choice is the one representative of the region's oldest black singing style. Using this unidentified hymnal, he presents himself as a man of music and a tradition bearer who leads his fellow community members in song, in turn preserving this centuries-old form of black congregational singing.

The Dr. Watts tradition they kept alive may have been aged, but black people in early twentieth-century Fayette County were decidedly modern, connected to modern technology and modern cultural practices. Moreover, while continuing this "old way of singing," they were likewise avid practitioners of the South's most modern singing form—shape-note singing. An examination of local shape-note singing practices will describe how this printed form of musical notation served as an agent of social interaction, community development, and mutual aid. At the same time, shape-note singing offered a pathway for religious and racial uplift that rested on an accessible form of musical print literacy.

Like Dr. Watts singing, black shape-note singing in northwest Alabama had roots in white European and American hymn traditions. As discussed above, in the eighteenth

century there was a movement among northeastern Protestants to refine congregational singing. A significant facet of this reform was the singing school movement. At these singing schools, which last several days and even weeks, itinerant master instructors worked to replace the cacophonous lining out of hymns with more sophisticated hymnody by teaching people how to read music and sing in four-part harmony.

Along with the singing school movement came the development of a new form of musical notation that could be easily understood by novices. This "shape-note" system used the traditional musical staff but replaced the standard round heads on the notes with four shapes—a triangle, a circle, a square, and diamond—that corresponded with the solmization syllables fa, sol, la, and mi (Fig. 5.3).[46] In this novel method, notes could be identified by their shape rather than their position on the staff, making sight-reading possible for those with little or no musical expertise. The shape-note music for a single hymn included separate musical staffs to be read by soprano, tenor, alto, and bass singers, allowing for the creation of four-part harmonies.[47] Because of its accessibility to untrained singers, the shape-note method was taught in singing schools throughout the

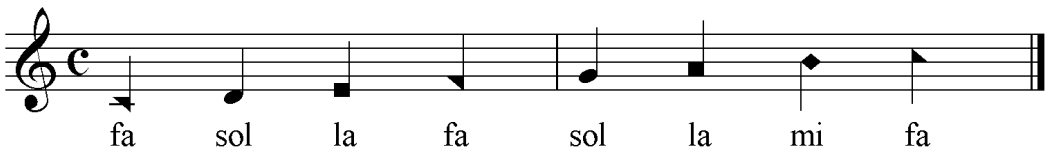

Figure 5.3. The C major scale in the four-note, shape-note format. Image public domain. Courtesy of Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shape_note, accessed February 5, 2015.

[46] "Solmization" is the musical practice of assigning a particular syllable to each of the notes on a musical scale.

[47] For a brief history of the development of the shape-note methodology, see James C. Downey and Harry Eskew, "Shape-Note Hymnody," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., vol. 2, ed. Stanley Sadie, 208-212 (New York: Grove's Dictionaries of Music, Inc., 2001).

northeast in the nineteenth century, and publishing companies capitalized on its popularity by producing shape-note hymnals.[48] These songbooks, which were immediately recognizable by their oblong shape, often contained a combination of age-old European hymns and original new tunes. Published by Benjamin White in 1844, *The Sacred Harp* was far and away the most popular hymnal to use the four-note methodology.

In the nineteenth century, the shape-note methodology fell out of favor in the North as the standard, round-noted form of notation began to be taught in public schools.[49] But in the South, and especially in the rural South, shape-note singing flourished in the early decades of the twentieth century and became a full-fledged regional phenomenon. *The Sacred Harp* in particular was so widely used that shape-note singing was often called simply Sacred Harp singing. In 1944, musicologist George Pullen Jackson had the following to say about the omnipresence of this songbook in the South: "Aside from the Holy Bible, the book found oftenest in the homes of rural southern people is without a doubt the big oblong volume of song called *The Sacred Harp*."[50] As popular as shape-note singing was throughout the South, it was primarily white southerners and especially white rural southerners who practiced it.[51] As we will see below, however, in certain areas there existed a thriving African American shape-note tradition.

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[48] On the eighteenth-century publication of shape-note songbooks, see Goffman, *Close Harmony*, 20-24.
[49] Grauberger, *Traditional Musics of Alabama*, 6.
[50] George Pullen Jackson, *The Story of the Sacred Harp: 1844-1944* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1944), 7. On the various shape-note hymnals used in the American South, see J. Bradford Young, "Shape-Note Tunebooks in the Deep South," *Popular Music and Society* 10, no. 3 (1986): 17-27.
[51] For works on white Sacred Harp singing and other white shape-note traditions in the South, see Buell E. Cobb Jr., *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and Its Music* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004); Goff, *Close Harmony*, and David Warren Steel and Richard H. Hulan, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014).

In white and black communities in the South where shape-note singing was practiced, it carried with it a profound social aspect. Singing schools were community-wide social events; they were valued opportunities for rural southerners to not only receive singing instruction under the tutelage of a master teacher, but also to socialize, catch up with old friends, meet new people, and perhaps fall in love.[52] In addition to singing schools, regional and statewide singing conventions were important gatherings and institutions. In the context of shape-note singing, the term *convention* had a dual meaning. Singing conventions were indeed singing events, but the moniker was also used in reference to local and regional singing organizations that were often named for geographical markers, dedicated to a single book like *The Sacred Harp*, and had a democratic structure complete with a president, secretary, and other officers.[53]

As the social and cultural aspects of shape-note singing evolved, so too did the musical notation itself. In the mid-nineteenth century, a seven-note system was developed, allowing a single shape to be assigned to every note and syllable—do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, do—on the musical scale. In the second half of the nineteenth century, hymnals began to be published using this seven-note system.[54]

Using the seven-note method, in the first years of the twentieth century musical entrepreneurs like James Vaughn, A. J. Showalter, and V. O. Stamps formed publishing companies that produced new songbooks made up of original songs and a smattering of traditional standards. Known as "new books" or "convention books," these musical volumes were published once or twice a year, available via mail order, and increased the popularity of shape-note singing while also providing the foundation for what is now

[52] On the social aspects of shape-note singing, see Goff, *Close Harmony*, 35-39.
[53] Ibid., 38.
[54] Ibid., 24.

known as southern gospel music.[55] Due to the popularity of these new books and the frequency of their publication, early twentieth century southerners were consistently introduced to new music at singing classes and conventions. Dedicated singers purchased new books every year but also kept their old favorites, therefore arriving at singing events with several songbooks in tow. The new books also ushered in a change in the shape and size of shape-note songbooks themselves. These early twentieth-century "little books" were paperback volumes that were smaller and more standard in shape than their oblong predecessors.

In the early twentieth century, shape-note singing was by far one of the most popular social activities among whites and blacks in Fayette County, and the region's singing organizations and events were segregated. Though white singings are mentioned almost exclusively, the pages of the *Fayette Banner* newspaper are riddled with announcements for "old book singings," "all-day singings," "singing schools," and for the annual two-day *Sacred Harp* singing at the Fayette Courthouse.[56]

The origins of black shape-note singing in Fayette County could not be pinpointed, but it is clear that it was an established musical practice there by at least the 1880s.[57] By the turn of the twentieth century, black songsters in the region had adopted the seven-note methodology and sang quite often from the seven-note songbook *The Christian Harmony*,

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[55] Downey and Eskew, "Shape-Note Hymnody," 211.

[56] The following issues of the *Fayette Banner* from 1925 mention white all-day singings, singing schools, or other singing events: March 19, 1925; April 23, 1925; April 30, 1925; June 24, 1925; October 1, 1925; and November 12, 1925. A recap of one of the annual singings at the Fayette Courthouse can be found in *Fayette Banner*, July 12, 1928. Based on these newspaper articles, Fayette County whites appeared to have held "old book" singings in which they sang from the *Sacred Harp* and *Christian Harmony*—a popular seven-note hymnal—as well as new book singings where they sang from the small convention books that were being sold across the region.

[57] The earliest known reference to black shape-note singing in Fayette County found in this research dates to the mid-1880s. See Nall, *Freeborn Slave*, 60-61.

which was also a popular hymnal among local whites.[58] Among black people in northwest Alabama, then as now, shape-note singing was referred to as "notebook singing," a reference to the hymnals themselves, which contain the notes to the songs.[59]

As was the case with white shape-note traditions throughout the South, notebook singing in northwest Alabama had a certain organizational structure that carried with it a particular terminology.[60] Each black community had its own *singing class*, a term whose meaning was two-fold. First, a singing class was an event held at the local church every Sunday afternoon where community members sang together and received musical instruction. Though held in churches and consisting of the singing of religious hymns, singing classes, as was the case with most shape-note singing activities, were social events, not religious rituals, and they were rivaled only by baseball in terms of Sunday afternoon entertainment.[61] It should also be noted that shape-note hymns were often not sung in Sunday morning church services, where Dr. Watts hymns and especially traditional spirituals made up the worship's musical component.[62]

Second, the term singing class applies to important community institutions, akin to fraternal orders, that were organized around shape-note singing. Each community's

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[58] Three sources point to the *Christian Harmony* as one of the first songbooks used by blacks in the region. The first is the photograph in figure 5.5 of Geneva Shackelford posing in front of her home displaying *The Christian Harmony* in her lap. The second is the photograph in figure 5.6, in which two men seated at the front left of the group hold what appears to be the oblong *Christian Harmony*. Finally, in an interview Cheryl Studdard, a lifelong singer from the region, mentioned *The Christian Harmony* as the predominant songbook in the early twentieth century. Cheryl Studdard, interview by the author, June 13, 2012.

[59] Fred Tolliver, interview by the author, June 17, 2012, and Cheryl Studdard, interview by the author, June 13, 2012. Based on this research, "notebook singing" appears to be a colloquial expression used on in western Alabama and eastern Mississippi.

[60] The predominant source for the below description of the social organization of shape-note singing in Fayette County is an interview with Fred Tolliver. Born in the 1960s, Tolliver was a leader in Fayette County's singing community with a remarkable memory and an abiding commitment to local black life that manifested itself in part through his status as a keeper and transmitter of the region's oral black history. Fred Tolliver, interview by the author, June 17, 2012.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

singing class included men and women, and these institutions were multidenominational, being made up of members of Baptist, Methodist, and Church of Christ parishes.[63] Members of singing classes paid dues and elected officers, such as a president, general manager, and secretary, who each had specific duties. It was the job of the singing class president, for example, to order new songbooks, while the responsibility of distributing these new books to members fell to the secretary.

A brief portion of a letter dedicated not to music but to education offers insight into the import of singing classes in Fayette County's early twentieth-century black communities. In chapter 4 we were introduced to Cherrie Price, a young black woman who was appointed as Fayette County's Jeanes Industrial Supervisor in 1916. As an outsider, Price felt she was struggling to reach the county's black residents and indoctrinate them in the industrial model. While venting her frustrations in a letter to her boss, Alabama State Supervisor of Rural School James Sibley, Price also expressed a bit of hope, for she had at least identified a place where she could have an audience with large numbers of local blacks. "I feel that I have helped these conditions," Price wrote, "by speaking in their churches and singing classes."[64] As community institutions, singing classes in northwest Alabama were on par with the other primary institutions of social life—churches, schools, and fraternal orders.[65]

Local singing classes also joined together to form regional singing organizations called singing conventions, which likewise elected officers and incorporated a democratic

[63] Ibid.
[64] Cherrie Price to James Sibley, 17 August 1916, Alabama Department of Education, Correspondence of the Rural School Agent, Box SG015447, Folder P-Q, Alabama Department of Archives and History.
[65] Fred Tolliver, interview by the author, June 17, 2012.

organizational structure.[66] In the summer, during the lay-by period of the cotton cycle, these singing conventions held regular all-day singings one Sunday a month. The location of these singings rotated from church to church so that every community represented in the convention had an annual opportunity to host a singing. Weeklong singing schools were also held at least once per year.[67]

The institutional structure of singing classes and singing conventions offered blacks in the area an opportunity to participate in democratic procedures and processes during an era when they were excluded from American electoral politics. Through open discussion, the election of officers, and voting on a range of other decisions, members of singing classes and singing conventions participated in institutional life that mirrored the United States' electoral model. In this way, the singing classes and conventions of northwest Alabama were yet another institution—along with religious conventions and fraternal orders—that added a formally democratic structure to black community life.

There is also evidence that Fayette County's black shape-note conventions served as institutions of mutual aid. In the Bankhead Cemetery, a black cemetery that rests on just west of the county seat of Fayette, sits the gravestone of Onnie Terrell, who passed away in 1935. Terrell's gravestone includes the dates of his birth and death, the phrase "At Rest," and the inscription "By Singing Convention." Providing gravestones and helping to defray burial costs were keystone services of black fraternal orders throughout the nation. This simple designation on Terrell's gravestone—By Singing Convention—indicates that this stone marker was supplied by the singing convention and points to the

[66] One of the oldest singing conventions in the region was the Alabama-Mississippi Singing Convention, which began around 1887. Other early twentieth century conventions that included singing classes from Fayette County were the Davis Creek-New Grove-Canaan East Union singing convention and the West Alabama Union Singing Convention. Grauberger, "Traditional Musics of Alabama," 24.
[67] Ibid.

fact that Fayette County's singing conventions were mutual aid societies as well as vocal and social institutions.

In their singing classes and singing conventions, Fayette County's black residents also learned to sing. An important figure in any shape-note singing tradition was the local singing master who taught community members the nuances of the craft. Though itinerant song leaders traveled from community to community leading singing schools and selling books, it was these local experts that had the most profound impact. [68] Singing instructors would teach locals the rudiments of the craft, drilling them on the shapes and corresponding notes found in their songbooks, drawing connections between the printed page and the songs themselves.

As an accessible form of sight-reading and musical instruction, shape-note singing served as a form of literacy, broadly defined, in Fayette County's black communities. At a time when black churches were beginning to move away from oral practices and toward the printed page, as discussed above, shape-note singing provided local blacks with an attainable form of literacy, a way to participate in modern musical practices without having to master the intricacies of standard musical notation or learning to read. In fact, there were those in Fayette County who were unable to read the written word but were proficient in sight-reading shaped notes.[69] Shape-note singing therefore circumvented rote literacy while still providing an avenue for participation in the shift to musical print culture.

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[68] Willie Hewitt held this status in Fayette and neighboring Lamar County. Hewitt was a master singer who led singing classes and singing schools in the region. As discussed above and in the previous chapter, he also frequently led the devotion and other songs at Fayette County's African American community meetings. Hewitt taught countless people the craft of shape-note singing, and many of his pupils went on to become singing instructors themselves, making Hewitt an invaluable progenitor of the region's shape-note tradition. Ruth Anthony, interview by author, June 20, 2011; Warda Prewitt, interview by author, March 21, 2012; and Clyde Wilson, interview by the author, March 22, 2012.

[69] Fred Tolliver, interview by the author, June 17, 2012.

In practice and performance, notebook singing in early twentieth-century Fayette County mirrored this vocal tradition's organizational structure, for the manner in which these songs were collectively sung was inherently communal, social, and democratic. At a given early twentieth-century singing, singers sat in pews facing the front of the sanctuary and were grouped in rows according to their voice types—soprano, tenor, alto, and bass. Notebook singing in this region, as was the case with shape-note singing across the South, was a collective endeavor that promoted individual leadership, with every singer in attendance—male and female—having the opportunity to lead the congregation in song. Standing in front of the church to lead a song, or taking the position "on the floor," was an important rite of passage for any young singer, an opportunity to stand before the community as a leader. Born in Lamar County, Alabama, in 1926, today Cheryl Studdard is an experienced and respected elder in northwest Alabama's singing tradition. However, she still remembers the nerves she felt the first time she led a song at her home church, saying, "I'll tell you what, the first time that I got on the floor, that's the hardest days work I ever tried to do!"[70]

Once on the floor, a song leader announced the song's number in the chosen hymnal. Often, as an initial step, the song leader would then guide the group as they sang the hymn's melody using not the song's lyrics, but instead the solmization syllables do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, do. This practice helped all singers get acquainted with a song's melody and enabled any trained singer to sing a tune even if they were doing so for the first time. After the melody was established, and following the direction of the leader, the group

[70] Cheryl Studdard, interview by author, June 13, 2012.

sang the song itself. Once the song was over, another singer would step on the floor, and the process was repeated.[71]

Though there are no known recordings of early twentieth-century black shape-note singing in northwest Alabama, examples of shape-note hymns from the era recorded in the 1990s offer an opportunity to access this vocal custom's turn-of-the-century sound. Recorded in 1995 at New Grove Church in Fayette, Alabama, the song heard in music sample 2 is "Contented Soldier," and it is sung from *The Christian Harmony* songbook (http://www.andrewlnelson.com/withsightandsound). In the first portion of the recording, a man and woman can be heard leading the congregation as they pitch the tune and establish its the melody using the solmization syllables do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti. Once the melody is established, the male song leader offers a reminder to repeat the chorus, and those present begin to sing the song's lyrics. The congregation sings in four-part harmony, and this particular tune has a slow tempo that is in some ways reminiscent of the Dr. Watts singing discussed above.[72]

In the early twentieth century, when new book singing swept through the South, African Americans in northwest Alabama were early adopters of this modern vocal tradition. Area singing classes and conventions began to order and sing from these smaller seven-note songbooks that contained new hymns for a new century.[73] The accessibility of these new books and the popularity of their songs led to a blossoming of notebook singing in Fayette County's black communities. Heard in music sample 3, a

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[71] I was able to observe this process in June of 2012 when I was invited to attend a shape-note singing at Gibson Chapel in Fayette, Alabama.

[72] Cheryl Studdard described songs sung from *The Christian Harmony* as being "slow" and "soulful." Cheryl Studdard, interview by the author, June 13, 2012.

[73] In an interview, Clyde Wilson mentioned that his father, who was a leader in Fayette County's singing community in the first decades of the twentieth century, owned fifteen to twenty convention books. Clyde Wilson, interview by the author, March 22, 2012.

1995 recording of the West Alabama Union Choir leading in the singing of the 1937 hymn "Getting Ready to Leave this World" provides a chance to hear the energy and modern sound of new book singing (http://www.andrewlnelson.com/withsightandsound). Again here, the song leader sets the melody by leading the congregation in the singing of the song's notes. He then proclaims, "Sounds mighty good to me, take that first line of words," and the congregation sings this hymn of faith and a joyous anticipation of the rapture.

While describing the excitement that came with receiving a new songbook, Chiquita Willis-Walls, a long-time practitioner and scholar of seven-note singing in eastern Mississippi and western Alabama, highlights the fact that shape-note music was more than social music, it was also domestic music. In her words:

> Singers didn't just learn shape-note singing at church and in the institutes. Family and extended family social bonds were continually being reinforced when families would practice at home and with neighbors. It became customary to "sing from house to house" in the evenings and at nights. Many singers recall getting new books and going over all the songs page by page 'in just a few nights' or on rainy days when outside work wasn't possible.[74]

Jasper Rastus Nall likewise spoke to this domestic aspect of notebook singing. In his memoir *Freeborn Slave*, Nall shared the following recollection about a visit he and his friend Cisaro Kemp made to the home of Monroe Hill and his sister Lena Hill, who Nall would eventually marry:

> At once, Monroe suggested singing. He was a great singer and so were his sister and I. He said, "Lena, get your notebook, and let's sing some." He added, "I want to hear Nall BASS!" She got her book and sat down. Monroe sat on one side, and I sat on the other side of her so we both could look on her book. We enjoyed singing for a while. Cisaro could not sing, so he sat in a corner to himself and enjoyed the excellent vocal music we made.[75]

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[74] Willis-Walls, *Songs of Faith*, 2.
[75] Nall, *Freeborn Slave*, 60-61.

But it was the region's various vocal events—singing classes, singing schools, all-day singings, and singing conventions—that were integral to the fabric of local and regional black social life. The all-day singings that occurred at a different church each month were particularly valued and highly anticipated social events, and as social customs they were at the forefront of community life alongside church events, educational meetings, and the activities of the Masons and the Order of the Eastern Star. These were daylong affairs attended by most every member of the community, whether they actually participated in the singing or not.[76] Families from other parts of the region would also attend the all-day singings, traveling by wagon and later automobile to the designated church.[77] When recalling the crowds at the annual singing at Temple Star Baptist Church in Lamar County during shape-note singing's heyday, Cheryl Studdard noted that there were "cars on both sides of the road just as far as you could see," before going on to exclaim, "People, people, people, you'd just have to go up sideways to get through all those people."[78] Dinner on the grounds was an indispensible component of these community events, with food being provided by both the host church and families who brought with them baskets of homemade food.[79] These were social events, not religious services, and men were known slip behind the church and sneak a drink or two during breaks from singing.[80]

As was the case with Dr. Watts singing, shape-note singing in Fayette County also had a photographic element. Take for example the portrait in figure 5.4, in which

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[76] Clyde Wilson, interview by the author, March 22, 2012.
[77] Fred Tolliver, interview by the author, June 17, 2012.
[78] Cheryl Studdard, interview by author, June 13, 2012.
[79] Fred Tolliver, interview by the author, June 17, 2012, and Cheryl Studdard, interview by the author, June 13, 2012.
[80] Fred Tolliver, interview by the author, June 17, 2012.

Figure 5.4. Geneva Shackelford in front of her home with *The Christian Harmony*, ca. 1900s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.779); photograph by the Shackelford family.

Geneva Shackelford poses outside of her home holding *The Christian Harmony* songbook in her lap. In chapter 2, music was identified as a primary component of the Shackelfords' family culture. In this image, Geneva Shackelford opted to photographically enact her involvement in the region's most prevalent singing tradition as well as the connotations that come along with this songbook, which include Christian worship, musical literacy, and the middle-class femininity associated with musical practice at home.

Two additional photographs further establish this local photo-musical custom while reiterating the import of shape-note singing to community life. In figure 5.5, a

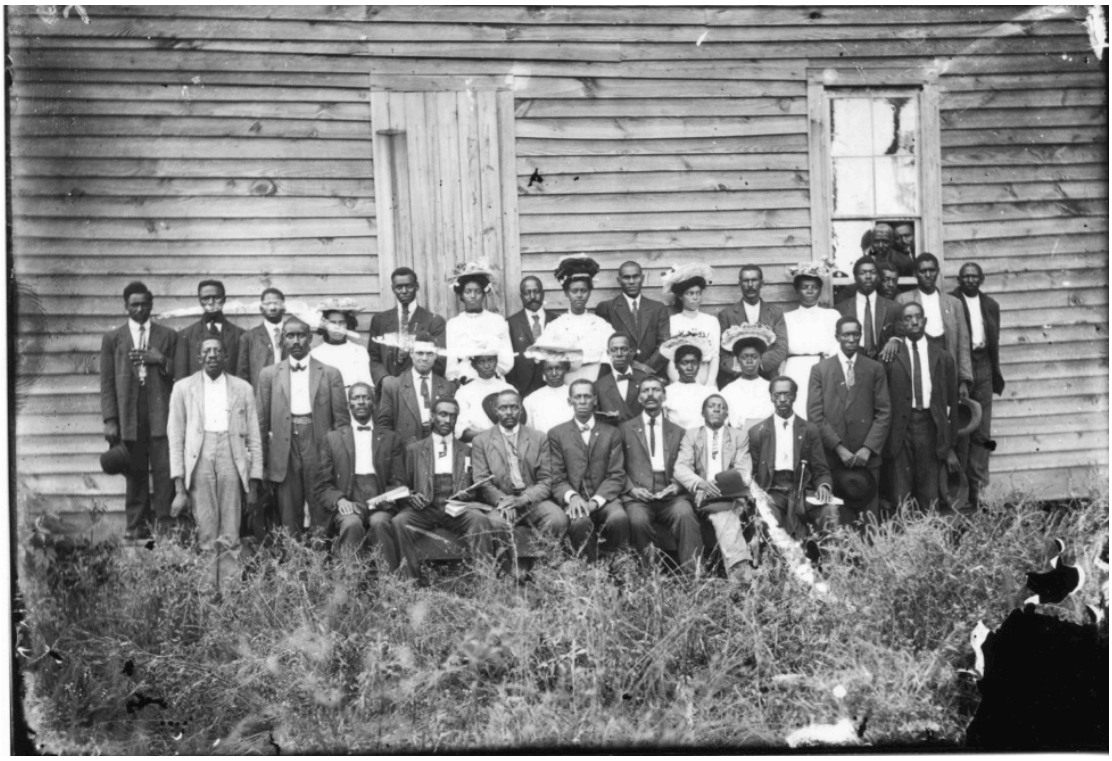

Figure 5.5. Shape-Note Singers in front of the Covin schoolhouse, ca. 1910. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.81); photograph by the Shackelford family.

group has gathered for a portrait outside of the Covin schoolhouse.[81] Those present wear the formal fashions, strike the upright poses, and include the symbol-objects like pads and pencils that characterize the photographic performances of respectability found throughout the Shackelford Collection photographs.[82] In the laps of the men seated at the far left rest oblong books whose shape and binding reveal them to be *The Christian Harmony*, the same hymnal held by Geneva Shackelford in her portrait.

As was so often the case, the African Americans in Fayette County pictured here were not alone in this photo-musical practice. The photograph of the Fisk Jubilee Singers in figure 5.1 discussed at the beginning of this chapter stands as a reminder that

[81] Warda Prewitt, who was born in Covin in the 1920s, identified this building as the Covin schoolhouse. Warda Prewitt, interview by author, March 21, 2012

[82] The man seated fifth from the left holds a pencil in his right hand and a pad in his left.

photographing singing groups was an established method of African American uplift as early as the 1880s. Also, in the context of shape-note singing, photographically commemorating singing schools, singing conventions, and all-day singings in the fashion seen in figure 5.5 was a southern practice carried out by blacks and whites. An example of a white shape-note singing group from southeast Louisiana will illustrate the point (Fig. 5.6). In this portrait, taken by A. L. Blush somewhere near Hammond, Louisiana, in the 1920s, singers display a seven-note new book called "Revival Echoes," and have included in their group portrait other symbols of their vocal craft. A music chart used in shape-note singing instruction hangs from the side of the building—an indication that

Figure 5.6. Singing school in or around Hammond, Louisiana, ca. 1920s. Center for Southeast Louisiana Studies, Southeastern Louisiana University, Piney Woods People Photography Collection (H562); photograph by Arch Lee Blush.

this was a singing school—while the baton in the right hand of the man in the center of the group is used to identify him as the singing instructor. Across the South, cameras were used to preserve and commemorate the value of shape-note singing to local community life.

In regard to black notebook in singing in Fayette County, it is the calculated photographic performance seen in the photograph figure 5.7 that perhaps speaks most profoundly about this song style's role in shaping community life. Taken by the Shackelford family, in this portrait thirty individuals, who are mostly children, teenagers, and young adults, are arranged in front of an unidentified wooden building. Seven of them are seated in chairs in the front of the group, while the others are arranged standing behind them. Roxie Shackelford is seated in the center of the frame holding a pencil in her right hand. Her status as a teacher, along with the pencil in her hand and the number of children in the photograph, indicate the possibility that this portrait is related to educational life.

To be sure, the photograph in figure 5.7 exemplifies the various elements of photographic performance featured throughout this dissertation, and this group is engaged in the creation of a carefully crafted photographic tableau in front of a particular structure. The most significant aspect of this photograph in regard to this discussion, however, are the three pairs of teenagers sharing open songbooks and arranged as a choir to the left of the frame. There is of course the possibility that these texts are school primers, but there are a number of indicators that what is being enacted here is not school but song. The size of the books, for example, is consistent with that of shape-note songbooks, with the book to far left having the oblong shape of *The Christian Harmony*

Figure 5.7. Unidentified group portrait, ca. 1910s. Courtesy Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Shackelford Family Fayette County Photographs (File 877.047); photograph by the Shackelford family.

and other older volumes and the two paperback books to the right being the size and shape of early twentieth century new books. In addition, there is evidence that shape-note songbooks were used to teach music in area schools.[83] Most importantly, however, is the fact that the attention of the young people holding the books and those surrounding them is focused to their right, where there stands a bespectacled man holding in his left hand a bell and in his right hand an indispensible implement for shape-note singing instructors—a baton.

In this calculated photographic performance, a group of young people have gathered around a building with symbols of school and song. What brings this image to life and gives meaning to its photographic narrative are the relationships among the people pictured, the songbooks held by the choir to the left, and the building itself. Here song and photography come together in the creation of a spatial story that gives cultural significance to a community structure, which in this case could be a school, a church, or some other site. What is perhaps most significant here is the fact that the building appears to be still under construction. Why pose for a photograph in front of a building that is not yet completed, an edifice that is still surrounded by the scaffolding used to support those who constructed it? By crafting a photographic tableau in front of this unfinished structure, these young people are acting out and commemorating the value of song not

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[83] During an excursion into the room in the vacant Shackelford family home where Roxie Shackelford kept her books, I found a copy of *Songs for the Singing*, *Normal and Literary Schools: One Hundred New Songs*. Printed in the first decade of the twentieth century and published by James Vaughan, who was one of the most popular new book publishers, this primer contained not only musical notation for songs, but also instruction on "simplified theory and how to write music." Handwritten in this copy of *Songs for the Singing* were the words "Saint Jacob School Book." It should be noted that Saint Jacob was the original name of what would come to be known simply as The Covin School. A digital scan of this copy of *Songs for the Singing, Normal and Literary Schools* is in possession of the author. Mitch and Geneva Shackelford's grandson Walter Shackelford identifies Saint Jacob School as the original name of the Covin School in his unpublished history of New Friendship Church. Walter Shackelford, History of the New Friendship Church, n.d.

just in community, but also in the upbuilding of a community. This is a dramatic portrayal of the very act of creating community. When seen through this lens, the singers to the left of the frame take on a renewed significance. Song here is identified as a key component of community development; it performs the same work as the scaffolding around the building

As unique as this photographic performance may seem, this was not the only black community where there was such a link between buildings and sacred song, where the idea of singing up buildings had resonance. A return to the Fisk Jubilee Singers will illustrate the point and bring to life the message of the photograph in figure 5.7. In W. E. B. Du Bois's 1903 *The Souls of Black Folk*, the focus of the final chapter is African American spirituals. While reflecting on the import of the spiritual, Du Bois made the following reference to Fisk University's Jubilee Hall, the college's first building, which was erected using funds earned by the Jubilee Singers on their tours of the early 1870s:

> Ever since I was a child these songs have stirred me strangely. They came out of the South unknown to me, one by one, and yet at once I knew them as of me and of mine. Then in after years when I came to Nashville I saw the great temple builded of these songs towering over the pale city. To me Jubilee Hall seemed ever made of the songs themselves, and its bricks were red with the blood and dust of toil. Out of them rose for me morning, noon, and night, bursts of wonderful melody, full of the voices of my brothers and sisters, full of the voices of the past.[84]

In Du Bois's articulation, the songs themselves—the voices of the Jubilee Singers—were the very bricks that were stacked and mortared to create what was at the time one of the most emblematic edifices in black education. In fact, Du Bois went so far as to give the bricks themselves the power to make music, writing that "out of them rose for me

[84] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Signet Classics, 1995), 212-213.

morning, noon, and night, bursts of wonderful melody, full of voices of my brothers and sisters, full of the voices of the past."

The photograph in figure 5.7 reveals that, as was the case at Fisk University and in the psyche of W. E. B. Du Bois, in Fayette County song was incorporated in the erection of the physical sites of community. The message of this photo-musical tableau is clear. This building, whatever it was, was "ever made of the songs themselves." Just as the Jubilee Singers sang their university community into being, so to did these African Americans in or around Fayette County sing their own communities into existence, intoning Dr. Watts hymns of the past, transposing the shaped notes of the modern era into communal song, and staging elaborate photographic performances that bound the act of singing itself to the creation of community.

This chapter has described two of the most prominent types of turn-of-the-century sacred singing in Fayette County and across northwest Alabama. Dr. Watts singing was an old style of call-and-response singing learned aurally with the assistance of deacons and other song leaders who read lyrics from aged hymnals and sang melodies from local music traditions. Shape-note singing was a new way of singing picked up visually using songbooks that combined the written word and an accessible for of musical notation. When singing in both styles, black people gathered to lift their voices multiple times over the course of a given week, whether they were at home, at church, or at school. In doing so, they used these vocal traditions to find moments of group expression, cultural literacy, and solidarity in the sounds of their collective voices.

Conclusion

In his essay "Interventions and Radial Research," Dwight Conquergood describes a need for studies that address what he terms the "repertoire of performance practices" that define a given culture but remain hidden when scholars rely predominantly on the written word as a source of information.[1] "With Sight and Sound" represents an attempt to answer Conquergood's call in the context of early twentieth-century Fayette County. This has been an effort to comprehend how black people in northwest Alabama used three of their performance practices—posing for photographs, playing brass band music, and singing—in meaningful moments of individual and group expression. The purpose of this chapter is to tie together the preceding analysis in order to reiterate a number of conclusions.

Before doing so, a simple yet significant finding should be emphasized—Fayette County was a vibrant site of variegated black cultural production. Black people in the region created photographs, staged elaborate photographic tableaux, played, listened, and danced to brass band music, and sang sacred hymns at a range of community events. And this is to say nothing of the other forms of cultural production that flourished in the region's black communities but whose practice is beyond the scope of this project—quilting, blues music, dancing, theatrical performance, parlor music, and string band music, to name a few.

By highlighting the active role of creative expression in Fayette County's African American communities and pointing in particular to black photographic and musical practices that are overlooked in the prevailing historical record, this dissertation's findings require a reframing of the narrative of rural black life in the turn-of-the-century

[1] Conquergood, "Interventions and Radical Research," 7.

South. When considering black agricultural communities in the southern countryside, more emphasis needs to be given to the vast array of creative forms that existed there, as well as to rural black southerners' engagement with national creative practices.

The photographs and music discussed in these pages played a number of roles in Fayette County's African American life. To begin, these creative acts often constituted social activities that brought about moments of companionship and pleasure. People sang hymns throughout the week on their porches, in their schools, and at their churches. The Covin band played at community events and offered opportunities for people to come together to listen and dance. From time to time, residents also gathered in front of the Shackelfords' camera, perhaps at a community site such as a school or church, to enact and preserve their personal identities and collective ties.

When blacks in Fayette County posed for portraits, danced to the music of the brass band, and sang sacred songs, they were enjoying the everyday emotional sensations that accompany these activities. They were experiencing the thrill of hearing sound reverberate off of the walls, ceiling, and floor of the church while singing in unison with family, friends, and neighbors. They were feeling the excitement of listening to the brass band's melodies ring out across the countryside at a community picnic. They were encountering the joy of being pleased with one's likeness on a recently developed real photo postcard, perhaps wearing a new outfit or posing with a pocket watch, and looking forward to mailing the picture to a loved one far away.

At the same time, these creative acts were performance strategies that had important goals and consequences. Producing pictures and making music were often methods of community development at a time when the harsh realities of Jim Crow made

a sturdy social mechanism of self-reliance essential to everyday survival. Whether it was a group portrait session at the Shackelford home, a schoolhouse concert, or an all-day singing at a local church, these activities were communal creative endeavors whose very existence depended on collective engagement. Historian Thomas Bender suggests that community is "defined better as an experience than a place."[2] The visual and musical performances described in these pages were part of the experience of black community life in Fayette County. Using cameras, instruments, and voices, Fayette County's black residents performed their local and regional communities into existence by repeatedly acting out their collective ties and highlighting a number of shared values. This dissertation has pointed to everyday conflict, resentments, and class disparities among Fayette County's black residents. However, these pages also show time and again how photography, brass band music, and song were used to nurture black collectivity and to define the community by reiterating a number of shared ideologies, from a positive view of black heritage to an emphasis on family, education, and religion.

The Shackelford family's portrait sessions, the concerts of the brass band, and the myriad events where groups of local African Americans came together in song also had political purposes. This dissertation has repeatedly illustrated how such occasions were often aimed at positively demonstrating local black culture to surrounding whites and the black community itself. Posing for the Shackelford photographers with one's head held high and arms behind the back could be a powerful way to speak against racial injustice. An evening concert by the brass band could be a way to showcase to invited "white friends" the cultural fluency and sophistication of the area's broader black community. Lining out age-old hymns was a method of honoring one's ancestors while also merging

[2] Bender, *Community and Social Change in America*, 6.

voices with one's contemporaries in preparation for the work of community development. And standing on the floor to set the tune for a church full of shape-note singers was a way to present oneself to the community as a capable leader and active contributor to collective life.

In their acts of cultural counterhegemony, African Americans in Fayette County practiced indigenous African American forms of creativity while simultaneously displaying a mastery of the dominant white American culture. The photographs of the Shackelford family, the music of the brass band, and the Dr. Watts and shape-note songs sung by those throughout the community were born from African American cultural traditions and reflected the experiences and worldviews of the African Americans in the South who created them. At the same time, each of these modes of cultural production were rooted in white American and European traditions, such as the European painted portrait, singing from shape-note songbooks, or the lining out of a cappella hymns.

With these forms of cultural production, many blacks in Fayette County devised a cultural strategy in which they used performance to highlight their worthiness of respect, civic responsibility, and equality under the law. They did so for themselves and for other black people in northwest Alabama. As strategies of racial uplift, photographic and musical practices were used to consistently reify blacks' feelings of self-worth. While living in a nation and a state in which they encountered never-ending attempts to demean, humiliate, and subjugate them, black people in Fayette County consistently and successfully combated the negative psychological effects of this oppression by performing, time and again, their value and accomplishment as a race.

In these pages, we have also seen multiple examples of black creative acts being carried out publicly in front of white audiences, whether at a school meeting or perhaps while having one's picture taken at the Shackelford house. To openly challenge Jim Crow in the early twentieth century South was a dangerous act, but through culture and the politics of respectability local African Americans could subtly challenge the racist ideology of black inferiority that bolstered white supremacy. By becoming fluent in white culture, black people in Fayette County were able to demonstrate that they were the intellectual, moral, and cultural equals of whites, calling into question local racism and the brutality of Jim Crow itself.

The photographic and musical acts described in this dissertation likewise connected black people in Fayette County to national black movements of cultural counterhegemony. Like those in Fayette County, African Americans throughout the nation were speaking positively about their racial heritage through photography, brass band music, and song. As detailed in chapters 2 and 3, African Americans in Fayette County posed for portraits wearing the same styles of clothing, holding the same poses, and clutching the same objects as African Americans across the nation who were using photography in similar acts of self-definition and community uplift. Chapter 4 described how the Covin band played the same combination of marching band standards and early jazz numbers as countless black community bands across the country. And chapter 5 showed how, in their singing classes, blacks in Fayette County joined a small but potent number of black communities in the South who used the organizational structure of shape-note singing, along with the songs themselves, to enhance their ability to support one another in times of need. These creative practices enabled African Americans in

Fayette County to be part of something bigger than their local and regional communities. They were active participants and primary contributors to a national phenomenon in which black people were using cultural production to define themselves, strengthen their communities, and challenge white supremacy.

These various outcomes were all heightened by the relationship between photography and music in Fayette County. Though photographic and musical performance seemingly incorporated separate human senses—sight and hearing—this dissertation has illustrated time and again that these creative forms were in fact interrelated and were used by African Americans in Fayette County and across the nation to enhance one another. It was many times not enough to simply stand in front of a camera for a portrait, as shown by how often individuals and families were compelled to use a symbol of their musical lives—a songbook, a guitar, or a drum—to photographically define themselves. Likewise, local African Americans frequently felt that sound itself was not enough to convey the messages they produced with their music. They were moved to visually record their musical skill, to photographically preserve their musical traditions.

The photographic and musical forms addressed in this dissertation were also linked in their purposes and themes. This study has displayed how both the Shackelford family's photographs and local musical traditions were used to shape local African American culture and strategies for uplift by uncovering a number of messages that were consistently conveyed in these creative practices. Among these themes are racial pride and accomplishment, a valuing of education and religion, a respect for family and community, and a display of civic readiness. While posing for the Shackelford family,

playing and listening to brass band music, and singing congregational hymns, blacks in Fayette County were not only establishing these as community defining tenets, but they were also repeating them multiple times throughout a given week in a number of creative formats that engaged multiple human senses. It is the multisensory reiteration of these themes that rendered them powerful ideologies used by many to define local African American life. With this dissertation's findings in mind, it becomes impossible to imagine any of these forms of cultural production in Fayette County—photography, brass band music, or singing—on its own, for they relied on one another in their performance and in their ability to convey the pointed messages that were so clearly the intent of the performers.

In the end, a primary contribution of "With Sight and Sound" to the study of turn-of-the-century African American life in the rural South is one of possibility. When considering a particular black community in the South or rural black life in general, what happens if we do so with the findings here in mind, beginning from a place in which these communities are framed as vibrant and diverse creative centers? What forms of creativity existed in other communities that were not present in Fayette County? Were there communities in the South where a black painter, sketch artist, potter, or piano player had a similar effect on local life? In this sense, "With Sight and Sound" is a beginning, a first step at reevaluating rural African American expressive culture in the turn-of-the-century South and a call for others to do the same with the hope that a richer portrait of the lives of turn-of-the-century African Americans can be crafted, so that these sights and sounds will become a more visible and audible component of regional and national narratives.

Appendix

Note on U.S. Census Records and Other Documents Accessed Through Online Databases

This dissertation incorporates data from multiple years of the United States census that have been accessed through two online databases— the website www.ancestry.com (known as ancestry.com) and the University of Virginia's Historical Census Browser. Designed for genealogists tracing their family history, ancestry.com offers access to a range of historical records used for this project, such as population and agriculture schedules of multiple years of the U.S. census, World War I draft cards, and the Sears-Roebuck catalog. Ancestry.com provides digitized versions of these documents, enabling researchers to remotely access original records housed in archival repositories such as the National Archives and Records Administration. For this project, ancestry.com was used to analyze U.S. census records for two purposes. First, census records were used to gather biographical data about individuals in northwest Alabama whose names were mentioned in interviews or in newspapers or other documents from the early twentieth century. Second, digital images of census population schedules were used to gather macro-level data, such as the analysis of the 1900 census in chapter 1 that describes the occupations of African Americans in Fayette County. Since ancestry.com provides not just data but also images of the original documents, in the dissertation's footnotes the census records themselves are cited followed by the date they were accessed on www.ancestry.com.

Macro-level census data were also retreived through the University of Virginia's Historical Census Browser, which can be found at http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu. Funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation, the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research gathered data from each year of the decennial census

and made it available on the Historical Census Browser website, which is maintained and operated by the University of Virginia Library. The site enables researchers to access population, agricultural, educational, and housing data from the U.S. census on both the state and county level. The Historical Census Browser was used in this dissertation to gather such data about Fayette County in varying time periods and compare it to other counties in Alabama. The database offers only raw numbers from the census, and all percentages were calculated using these figures. Since the Historical Census Browser provides data culled from the U.S. census but does not offer access to the records themselves, as is the case with ancestry.com, throughout this dissertation the Historical Census Browser database, not the U.S. census itself, is cited as the source for all information gathered from the site.

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Title: With Sight and Sound: Black Photographic and Musical Expression in Fayette County, Alabama, 1900-1930

Author/Producer/Publisher: Andrew Nelson

Expected date of publication/release: April 21, 2015 (will not be published)

Andrew Nelson
Name

2815 B Highland Avenue South, Birmingham, AL 35205
Address

andrew.lnelson@gmail.com (205) 919-9746
E-mail Telephone

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Signature 2/18/15
Date

Approved by ADAH	Date
[signature]	2/23/2015
Assistant Director for Public Services	

Please return to: ADAH Permissions, PO Box 300100, Montgomery, AL 36130 Fax: 334-353-4321

Form revised July 2012

Gmail by Google

Andrew Nelson <andrewlnelson@gmail.com>

Permission to use track from Traditional Musics of Alabama Volume 2

Steve Grauberger <steve.grauberger@gmail.com> Wed, Mar 4, 2015 at 1:17 PM
To: Andrew Nelson <andrewlnelson@gmail.com>

Andrew Nelson has my permission to use track 2, "Getting Ready To Leave This World." from Traditional Musics of Alabama Volume 2 on his webpage.

On Wed, Mar 4, 2015 at 12:12 PM, Andrew Nelson <andrewlnelson@gmail.com> wrote:
[Quoted text hidden]

Gmail by Google

Andrew Nelson <andrewlnelson@gmail.com>

Amon Carter Rights and Reproductions Image Request Form

Emily Olson <emily.olson@cartermuseum.org> Wed, Jan 28, 2015 at 11:04 AM
To: "andrewlnelson@gmail.com" <andrewlnelson@gmail.com>

Hello Andrew,

We received your image request for P1978.127.37, Henry, E. E. - [Full-length portrait of a man] - ca. 1875-1885. I have submitted it to our photographer so that he can make an appropriate sized TIFF for you. There will be no charge and I will email you a link through Hightail to download the image when it is ready.

Thank you,

Emily Olson

Digital Engagement Fellow

Amon Carter Museum of American Art

3501 Camp Bowie Blvd, Fort Worth, Tx 76107

t. 817.989.5168 f. 817.989.5179

www.cartermuseum.org

-----Original Message-----

From: webmaster@cartermuseum.org [mailto:webmaster@cartermuseum.org] On Behalf Of Amon Carter Museum

Sent: Tuesday, January 27, 2015 3:50 PM

To: Jana Hill

Subject: Form submission from: Rights and Reproductions Image Request Form

Submitted on Tuesday, January 27, 2015 - 3:50pm Submitted by anonymous user: [108.194.212.81] Submitted values are:

--Contact Information--

Name: Andrew Nelson

Telephone: (205) 919-9746

Fax:

Affiliation: University of Maryland

E-mail: andrewlnelson@gmail.com

Address: 2815B Highland Avenue South

City: Birmingham

State/Province: AL

Zip/Country: 35205

Requestor's Status: Other

Requesters status other: Doctoral student

--Image Requested--

Artist: Unknown photographer

Accession #: P1978.127.37

Title: [Full-length portrait of a man]

Image:

--Image Requested--

Artist:

Accession #:

Title:

Image:

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Artist:

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Deadline for images: February 14, 2015

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--Publication--

Title of book/article/magazine: Creating Community: The Art of

African American Self-Definition in Rural Alabama, 1900-1930

(subject to change)

Author/editor: Andrew L. Nelson

Publisher: None

Projected date of publication: None

Print run: None

Reproduction in electronic media or TV/film/video:

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--Production--

Title of production:

Producer:

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877.574	877.639	877.737	877.748	877.764
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Andrew Nelson

Name (please print)

Signature

3/2/15

Date

2815-B Highland Avenue
Birmingham, AL 35205

****

Signed for the Library:

James L. Baggett, Archivist

3-2-15

Date

Gmail by Google

Andrew Nelson <andrewlnelson@gmail.com>

Reproducing images in doctoral dissertation

Schwendemann, Joann <jschwendemann@doverpublications.com> Thu, Jan 29, 2015 at 2:13 PM
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Sent: Thursday, January 29, 2015 11:50 AM
To: Schwendemann, Joann
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[Quoted text hidden]

Gmail by Google

Andrew Nelson <andrewlnelson@gmail.com>

Photograph of Fisk University Singers

Phillips, Kenvi1 <kenvi.phillips@howard.edu> Fri, Sep 5, 2014 at 1:38 PM
To: Andrew Nelson <andrewlnelson@gmail.com>

Hello Andrew,

I've attached a high resolution copy of Fisk Jubilee Singers you requested. Please credit: Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University. No permission is needed from us.

Best,

Kenvi Phillips, PhD

Prints and Photographs Librarian

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Howard University

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Building #29

Washington, DC 20059

phone 202-806-4269

fax 202-806-6405

http://libguides.howard.edu/msrcblog

From: Andrew Nelson [mailto:andrewlnelson@gmail.com]
Sent: Thursday, September 04, 2014 11:27 AM
To: Phillips, Kenvi1
Subject: Photograph of Fisk University Singers

KANSAS STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
6425 SW Sixth Avenue, Topeka, KS 66615-1099
Phone 785-272-8681 Ext. 303
FAX 785-272-8682 TTY 785-272-8683
E-mail: NSherbert@kshs.org

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Name Andrew Nelson

Institution or company University of Maryland

Address 2815 B Highland Ave South Phone (205) 919-9746

City Birmingham State AL Zip 35205

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Form continues on page two

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by Nancy Sherbert
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Curator of Photographs
(Title)

Approved 2/12/15
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Name Andrew Nelson Institution/Company University of Maryland

Address 2815 B Highland Avenue South Birmingham, AL 35205

Phone 205-919-9746 Fax _____ email andrew.nelson@gmail.com

II. PUBLICATION INFORMATION

Type: ☐ Book ☐ Article ☐ M.A. Thesis ☒ Ph.D Dissertation ☐ Electronic Publication (WWW, CD)
☐ Documentary film ☐ Theatrical Motion Picture ☐ News broadcast ☐ Exhibit/Display
☐ Other (describe) _____

Author/Producer/Curator: Andrew Nelson

Title of work: With Sight and Sound: Black Photographic and Musical Expression in Fayette County, Alabama, 1900-1930

Publisher/Production Co./Journal/Site: None

Expected Date(s) of Publication/Broadcast/Exhibit/Performance: Completed April 21, 2015 (not published)

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Edition: _____ First edition _____ Reuse

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Agreed to and accepted by Annie L. Shackelford

Date 01-29-2015

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Taken by: CW

Name Andrew Nelson Date 2/19/15
Organization University of Maryland
Address 2815 B Highland Ave.
City Birmingham State AL Zip 35205 E-mail andrewlnelson@gmail.com
Phone: Work (205) 919-9746 Home FAX

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Gregory M. Walker
Utah State Historical Society — *Date* February 24, 2015

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Tel: (205) 919-9746
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