INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6” x 9” black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.
RICE UNIVERSITY

WHOLE LOT OF SHAKIN' GOING ON: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF RACE RELATIONS AND Crossover AUDIENCES FOR RHYTHM & BLUES AND ROCK & ROLL IN 1950s MEMPHIS

by

LAURA HELPER

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE

George Marcus, Professor, Director
Department of Anthropology

Kathryn Milun, Assistant Professor
Department of Anthropology

Elizabeth Long, Associate Professor
Department of Sociology

James Faubion, Professor
Department of Anthropology

Charles McGovern, Curator
National Museum of American History

Houston, Texas
May, 1997
Copyright
Laura Helper
1997
ABSTRACT

Whole Lot of Shakin' Going On: An Ethnography of Race Relations and Crossover Audiences for Rhythm & Blues and Rock & Roll in 1950s Memphis

by

Laura Helper

This dissertation, an ethnographic history of urban segregation and popular culture in the 1950s, is based on sixteen months of field research in Memphis and a year's archival work at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. I show that Memphians lived both race and music as part of specific urban rhythms and in changing urban spaces, creating and responding to a rich musical scene and new mass media. The music and its distribution crossed lines of class and race, and black and white people of different classes lived next to each other in many neighborhoods. My research makes clear that residential and musical juxtapositions almost never led to friendships or equal relationships of any sort across racial lines; I turn instead to detail the rich strangeness of this geography of juxtaposition and segregation, and the central place of music within it.

Setting in motion a Memphis idiom of call and response, I take ethnography not only as a methodology but a theoretical concern, exploring the interrelations of theory and experience in both music and geography. Similarly, the dissertation attends to both production and reception, not only of music but of local meanings, including how white elites legitimized and in fact increased residential segregation in the postwar era by describing black and poor people as dirty, infectious, and polluting. Thus "culture" in my work denotes not simply music and dancing but the social construction of racial codes, as well as of bodies, ideals of citizenship, and styles of movement.
Acknowledgments

I have had the honor and the pleasure of working with a number of extraordinary people and institutions over the past few years, and I am grateful to be able to thank them here explicitly as well as with the dissertation itself.

Most crucial have been the Memphians who have given me so much of their time and stories and friendship. Bettye Berger, especially, honored me with her trust and made me laugh and made Memphis vivid, as did Ruby Harding. Fred Fredericks and Doris Axton, Budgie and Mary Ann Linder, George Fleischer, Rev. Melvin Rodgers, Larry Moore, Terry Shainberg, Joe Phillips, Louis Cantor, and Dr. Charles Williams (of the University of Memphis's Anthropology Department) all took the time to drive me around the city, not only patiently answering my detailed questions but also bravely delving into other layers of memory and storytelling. Virgil and Mary Griffiths, Joanne Turnage, Eddy Harrison, Joan Russell, Walter Diggs, Bobby Manuel, the wonderfully graceful Sammy Lobianco, Bob Farely, Don Bryant, Sandie Scott, Alex Ward, Jerry Phillips, and Floyd Burge all also took long fascinating afternoons to reflect on race and music and Memphis with me. Paula Platt was a wonderful landlady and storyteller, and yet another role model; Steve Taylor was a reassuring neighbor and a kind date to the Bop Club. I also thank those who asked me not to use their names. And I thank all of the Memphians who contributed to the Smithsonian's Rock & Soul project, and to research like mine which grows from that work. Although I have left too many stories untold, I hope that these generous folk will recognize themselves in this text, and that my work will contribute to our conversations.
Fundamental to this project was a year-long fellowship from the National Museum of American History at the Smithsonian Institution, which provided primary funding and made it possible for me to locate and reproduce most of the maps and photographs. I also learned a tremendous amount from my fellow fellows at the museum—Janet Greene, Helen Rozwadowski, John Hartigan, Carolyn Epstein, Peggy Shaeffer, Alison Kibler, Elizabeth White, Lee Baker, Doug Rossinow, Katherine Ott, Tera Hunter—who fostered conversations on consumer culture and race in American history. Far beyond even all of this crucial support, curator extraordinaire Charlie McGovern and the whole team of bighearted Rock & Soul warriors—especially Pete Daniel and Smita Dutta—supported and furthered this work with their own fascinating research on Memphis music and social change. They were just as excited about my work as I was (sometimes, luckily, even more so). An ethnographer couldn't ask for better colleagues, or better friends, or a better model of scholarly work.

Others doing research in and on Memphis include Jim Cole, Charles Raiteri, Robert Gordon, Peter Guralnick, Louis Cantor, Robert Dye, and Dick Raichelson. They have all been quite generous to me, which I appreciate—there is a remarkable ethic of respect and cooperation amongst them which I hope to live up to. Along with Ruby Harding, the staff of the Center for Southern Folklore—especially its director, the wild Judy Peiser—were generous with support, introductions to fascinating people, and good conversation any day of the week. At the Memphis and Shelby County Library and Public Information Center, John Dugan went way above the call of duty in listening to my not-very-specific requests for information and then finding me incredible maps, photos, tenant
newspapers, and paths through the overwhelming amount of information in the Cossitt Archives' roomful of documents on urban renewal. He is the "sharp-eyed archivist" of Chapter Three, and this dissertation would be much poorer without his help.

Peaceful havens during fieldwork included Mr. Thomas Wilson's tailoring shop, Bobby Manuel's recording studio, Moira Logan's kitchen, and Myrna Comstock's porch: I thank all of these people for taking care of me and letting me hang out, and for wonderful conversation. I also am grateful to Ken Kreitner and his merry Collegium for letting me sing non-r & b with them every week, and to Larry Jasud for weekly coffee and cultural critique at Otherlands.

The Department of Anthropology at Rice University has offered other kinds of support and haven throughout this project. Along with crucial financial support, the department has given me a critical home and all kinds of sustenance for my writing. I can't imagine doing this project anywhere else. George Marcus, Kathryn Milun, Jim Faubion, Elizabeth Long (from Sociology), Michael Fischer, and Sharon Traweek have been wonderful readers of my work, and provided warm intellectual space in which I felt safe in following my thoughts and passions, and in exploring my fears. The graduate community has also been crucial to my development as a scholar and a writer: in particular I am grateful to Laurel George and Bruce Grant for their perceptive comments on my chapters, and to Pam Smart, Mitra Emad, David Syring, Tatiana Bajuk, and Myanna Lahsen for golden friendship and powerful questioning. I thank Carole Speranza for her stories of the Alan Freed shows in Brooklyn, and for her fierce support.

Peter Agree gave me my first real job and told me to go into anthropology, and he
has stayed my friend throughout, for all of which I am grateful. I have learned a lot from
the fabulous work of Mike Willard, Maureen Mahon, and Bob McMichael, who are not
only stimulating colleagues but cool friends to have. George Chauncey and David
Roediger each provided an encouraging comment at a crucial moment, although I do not
know them and they may well have forgotten this. Ann Miller, Carole Greenhouse, and
Ken Wissoker have provided ongoing encouraging noises, and Ken is the only person who
asks me informed questions about r & b and cultural studies. Conversations with Kathleen
Kearns about writing, ethnography, and much else enrich my work and life.

For emotional support during two particularly difficult periods, I thank Dr. Deirdre
Williams-Markum and Dr. Debbie Story of the Rice Counseling Service. When I was hurt,
Margaret and Barbara Conable healed me in that Conable way, by showing me my own
strengths. I know that they will recognize our lifelong conversations in this work. Diana
Rhyan is my true friend; Lisa Gurr gets me through writing and everything else; and
without Rebecca Stern I could not have come back to Houston or have lived so vividly
here. Laura George came back into my life right when I needed her. Tal, Natalie, and
David Simmons believe in me and offer me wonderful places to work and to escape from
work. Rob Bethel sends me music and calls me up in the middle of the night! Also (you
may laugh but it is true) I am grateful to the waiters at The House of Pies, One's A Meal,
Collina's, the Avalon Cafe, and Baby Barnaby's for keeping me in coffee, bad jokes, and
good diner food, and for generally looking out for me through this long hard process of
writing.

I thank Matt Deschner for being brave enough to visit this Girl Ethnographer in
Memphis on that blind date, for coming back, and for continuing to make my life deeply sweet. *Since I met you, baby*...

Finally, of course, I am grateful to my wonderful family, who got me into this whole thing and have cheered me on at every turn. My mother, Eleanor Helper, has invested in this project both emotionally and financially, and it would have literally been impossible without her. I hope that this dissertation begins to repay her for all that she has given or loaned me. My sister, Sue Helper, has always asked me the hardest questions about my work, and her own scholarship stands as a model of rigor and excellence. (Plus she makes me laugh!) My brother, Tom Helper, is responsible for much of my musical education—not only punk but rockabilly and depressing country music. His shared passions for, wry analyses of, and tips about good music and good writing help me tremendously. I thank Laura Thielen, my sister-in-law, for honoring my work, for helping me to keep my feet on the ground, and for her example of socially engaged work.

John Helper, one of my wonderful uncles, gave me an unexpected, amazing day several years ago when I visited him in Denver: while shopping for an elusive pair of shoes, we embarked on a long conversation about gender, autobiography, music, self and society, memory, and family, particularly our family. I hope he recognizes in this work the offspring of some of the thoughts he sparked that day. And although my father, Malcolm Helper, died before I really knew what anthropology was, he is present in every word I write. He was the one who always had the radio on, who asked me to try to name what I heard in the music I loved, whose own bemused engagement with pop music suggested it was something one could think about, who suggested I write about my friends, and who
first told me I could write at all. He and my mother taught me joy in other people and in ethical, creative scholarship, and I miss him every day. I dedicate this dissertation to his memory.
Table of Contents

List of Figures x

Chapter One: Introduction: Crossover 1

Chapter Two: Centralization in the Music Industry, and Elvis:
  Racialized Genres at Risk 42

Chapter Three: Blight, Filth, and Encroachment: The Discourse of Pollution
  and the "Logic" of Segregation in Memphis, 1919-1960 70

Chapter Four: Ruby, Bettye, and Laura 143

Chapter Five: The Mobility of Working-Class White Boys 202

Chapter Six: The Plantation Inn 242

Bibliography 268
List of Figures

Figure 1.1 "1953-54 Junior High: White" 36
Figure 3.1 HOLC City Survey Map of Memphis, 1940 79
Figure 3.2 Memphis Traffic Commission map, 1950 83
Figure 3.3 A Memphis theater advertises the City Beautiful Campaign, 1955 97
Figure 3.4 "Clean-Up Paint-Up Fix-Up Officers at Firestone," 1953 98
Figure 3.5 Detail of title page for the "Colored Activities" section, 1952 100
Figure 3.6 Sanitation workers, 1962 100
Figure 3.7 "Inspection and Cleanup," 1949 101
Figure 3.8 "No Blue Note, This," featuring Booker T. Jones on trombone, 1956-57 103
Figure 3.9 "Opponents of Integration" 107
Figure 3.10 "Censor at Work"—Lloyd T. Binford, 1954, just after his retirement 110
Figure 3.11 "OUT!" 127
Figure 3.12 Front page of Commercial Appeal, March 31, 1960 137
Chapter One:  
Introduction: Crossover

The day before I moved away from Memphis, I finally got to bop. Sammy Lobianco and I had set up an interview, our second, but instead of sitting at a table to talk we spent the afternoon dancing and dancing. We did the Memphis bop; we also did the rumba, we jitterbugged and we even foxtrotted; he showed me the sugar foot, the camel walk, and the chicken, and how these different steps could be combined. Mostly we bopped. Because I had given up sleep to pack boxes the previous night, and because Sammy is such a fabulous dancer that he makes his partner feel infinitely graceful, it didn’t seem to matter that I didn’t know these dances, hadn’t even ever learned how to follow. He put on record after record--Fats Domino, Big Joe Turner (his hero), Perez Prado, Joe Williams, Louis Prima, the Clovers--and for a few hours we transformed his living room into a dance floor.

Sammy's grace flows from years of passionate practice. In the early 1950s, as a teenager, when he didn't have to attend to schoolwork at the white Catholic boys' school or to vegetable cutting at his parent's produce stand, he was out with his buddies searching for new dance steps and new places to go dancing. Although they listened primarily to black musicians, he said in our first conversation, they

...didn't go to too many, you know, too many black clubs--the police didn't want you to, back in those days.

Police? I look up at Sammy from my notebook, astonished. In a year and a half of fieldwork, this is the first mention of police I have heard. Sammy is going on anyway,
already caught by a memory, his words tumbling over each other as he speaks:

Police escorted us out, when we were at Curry's club, like I said; we were walking down, these, about four or five white guys....we were walking, cause we had our group, we were trying to get some ideas, you know, Hank Ballard and the Midnighters, we wanted to see them.

Hank Ballard and the Midnighters hit the charts in 1954 with the bawdy tune Work With Me Annie,” one of the first songs to cross over from the black r & b charts to the white-dominated pop charts. Curry's Club Tropicana was a black-owned supper club in north Memphis, about a mile from Sammy's house. The father of one of the other boys was Mr. Curry's lawyer, and when the clique heard that Hank Ballard would be playing the Tropicana, they finagled tickets.

So Miz Curry come over to us, "Come on, y'all, I'll take care of you," she gave us a chair, said, "Nobody's gon' bother you." But before we got in there, this [black] guy says, "Hey man, can I come to the Peabody?"

The Peabody was not only a white hotel but the fanciest, most elegant hotel in Memphis and the entire region. Faulkner famously said that the Mississippi Delta began in the lobby of the Peabody, where all the cotton factors and plantation men would congregate for drinks; more relevant to this story is that the only way a black person could go to the Peabody was to work as a waiter or janitor, or as a musician, part of one of the nationally famous big bands that played the Skyway, its rooftop ballroom. So this was a very pointed remark, naming the unfairness of segregation, the one-way arrow on mobility in the city. Sammy was stung, and (in the interview, if not in the event) raised the question of culpability and complicity, of the relation of the individual to the social system and to
history.

Well, you know, I ain't had nothing to do with that. Don't blame me, I said, you know what I mean? I don't, I don't believe in slavery, I don't believe in any of that stuff, I said; it happened, but don't blame me for it! And we went on--they were sort of needling us that way, you know, so we looked at each other, and just kept on going, and we went in, like I said. Well, the police came in and saw us--said, "Y'all gon' stay here long?" "We're gonna stay and watch Hank Ballard and the Midnighters." Altogether we must have been there ten, twenty-five minutes. "Y'all want me to escort you out of here?" They didn't want whites there.

This experience--white boys venturing into blacks' territory in a segregated city, meeting with a confusing mix of welcome and challenge--can hardly be called integration, and barely counts as "race mixing." I call it crossover, describing the movement of real people across social boundaries with a term from the movement of a hit song from one Billboard chart to another (from country to pop, from r & b to country). In 1953 and 1954, for the first time, songs began to cross over in large numbers, after a brief period of "covering," in which different versions of songs hit in different charts (for example, "The Tennessee Waltz" was a monster hit first on the country charts and soon enough in different versions on pop and r & b charts as well, different producers recognizing a good thing when they heard it) . The covers most notorious in subsequent history were white pop versions of black songs, as when Pat Boone "cleaned up" songs by Fats Domino and Little Richard for white audiences, or Georgia Gibbs literally used LaVern Baker's arrangements in order to score hits on the white charts. By 1954, the appearance of the original versions on all charts confused the racial and stylistic distinctions between genres. Not only did songs by
white artists (Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins) place on r & b charts, several by black musicians appeared on country charts (Chuck Berry) as well, and both r & b and country songs (that is, from the marginalized markets) crossed into the mainstream pop category. All of this crossover reflected a new social fact: black and white people, musicians and consumers alike, listened to the same music. Historians and pop culture writers cite specifically white youths' interest in hearing black music as the central force in changing the market and making more music available. More, they argue that this was a utopian moment, foreshadowing the civil rights movement's explicit challenges to segregation.¹ What I like about the term crossover is that it names both boundaries and movement across them, identifying not only music but race itself as simultaneously cultural constructions and social facts with long histories.²

The questions that had taken me to Memphis (much as the music had pulled Sammy to Curry's) were all connected to this moment: did crossover happen in everyday life? Shifting the focus from musicians to ordinary people, I wanted to know how white

¹White civil rights workers apparently listened to folk, jazz and bebop, not to the more commercial forms of music I discuss. African-American civil rights workers listened to these and to a different range of music as well: Anne Moody tells us in Coming of Age in Mississippi (1968) that Ray Charles' music provided crucial emotional support during her civil rights activism, while Bernice Johnson Reagon and the Freedom Singers provided and discovered political gospel music in the intense mass meetings that characterized the early movement (Blackside 1993).

²Language about "borderlands" functions in similar ways, and my construction of "crossover" is informed by Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderlands (1987) and This Bridge Called My Back (1983), Sarah Deutsch's No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier, 1880-1940 (1987), and John Sayles's movie Lone Star (1996), all of which address the complex interactions of people and cultures on the U.S.-Mexico border.
kids were exposed to black music in the first place, and whether black people listened
across racial lines as well. What did it mean for people living under segregation to do
these things? What was the relation between crossover and segregation? Where were
racial boundaries in 1950s Memphis, and how did musical practices, especially listening
practices, relate to them? Was white crossover only further racist exploitation of black
people, as Nelson George and others argue? A utopian moment, as others would say?
Perhaps my most basic question was this: did non-musicians cross over racial lines to
create new friendships or communities based on music?

The short answer to this last question is No. The longer answer is this dissertation,
an exploration through musical practices of the complex and all too simple ways in which
blacks and whites could not meet on equal ground, or, put another way, of the
consequences and possibilities nonetheless created by the constant juxtapositions of black
and white people brought about by imperfect segregation. As it happens, this is an
exploration that no one has yet made. It seems that there are disciplinary reasons that
these questions have been avoided, and that there are disciplinary explanations, or reasons
of positioning, for my own ability to identify this as a project. The academic fields into
which my work might fall are numerous: anthropology, American studies, history,
musicology or ethnomusicology, mass media studies, urban studies. Although
anthropologists have long studied American culture, and although there has been a shift
away from assuming that cultures are bounded entities, cross-cultural studies are rare in
general and basically absent from accounts of the United States. Similarly, as I discuss
below, ethnomusicology is moving away from its focus on supposedly discrete, rural
groups, but studies of urban American musics are still rare and have not included this period. Musicology, in turn, does not consider popular culture. Mass media studies do not address everyday life, while history does not consider cross-cultural interactions or shifting ideas about race. And so on. All of this has meant that my questions—about white and black people listening to the same music in cities in the postwar era—fall into a sort of structural hole between disciplines. Meanwhile, my own training in ethnography (which calls for attention to the construction of local meanings within the intricacies of daily life), reflexivity (not only considering my own positioning with regard to these questions, but the general question of social location), and questions of translocal, transnational, cross-cultural flows of meaning—all of these trajectories situated me ideally to conduct this research.

I do not mean to imply that I find these other disciplinary approaches useless, of course. In fact this work remains necessarily interdisciplinary, as I hope the following literature review makes clear. I situate my work not only in relation to the structural hole I have identified, but also in relation to a series of issues that have been richly explored by any number of scholars: the constructions of race, music, and movement through the city as knowledge. That is, instead of holding "white" and "black" constant as commonsense categories of experience, I consider race as a kind of knowledge about the world and one's place in it. Here I draw on the emergent literature on whiteness (Frankenberg 1993, Hartigan 1996, McMichael 1995, Morrison 1992, Roediger 1992, Saxton 1990, Wray and Newitz 1996, among others), which both identifies "whiteness" as a middle-class blankness (a normative position and an anxiety about having "no culture") and seeks to
specify particular experiences and cultures within that perceived blankness. I also owe this conception of race as knowledge—historically contingent, processual, culturally constructed, necessarily partial—to Joan Scott's careful work on gender as knowledge (1988) and Donna Haraway's concept of situated knowledges (1988). Their work, and that of Teresa de Lauretis (1984), further locates such knowledges in everyday experience. This resonates with the concerns of the ethnographic tradition within which I work.³

Similarly, I treat music as a kind of knowledge about race which specific people gain within particular geographies (here, urban). Crucial here are ethnomusicology's basic understandings that music has meaning within everyday interactions between people and that those meanings are culturally constructed. There was little specific work I could draw on in this tradition, however, given its general focus on bounded cultures and non-urban areas. Musicology also offered a useful set of tools—the formal analysis of music, and Susan McClary's argument that music works as narrative (1991)—whose general deployment in the analysis of high culture has meant there is little specific work that has been useful to me in this project. On the other hand, more popular literature on music offers a wealth of specific historical detail on the history of pop music in the United States and elsewhere—histories of particular studios and cities, and, especially, biographies and profiles of artists and producers. Rarely do these works attend to the experiences of ordinary people, however, although American studies scholar George Lipsitz (1990, 1994b) shows how much we can learn about class and race relations in specific places

³Foucault's insights in Power/Knowledge (1980) informs all of this literature, of course, but I do not explicitly engage his work here.
from musicians' lives. Most usefully, he emphasizes the working-class origins of early r & b and rock & roll musicians, discussing their lives as workers and using their lives as windows on those of their audiences.

In thinking about music and race as historically specific urban knowledges I faced a vast literature on urban geography, much more of it theoretical than historical. Marxist urban geographers David Harvey (1989), Edward Soja (1989), Mike Davis (1992), and Peter Jackson (1989) argue for the mapping of power relations in the postmodern city, although only Davis's work on Los Angeles offers much in the way of historical specificity. Walter Benjamin (1986) and Michel de Certeau (1984) have meditated on the experience of walking through the city, connecting the personal out to the social through experiences of the built environment, and I draw on their rhythms in Chapter Five. Pierre Bourdieu (1977) and Anthony Giddens' sociological theories of agency and structuration inform many of these arguments, but mostly leave out, as they do, cultural or historical specificity. Henri Lefebvre (1991), Marc Augé (1995), and other French theorists have begun to theorize the complex interweavings of place and memory. Accounts of social practices (but without much consideration of culture or, especially, theory) include journalist Tony Hiss's exploration of "a sense of place" in New York City (1990) and Kenneth Jackson's consideration of the impact of racial categories on urbanization and suburbanization in the U.S. across the twentieth century (1985), which I deploy in Chapter Three. Peter Silvester's history of boogie-woogie music (1988), linking it to the turpentine camps in the piney forests of the south and then to migrations out of those areas, and Kip Lornell's account of Memphis gospel (1995), also tracking migration patterns, do draw on
some of the theoretical literature on social geography, but both focus on musicians, who travel, rather than on their more rooted and mundane listeners. Henrietta Moore claims for anthropology the "microspecificities" of everyday negotiations and construings of real places and spaces, calling out a genealogy beginning with "Durkheim's idea of socially differentiated space, and before that...Lewis Henry Morgan's work on kinship and territory." Moore also invokes feminist, especially feminist ethnographic, explorations of gendered space, in her discussion of gender and space in an African village (1986).

I found, too, that the issue of white appropriation, or more bluntly "theft" of black culture has a literature. Nelson George (1988) and George Lipsitz (1994a) basically argue that when those with less power take styles, musical forms, etc. from those with more power, they are "appropriating" dominant culture in acts of resistance; but these actions are unacceptable and scary when the "theft" goes the other way around.4 This issue is connected to an argument I face repeatedly when presenting my work: that "culture"--music and dancing--is outside political economy, or a (less important) expression of it. I don't want to argue that cultural interactions are endless plays of meaning--certainly power is a crucial issue here, and certainly black musicians have been endlessly and unjustly exploited--but that these interrelations are more complex. In my fieldwork I found that when I asked only whether black and white people could meet on equal ground, I didn't get very far. The answer was so often "no," and each time suddenly all the rich information in front of me stopped resonating with meaning. I literally could not think of what else to ask when I started in this direction. Yet I was not ready to stop asking

4See also Hall (1997) and Howes (1996).
questions, or to acknowledge that that was all there was to say about this. In response, I mentally stepped back from the issue of equality to consider the field of relations in front of me. This did make me nervous—I wondered if I was being racist, or letting my friendships with other white people blur my analytic rigor. But I have always written from my connections with people, not from denying those connections. And I found that when I stopped thinking about power relations tout court and started thinking about constructions of race or how music and geography interrelated, I had questions galore. I named these two approaches "judgment" and "description" (I danced between them over and over again throughout my fieldwork and writing), but I want to make clear that I mean by description I mean to gain more information and understanding of the complexities of power and oppression rather than to disavow those dynamics.

Thus, a connected problem I have encountered in presenting my work to different audiences is the term "culture." Not only in American studies (Grossberg 1984, Lipsitz 1990, 1994a, 1994b, Graebner 1990) with its literary and historical roots, and British cultural studies (Frith 1981, Hall and Jefferson 1976, Hebdige 1979, McRobbie 1991, McRobbie and Nava 1984) with its attention to working-class experience and questions of "resistance," but also even within anthropology (Gregory and Sanjek 1994, for example) there is a working separation of "culture" from "power" or "the economy." I suspect that within anthropology this is the result of historical developments in the field: that anthropology for so long focussed attention on so-called primitive cultures which did not apparently have class or domination, and that this focus was partly challenged by the emergent discipline of cultural studies. In this latter formulation, cultures or subcultures of
music and dancing have a dialectic but ultimately distinct relationship with the structuring economy. Without rehearsing the whole history of the culture concept, I offer my work as an argument that in fact an anthropological definition of culture is quite useful indeed, and can easily incorporate attention to economic and power relations. Throughout this work I take culture to be the ways in which people make sense of their lives; how people construct and negotiate boundaries; the shifting relations between such categories as work and leisure; the construction of difference and identity; the social construction of embodiment and the different powers of the erotic; and the ways in which relations between individuals and "the social" are understood. Again, this feels to me like a step back, a move which opens up the possibilities of description and better information. And one of the aspects of anthropology that I find most appealing is the possibility that ordinary people's ways of construing the world might affect those of the anthropologist. Thus I happily include my own questions among the things that I consider to be culturally constructed, and I try to indicate the contingency of all the ideas I am using.

The remainder of this introductory chapter offers a description of my fieldwork, a look at histories of other crossover moments in American history, an explanation of how Memphis in the 1950s is both typical of this history and revolutionary, and a brief outline of the dissertation as a whole.

Fieldwork

To learn more about crossover, I wanted to talk to ordinary people in a specific place. I initially characterized them as much by who they were not as by any positive
attribute: non-musicians, non-music industry people. I came to define my population of
interest more positively—fans, dancers, listeners, Memphians—but I also realized that my
first, negative demarcation pointed to the relationship between fans and producers as itself
interesting. Instead of focusing on fans exclusive of the music industry (basically
impossible anyway, especially in a city such as Memphis) and adding information on
audiences to the literature on production, I wanted to shift the focus of scholarship. I
started reading against the grain of music biographies and industry narratives, using their
stories to ask questions they did not: what did Elvis Presley’s strange hybrid style, or the
rise of the independent disk jockey, or the invention of the 45 rpm single, mean in terms of
racialized listening practices? How did this music fit into people’s everyday lives? Where
did they listen to music?

I chose to go to Memphis to explore these questions ethnographically. Memphis,
the storied birthplace of rock and roll (Sun Studio, Elvis) with a thriving musical scene in
the 1950s supporting blues, hillbilly, jazz, and big band music; Memphis, which literally
occupied the center of the vast mid-century migrations from south to north, from country
to city, throwing blacks and whites into new relationships to work, space, and each other5.

5See Pete Daniel’s Breaking The Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice
Cultures Since 1880 (1985) and Standing at the Crossroads: Southern Life in the
Twentieth Century (1986) for extensive, elegant discussions (and bibliography) on changes
in southern agriculture and society leading to migrations and wrought by them. Also see
Palmer 1981 for the social dynamics of musicians’ migrations to the urban north, Lornell
1995 for a mapping of migration histories and touring patterns of Memphis black gospel
groups, and Lipsitz (1994a: 117-118, 1994b: chapter one) for attention to the importance
of working-class migrations in the lives of particular musicians, whom he usefully treats as
workers as much as musicians.
Memphis, a segregated city with innovative mass media starting to cross racial lines;

Memphis, written about by many people, but none focusing on everyday life and music in the 1950s, let alone crossover; and, most pragmatically, Memphis, where the Smithsonian Institution had already embarked on research for a large exhibit focusing on Memphis music and social change.  

*I divide my copies of books on Memphis into about four fairly distinct piles: those on the music industry, those on Memphis history in general, those on racial issues in the city, and novels and memoirs. Music industry books include: Louis Cantor's *Wheelin' On Beale*, on WDIA, the first black radio station in the city and the country, which leaves out the story most interesting to me, about how the author grew up in a black neighborhood because his father owned a grocery store there, and how he became a teenager an engineer and then a gospel disk jockey at WDIA (1992); Peter Guralnick on Elvis (1995) and also on Stax (1996); Colin Escott on Sun Studio (1991); Margaret McKee and Fred Chisenhall's *Beale Black & Blue* (1993); Charles Raiteri's video on Dewey Phillips; Robert Gordon on the Memphis music and culture in the 1960s, with some history of the 1950s, especially on Dewey Phillips (1995); Kip Lornell's social geography of local gospel groups (1995) and liner notes on any number of CDs, boxed sets, and record albums. Of course the music itself stands as a history itself, but too vast a literature to summarize here. (There are boxed sets representing all of the major Memphis studios--Sun, Stax, Hi.) More general Memphis histories include a business history by Robert Sigafoos, whose one mention of music as entertainment or industry comes in a meditative aside on the number of mourners flocking to Graceland the year after Elvis Presley's 1977 death (1979); Richard Raichelson's walking tour *Beale Street Talks* (1994), David M. Tucker's *Memphis Since Crump* (1980), a political history; Michael Honey's work on race and labor organizing (1993); and *At the River I Stand* (both a book by Joan Beifuss 1968 and a film by David Appleby, Allison Graham and John David Ross 1993), which tracks the sanitation workers' strike of 1968 and the subsequent assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King.

Focusing even more exclusively on racial issues than these last two books are W.W. Herenton's dissertation (1971) on school desegregation (Herenton was for a long time the superintendent of schools and is now the city mayor, the first African-American to hold that post); Charles Williams' ethnographic history of two black neighborhoods, Orange Mound and Douglass; and Christopher Silver and John Moeser's demographic history, *The Separate City*, comparing segregation patterns in Memphis, Atlanta, and Richmond (1995). Fiction includes most of the stories and novels of Peter Taylor (including 1985, 1986), and Ann Patchett's novel *Taft* (1994). Memoirs include Gloria Wade-Gayles' *Pushed Back to Strength* (1993), about growing up in one of the black housing projects in the 1940s and 1950s, and James Conaway's *Memphis Afternoons* (1993) about growing up in a downwardly mobile white family in the 1950s. Reading like a Peter Taylor novel,
I applied for a fellowship at the Smithsonian with the idea that their research would enable me to compare Memphis with Cleveland, Ohio.\textsuperscript{7} Like Memphis, Cleveland in the 1950s was residentially segregated and home to innovative radio entrepreneurs; but in contrast, its geography featured a host of ethnic communities (Italian, Slovene, Irish, German, Hungarian, and so on), marking, I thought, conceptions of whiteness and therefore race relations differing considerably from those in Memphis. The example of Cleveland kept before me the awareness that my questions could be answered quite differently in another place. However, the richness of the Smithsonian's project, combined with my desire to consider material on the music industry, led me to focus exclusively on Memphis once I got to the museum. The depth of knowledge I gained about Memphis made up for the sacrifice of the extensive comparative aspect of research.

Specifically, the Smithsonian curators had already conducted over forty interviews with Memphis musicians, record producers, jukebox operators, and record store owners,
asking them how they had come to Memphis, how they had forged careers in music, how their music or business worked, and so on. There was a sort of division of interviewing labor between curators: Charlie McGovern, a historian of consumerism and community life and a record collector and musician in his own right, usually asked people to talk about the intricacies of the music or the industry, about the Memphis sound and about venues for music. Pete Daniel, a historian of agriculture and the south and a southerner who came of age in the 1950s himself, asked people to talk about their rural experiences (usually childhood and young adulthood), about sharecropping, and then about how they decided to leave the countryside and come to Memphis.

I learned a tremendous amount from these interviews, both about Memphis and Memphis music in this period and about how the curators conceptualized their work. As with the books from which I had learned earlier, I also listened against the grain to the interviews, trying to understand what the actions of these professionals meant for audiences in Memphis and the mid-South, and to see in what way their lives might be typical of their audiences' experiences. This was a much easier process than it was with the books, in part because the interviewers had already asked some of the these questions, and in part because most of the people interviewed thought about audiences themselves. Viewed from one angle, their actions could be construed as reactions to a fickle public--their job was to gauge, anticipate, meet, woo, persuade, and understand consumer tastes. Put another way, they wanted in equal parts to make some money and to make people dance, and for both endeavors they danced attendance on their fans. While I was at the Smithsonian, I wrote and rewrote a paper on these entrepreneurs, trying to understand
their chicken-egg relationship with their audiences.

Finally, however, reading and listening and talking about Memphis was not enough, and I decided to explore the possibility of moving there. Reasoning that south was a reasonable direction to go in February, I packed my Architectural Guide to Memphis, my Library of Congress maps of Memphis in the 1950s, and a whole slew of cassette tapes (including a special one made by a friend that consisted entirely of songs about Memphis) into my car, and drove off into one of the worst ice storms of the century. I made it to Memphis in four days instead of two (spending most of the extra time in a motel where the electricity failed), driving across Tennessee on the single clear lane of the freeway through a landscape of broken pine trees and snow, deceptively pretty in the sunshine. I felt like a True Anthropologist braving my way into the field, like Evans-Pritchard battling disease and colonial agents and geography to find his way to the Nuer. Luckily all of this difficulty proved fairly ritual: the electricity worked in the apartment I had borrowed (though it was still out across in thousands of homes across Memphis, Arkansas, and Mississippi), the sun shone for the rest of my visit, and if anything the crisis made Memphians even friendlier to a curious outsider than they ordinarily would have been, which is saying something.

As in earlier visits (driving through on my way somewhere else), I was startled by the city'sordinariness. When I had lived in Chicago, long before I ever conceived of this project or had ever spent much time south of Ohio, I would occasionally pass an exit on the freeway that said, simply, MEMPHIS, showing the highway number, and it always tempted me to just go. The songs on my Memphis tape confirmed this romantic sense of
Memphis as escape from dreariness, as the epitome of cool, as authentic experience, as gritty and bluesy and funky and real. I don't want to say that these ideas are completely untrue—certainly I ran into my share of wonderful music, delightful people, odd occurrences, and true romance in the city—but that they are also myth, and that Memphis is also just an ordinary place. In fact some things about the city are downright depressing, extreme versions of what counts as ordinary in other American cities I have lived in: staggeringly huge mansions with gracious lawns, mostly for white people, next to staggeringly poor housing, low brick buildings with no airconditioning and few trees, mostly for black people; beautiful old buildings in utter decay downtown; suburban sprawl and freeways leaching life from the still-vibrant midtown; lots of scary vacant lots next to differently frightening (because so fake) tourist areas. Perhaps it is the sheer visibility of poverty that gives rise to the romance of authenticity: freeways and suburbs in other cities protect middle and upper class whites from it, but here the separations have remained incomplete. Luckily for me, all these things, which might make Memphis a hard place to live for normal people, were exactly what I had come to Memphis to study.

Two encounters on this first venture to Memphis significantly influenced the shape of my subsequent fieldwork. First, mostly through the Smithsonian, I met Bettye Berger, a vibrant white woman who had been a disk jockey in the 1950s, a club manager in the late fifties and early sixties, and had also been a booking agent and manager to a number of black musicians. Meeting her was like meeting a movie star, and also, as it turned out, the beginning of a wonderful friendship. Later, when I had moved to Memphis, Bettye was one of the people I talked to every day, not for research but in mutual support and
laughter and friendship; she also understood that I too was a working girl, and helped me whenever she could with stories, introductions, tips about people, and so on. That first day, we went out for breakfast and I interviewed her mostly by hanging out and talking with a tape recorder on. I had done very little formal interviewing before this, although I had learned a great deal from listening to Charlie and Pete, and although my nervousness, the fact of my project, and the tape recorder made it an unnatural conversation, Bettye taught me that an interview could also be an interesting, intense, and comfortable conversation.

The other crucial conversation I had during that trip was with Larry Moore, an African-American lawyer on the board of the Center for Southern Folklore. I had met Judy Peiser, the director of the Center, on an earlier trip, and she had given me a slew of names of people she said would be thoughtful, knowledgeable, and willing to help me out; Larry Moore was all of these, and a historian of his own life to boot. At our lunch, I was struggling to articulate my sense that segregation in my hometown, Columbus, Ohio, was different from segregation in Memphis; he looked at me kindly and said, "Do you have an hour or so? I have to pick up my daughter from school, but if you want to know about segregation, I'll show the neighborhood where I grew up." In that hour, he gave me a crash course on Memphis race relations, showing me how streets with black residents adjoined streets with only white people, and how this division mapped onto a class distinction: his mother worked for the Jewish couple around the corner, whose house was significantly bigger than those on her own street. He showed me where he walked from home past white houses to segregated schools and grocery stores, white people rarely
talking to him as he went, blacks always saying hey. He had thought very hard about the
social geography of his youth, trying hard to make sense of his move into lawyering and
the upper middle class and of the forces that would have prevented him from doing so,
and he seemed to relish the opportunity to set this out again for an interested innocent. I
learned a tremendous amount about Memphis that afternoon, about how race and class
and music were caught up with each other, and how moving through a landscape as a
particular person with a particular history differed from looking at a map; I also watched
how real places sparked Larry Moore's memories in a different, more intense way than
distanced questioning did. When I came back to Memphis, I asked the first people I
interviewed if they could drive me through the neighborhoods where they grew up, and
these trips proved so productive and so interesting that I made them a standard part of my
interview process.

So I moved to Memphis in April of 1993, and I stayed for a year and a half. I
found an apartment in midtown, in what had been the first subdivision away from the
central business district. Actually my apartment was the second floor of a bungalow built
in the 1920s, in the slightly less gentrified part of a neighborhood newly on the Historic
Register. Most of my neighbors were white, some of them older folks who had lived in the
neighborhood for years, some of them urban adventurers taking advantage of low prices in
a declining neighborhood to get a beautiful house. My street balanced on the verge of
becoming a "bad" area: just on the other side of the freeway was a black public housing
project, whose residents often cut through our streets to get to schools, the bus, the store,
and so on; just around the corner there was a trashy motel and some dingy convenience
stores; on the corner of my street was a notorious drug house, which I didn't find out about until after I had moved in. Nonetheless, it felt to me like a safe and interesting place. My neighbors were very aware of the risks—perhaps even more worried than they needed to be—and kept a sharp eye out for strange goings on. An added plus was that they all had odd schedules: mail carriers and a retired railroad man across the street, a factory worker and her occasionally employed son and grandson next door, a family with lots of grown children coming and going with their dogs on the other side, and downstairs from me, graduate students who kept hours as odd as my own. Everyone was incredibly friendly, and—typical of my fieldwork luck—one of the mail carriers had graduated from a working class white high school in 1959 and loved music and talking in equal measure.

I found other people to interview just as easily. My two fieldwork rules were to accept most invitations and to talk about my project at every opportunity, and so I met a classmate of Elvis's at lunch on Beale Street (each of us took the other for a tourist, and set out to be welcoming), a jazz aficionado at an art opening, former patrons of a famous club running the print shop where I got my business cards, a tailor who had participated in one of the sit-ins, and so on. An anthropologist at Memphis State had half-jokingly recommended that I just talk to anyone of a certain age group in the city—"There are only a few thousand potential informants out there!"—and he turned out to be absolutely right. Further, Smithsonian connections definitely helped, although for the most part I did not re-interview folks they had already talked to. There was enough for me in the interviews, and I wanted to talk to people outside the industry. As I said, I met a number of people through Judy Peiser and the Center for Southern Folklore, and by the end of my time there
I had a chance to follow up a number of referrals from my initial contacts. Finally, for awhile I worked as a temporary secretary and went into a number of offices. (My longest stint was at United Way, which turned out to be the most integrated situation I found in all my Memphis experiences.) Sometimes people didn't understand what I was after, but enough people got it immediately and started talking as soon as I said the phrase "race relations and rock and roll" that I never did have to rethink my approach. I conducted interviews in restaurants, once or twice in my kitchen, and most commonly in people's houses; and, taking my cue from Larry Moore, as I said, we drove around neighborhoods, especially in and about North Memphis.

In this process of finding people to interview, I went about my own normal routines of getting to know a new city, but this time with extra attention to see whether and how these routines would involve me in local racial patterns. Early on it was quite clear to me that I was mostly encountering white Memphians. The friends of friends whom I looked up, the people who I rented from and our immediate neighbors, the young professors I met through work and friends, most of the other singers in an early music group at the University of Memphis that my bassoonist neighbor invited me to join--all of these people were white, and most seemed to move in fairly white circuits themselves. There were exceptions: another alto in the collegium, a white woman, had not only been a backup singer for numerous soul groups but had married one of the Memphis Horns; one of the anthropologists who had studied Memphis neighborhoods is African-American; although the folks who made my business cards were white, my tailor was African-American; and I met one Jewish man who, before becoming a historian, had grown up
over his family's grocery store in a black neighborhood had and worked at the black radio
station as an engineer and a disk jockey. For the most part, though, only through the
Smithsonian and the Center for Southern Folklore did I encounter black people, or white
people who had ongoing relationships with black people.

At first I did not intervene in my own circuits. First of all, I was interested in where
they would land me. Less comfortably, I was nervous about talking to black Memphians.
Part of this was the result of having questioned but never having changed the racial (and
to a lesser extent, class) boundedness of my life. Part of my nervousness came from the
same place that some of my critical attention to racial questions came from: just before
embarking on fieldwork, I had been hurt by a black stranger. Though I was using my
project in part to sort out the true importance of race in what had happened, the fact that
one of the few encounters I had ever had with a black person was so incredibly scary and
painful led me in this early period to what might easily be read as racist decisions about
what counted as safe. Finally, and somewhat contradictorily, I did not want to bother
black folk with what felt in their context to be naive questions. I am a woman who has
spent a certain amount of time and patience explaining to men why and how sexism is
difficult and real, and did not want to tax black Memphians with an education I felt I
should already have acquired. And something in my left-liberal, Protestant, middle-class
upbringing had taught me to feel that talking about race might well be racist in and of
itself. Even though I was in the process of questioning these early teachings intellectually,
they carried a lot of emotional force.

I never fully resolved these questions, of course. From watching the interplay of
my own choices with larger Memphis racial practices I learned that it would take effort and strategic work to learn more about black Memphis. It was clear to me how I could proceed—it wouldn't have been a huge effort, for I already knew enough African-American people and institutions to start to work in those circles. And I want to emphasize that black Memphians I did talk to were very generous and incredibly informative, and never did anything to make me feel naive or intrusive or racist. Nonetheless I decided to work within the networks within which I already lived, for there were positive reasons to explore crossover primarily from the perspective of white Memphians. Most simply, I was learning a tremendous amount from my interviews and already faced a tremendous amount of information. Further, a number of arguments have been made about white interest in black culture without much ethnographic consideration of the experiences of ordinary white people as white people. And my training and inclination already led me to think of my own positionings and biases as potentially productive, not only as handicaps to be overcome in the name of science. For example, it is my sense that many of my white interlocutors were hungry to think about the question of race, which has been such a painful question in Memphis. My work offered safe ways to do this not only because it asks about their positive experiences with black music and black people, but also, clearly, because I am a sympathetic white woman about the same age as their children.

Since my questions were primarily historical, I could not do the usual anthropological participant observation. Therefore I turned to archives to supplement and ground the interviews. The Memphis and Shelby County Public Library and Information Center had, in their Memphis Room, an idiosyncratic and extensive collection of
newspaper clippings on all sorts of subjects. In my search for maps, I lucked out not at the Housing Authority or the newspaper but at the downtown archives run by the library, where they had an entire huge room of unprocessed material connected with urban renewal programs. The green boxes and big gray drawers held not only maps but photographs, proposals, housing records, and evaluations. An archivist helping me out there also found me scrapbooks from the Memphis City Beautiful Clean-Up Paint-Up Fix-Up campaigns from the forties through the sixties, which were a treasure trove both of pictures of the city and of official ideas about what counted as cleanliness. Finally, the Smithsonian curators in their on-going hunt for exhibit materials gained access to a number of photographic collections which opened my eyes to fashions, faces, and interpretations of Memphis life, especially Memphis Negro life, that deepened my understanding of history considerably.

Crossover

Crossover between white and black cultural styles has characterized American vernacular music from the beginning, although until recently ethnomusicology's focus on bounded (and usually distant) ethnic cultures has obscured this dynamic. The complex political and social interactions in which crossovers have happened constitute the history of American race relations, especially in the South, where the majority of black people lived until World War I. Bill Malone draws on a wealth of ethnomusicological articles about musical practices (ironically, none of them focus on crossover themselves) to argue that
As long as poor whites and blacks shared a milieu that was rural, agricultural, and southern, and one in which blacks were forced to adjust their lives to the needs of the dominant white population, the cultures of the two groups, while remaining distinctive, often overlapped. These overlaps include the ballad tradition, common sources of religious music including English hymnody, shape-note singing, a string band tradition reaching back both to West Africa and various European countries, and guitars, banjos, and fiddles, all of them both African and English. The social practices that engendered the sharing of these traditions included the mixed-race camp meetings of the Second Great Awakening after 1800 as well as early white religious instruction of slaves; paperback gospel songbooks; and, after 1920, radio transmission. Further, Malone notes that musicians and occasionally audiences would have encountered each other—not on equal footing—at planters' balls, town functions, barbecues, and other formal public occasions. (1985)

Later fans and historians of rural black and white musics have also characterized these genres as "folk music." A number of scholars name interest in so-called folk cultures, particularly but not exclusively white interest in black folk, as nostalgia born of industrialization. David Roediger (1991) and Eric Lott (1993) describe 19th century urban Irish working-class men's interest in blackface minstrelsy as a longing for their own recent preindustrial past; David Whisnant's *All That is Native and Fine* (1983) links the rise of Appalachian "traditions" at the turn of the twentieth century and beyond with the destruction of Appalachian landscapes and communities; and Serge Denisoff (1971) notes similarities between late 1960s leftist "millenarianism" and Radical Right conservative nostalgia. Charles Wolfe and Kip Lornell's biography of Leadbelly (1992)and Robert
Cantwell's account of the folk revival, *When We Were Good* (1996), offer evidence which supports these arguments, although they do not make it themselves. All of these works resonate with Hobsbawm's *Invention of Tradition* (1983), which reveals "tradition" as a modern category, and Renato Rosaldo's essay on imperialist nostalgia, which argues that "agents of colonialism long for the very forms of life they intentionally altered or destroyed." (1989)

Andrew Ross also points out that such nostalgia rarely questions how specific people actually negotiated industrialization, and ignores the fact that commercial and contractual relations enter into all realms of musical entertainment, or at least wherever music is performed to make a living. ...This demonizing of commercial music closes off any discussion of the way in which popular music taste--with its shifting definitions of "black" and "white" meanings--is actually negotiated in the space between the industrial logic of mass distribution and local forms of consumption. (1989: 70)

Analyses which do attend to these negotiations articulate the importance of class in racialized musical taste. Jeff Todd Titon (1977), for example, attributes the popularity of 1920s recordings of "race music" and "hillbilly tunes," as well as subsequent scholarly elevations of "the folk," to northern urban idealization of the countryside and "the South." This idealization mitigated the anxiety wrought by vast cultural changes. These changes are worth examining in some detail because the postwar 1920s resemble the postwar 1950s in many crucial ways. Mobilization for World War I had created defense jobs that drew millions of rural whites and blacks to cities, while changes in agricultural technology and the intensification of racial discrimination pushed blacks in particular off the land and out of the South; meanwhile, the recording industry and radio created new ways of
hearing, making, and disseminating music.

These listening practices and music—recognized as new and celebrated as urban—emerged alongside the nostalgic genres Titon and others describe. New recording technologies and the upstart radio networks disseminated ragtime and jazz, thoroughly urban music, as well as blues, vaudeville, minstrel, and sentimental tunes. Andrew Ross emphasizes that the musical developments of jazz occurred precisely because jazz was not a folk music:

Jazz...had become an astonishingly cosmopolitan form, which absorbed and contained every musical influence going, as much to ensure the survival of its black performers as to ensure its acceptability among the white audiences of different musical genres and in musical venues all over the country and abroad. There is little doubt that these musical developments would not have occurred if jazz-blues had remained a "folk" music, untouched by the recording industry. (1989: 73)

Ross also points out that, "although the real commercial dividends were, of course, reserved for white musicians," the new music industry "created" the new black consumer. Responding to this as well as established markets, it also enabled all audiences to hear "black" meanings in the mainstream for the first time.

The genre of blues itself split into rural and urban forms, as Ann Douglas tells us. Country blues (usually men performing solo with acoustic guitars) didn't find a wide urban audience of any ethnic background until the blues revivals of the sixties; meanwhile the popularity across the board of urban blues (women vocalists accompanied by bands including horns or piano) almost by itself established the recording industry (Douglas 1995: 392). Live performance was still the focus of all of these enterprises, and other entrepreneurs opened clubs to showcase the new artists. But even as records and radio
seemed to ignore racial customs of the day, renewed racism and segregation in the
postwar period kept Harlem a distinct community, split black jazz musicians from white,
and mandated non-mixed audiences at nightclubs.

Douglas hears a resonance between the moodiness, explicit lyrics, Biblical sources,
and truthspeaking of the blues in the period and the "terrible honesty" about emotional and
social realities, spirituality, and nihilistic hope of modernist artists. Yet the only crossover
of audiences she describes are "trendy whites who patronized the black Harlem night
scene," and the handful of white and black musicians who resisted the general segregation
of jazz personnel to make music together. She implies but does not document crossover
in other listening practices among whites. In fact, she cites a survey of Princeton students'
record collections in 1928 that shows that no one bought race records there, although
white jazz cornetist Bix Beiderbecke enjoyed tremendous popularity.

Lewis Erenberg's history of New York night life (1981) describes in more detail
the dynamics of white nightclubbing in black establishments, which occurred on West 53rd
Street in the 1890s and in Harlem in the 1920s. He notes how non-blacks of various ethnic
backgrounds could constitute themselves as "white" in contrast to the entertainers (259),
partly because of the absence of black audiences at most of these clubs. He also tracks

---

8See also Burton Peretti's The Creation of Jazz (1992) for more on jazz musicians and
urban race relations.

9Another important genre of music in this era, similarly focused on live performance but
crucial to the fledgling recording and broadcasting industries, was polka. Charles Keil
(1994) argues that the same issues of urbanization, class, nostalgia, and identity permeate
this history as well. Some of the "American" influences his Polish immigrant musicians
pick up are jazz instrumentation and rhythms; by the early 1930s, live bands had a Polish
set of songs (or "book") and an "English" book which included swing, hillbilly, rumbas,
how white dancing styles became less formal and more rhythmic in response to black influences. He records some criticisms of ragtime in the 1910s—worries that "African" (and other immigrant) rhythms and "filthy suggestive" lyrics were both too alluring and too dangerous for respectable people, especially women (74)—which sound a good deal like later white and/or middle-class objections to rock & roll. Susan Cook explicates how white dance entrepreneurs Irene and Vernon Castle made a career out of inspiring white middle-class dance crazes by "cleaning up" ragtime music and African-American dances such as the black bottom and the cakewalk (themselves parodies of upperclass WASP movements and dances). (1996)

George Chauncey's extensive and nuanced account of constructions of sexuality in the urban spaces of Gay New York (1994) offers the most fine-grained account of white crossover into black clubs in this era, and the only one which shows that not only middle class white heterosexual couples frequented Harlem: gay working-class white men attended clubs, drag balls, rent parties, and speakeasies there. Sexuality and race crosscut

and so on, to meet the varied demands of their dancing audiences. By World War II, a new Eastern (as distinct from Chicago) style had developed, based on a combination of swing and traditional polka, although even these bands also continue even today to have separate "books" for polka and non-polka dances. Nonetheless, Keil's focus on Poles as an ethnic and class-based community obscures whether this audience crossed over, either by listening to non-polka outside the dances or by going to other kinds of dances and venues, or indeed whether polka or other ethnic musics appealed to black musicians and listeners, influencing black styles. Victor Greene's account of polka in Cleveland indicates that "mainstream" music influenced many polka musicians, and defines mainstream as jazz, ragtime, and other African-American inflected musics. A book I bought at the same time, Katrina Hazzard-Gordon's work on African-American dance practices in Cleveland (1990), similarly notes that some black musicians crossed over into the mainstream, here defined as pop and polka! Thus an exclusive focus on one culture, without reference to the crossovers always already going on, reifies distinctions which did not necessarily hold in practice.
each other in complex ways. Some of these men participated in the same racist
romanticization of "blackness" that intellectuals and society slummers did, while non-gay
spectators at the Harlem drag balls exoticized homosexuality much as white spectators
exoticized blackness; these were some of the only places where black and white people
actually danced together, but white cross-dressers apparently never chose to emulate non-
white figures at the masquerade/drag balls. Chauncey explicates how this issue of
"passing" resonated between the communities. Some blacks could and did pass for white;
men could pass for women or women for men; homosexual men passed as straight in most
of their worlds. While Chauncey shows that some of these performances were strategic
responses to a repressive dominant culture, and that they destabilize essential definitions of
race and sexuality, he also acknowledges that black people had many fewer choices to
disavow their racial identities than gay men had with their sexuality.\textsuperscript{10}

\textbf{Memphis in the 1950s}

I have focused at some length on crossover in 1920s New York because the social
forces shaping Memphis in the 1950s replayed those of the twenties on a larger scale.
Mobilization for World War II accelerated rural migration to cities; black communities
explicitly allied the fight for democracy abroad with the struggle against racial
discrimination at home (the Double Victory campaign); large changes in recording and

\textsuperscript{10}Further, Chauncey's attention to geography, his explication of changing constructions
and experiences of gender (and class and race and sexuality), and his understanding of gay
men's agency all stand as a model for my own work. Unfortunately, I was unable to find
any information on homosexuality in Memphis in this period, both because it was a
relatively closeted period and place, and because I was not explicitly pursuing it as a topic.
distributing music as well as the growth of urban audiences and venues engendered new forms of music from formerly marginalized people. In the twenties, urban blues and ragtime were the hot new urban genres; in the fifties, new urban audiences danced to rhythm & blues, bluegrass, honky tonk music, and, eventually, rock & roll.

While these trends can be identified as national, they occurred in specific places. Of course this is always true of large-scale social movements, but in the 1950s specific individuals and companies were forging new relations between local and national levels. Many of them were located in Memphis: the local "invention" of the supermarket (Piggly Wiggly), the motel (Holiday Inn), and the drive-in restaurant exemplify the interesting role of this city as at once innovative and typical. How to generalize from Memphis is thus an ethnographic as well as a theoretical question.

The music industry was also highly regional in this period, in part because the national radio networks began to move their attention to television and the FCC nearly doubled the number of radio licenses after the war. Segregated cities with increasing new populations, new record labels or charismatic radio shows, active audiences, and dynamic musicians include Los Angeles, Houston, Cleveland, Cincinnati, St. Louis, New Orleans, Chicago, Philadelphia, Nashville, Detroit—and Memphis. Memphis's specific claims to fame from the fifties are Sam Phillips' Sun Studio, with its roster of black and later white musicians; Sun's most famous artist, Elvis Presley; the first radio station in the country with only black disk jockeys and all black programming; Dewey Phillips, a manic white disk jockey on a different station who played three hours of r & b every night; the rockabilly of Johnny and Dorsey Burnette, Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash, Charlie Rich, and
Jerry Lee Lewis as well as Elvis; the blues of Junior Parker, the young Howlin' Wolf and the young Muddy Waters, and of B.B. King as well; a legendary jazz community including Jimmy Lunceford's big band, pianist Phineas Newborn and his guitarist brother Calvin Newborn; and the roots of an integrated community of musicians that would become powerhouse studios for soul and pop music in the sixties, Stax Records and American Studios.

But this dissertation is not about the music industry in and of itself. Rather, it explores how these social actors emerged from and created new forms of crossover, how new music responded to and created new audiences. In short, it explores how popular culture relates to the everyday life of ordinary people in a particular city. Race is not separable from these issues. Social actors and institutions constructed and experienced both the music and the city in racialized terms, and those experiences overlapped: black and white people made, listened and danced to music in specific places in the city. Further, music constituted a powerful form of knowledge about race, one which could contradict or confirm the lessons of the city's geography of segregation.

Despite the similarity of social and historical forces between the two eras, crossover in 1950s Memphis differed markedly in three ways from that of 1920s New York: the class and ethnicity of those crossing and the geography in which crossover occurred. White modernist interest in black genres seems to have been a primarily middle-class phenomenon, to which the closest 1950s analogue would be the Beat poets' attraction to jazz forms (most extravagantly articulated in Norman Mailer's infamous article, "The White Negro" [1959]). Once again white intellectuals felt that black jazz
artists ("naturally," whether because of social positioning or because of a supposed genetic
difference writers rarely specify) saw and articulated the truth of America in ways that the
repressive (and cultureless) white suburbs ever could. The more abstract and difficult that
bebop musicians made their music, the more authentic both black and white audiences
found it.11 Interestingly, Memphis never had either a significant intellectual community or
any Beat contingent of note, although in the 1960s the local aspect of the nationwide folk
revival focused on country blues in similar ways. (See Gordon 1995 for an account of
these audiences, whom he calls "witnesses" and many of whom became musicians
themselves). In the early postwar period, the first Memphis audiences for and the creators
of both black and white new music were primarily--though not exclusively--from similar
working-class backgrounds.

If there was working-class crossover in New York, it was between "white ethnic"
communities such as the Polish-American polka audiences and African-American
communities. But unlike New York, Memphis had no significant ethnic neighborhoods by
the 1950s, early Irish, German and Italian immigrants having assimilated and later
immigrants having for the most part been discouraged from moving to Memphis by
devastating yellow fever epidemics there in the 1870s and 1880s. The result was that Irish,

11 Andrew Ross also considers the complex relationship of black and white intellectuals to
jazz hipness, focusing especially on the 1920s and 1950s. He links the Beats' turn away
from politics with their Romanticism (along with black jazz musicians, Beat heroes
included 19th century French poets such as Rimbaud) and with the dangers in the
McCarthy era of being explicitly leftist. He further connects these two motivations, noting
that France in the 19th century was one of the last models for apolitical intellectuals. In the
process of distinguishing and specifying elite practices, he notes the importance of white
southern working-class people's interest in black r & b; he also notes the general absence
of this latter history from scholarly literature.
Italians, and Germans--also Catholics, Jews and Protestants of varying European ancestry—all counted as white, or non-black. The primary musical distinction was between hillbilly and race music.

Further, musical crossover more audibly went in both directions in 1950s Memphis, with black audiences listening to white musicians (on, for example, radio’s Grand Ol’ Opry) as much as the reverse, although they could not literally attend live performances of such music.¹²

And Memphis audiences lived in similar, interwoven neighborhoods as well, in contrast to the white nightclubbers, dancers, and patrons of black music in the twenties who were tourists going into black Harlem, a large, distinctly separate community.

Segregation did structure 1950s Memphis neighborhoods and performance venues (even the jukebox routes). It is fundamental and crucial to know that black people, whether musicians or not, could not move as freely as white people, in where they could live, eat, work, go to school or sit on public transportation as well as listen to music. But segregation became less and less geographically absolute the further down the class ladder one lived, even if behaviorally its rules remained in force.¹³ While there were historically

---

¹²It isn't clear whether black to white audience crossover actually didn't happen in earlier periods, or whether historians simply haven't looked for it. (My sense is that the latter is true.)

¹³Doyle 1937 notes that residential segregation is not necessarily a component of official segregation, and eloquently describes both the intricate bizarre "rules" of behavior and the beliefs behind them. However, he cites as examples of proximity alley cultures (see also Borchert 1980), slave quarters near plantation houses, and domestic workers living near their places of work rather than this urban almost-mixing. See Dollard 1957, Ferris 1984, Laurin 1987, and Powdermaker 1993 for descriptions of the more classic small-town segregation in the South, in which railroad tracks divide the two sides of town.
black neighborhoods and exclusively white suburbs, the main part of the city was patchworked with white and black streets. When the city tried to map black residential patterns in the early 1960s, the only way the fieldworkers could determine the race of resident families was by watching to see which schoolchildren headed for which houses (City Planner 1994). These mixed (not integrated) residential patterns—combined with the absence of air conditioning, the fact of two sets of schools in each quadrant of the city, the (especially working class) habit of walking everywhere, and the prevalence across white class lines of hiring black domestic workers—meant that black people and white people overheard, saw, walked past, worked next to and encountered each other every day. ¹⁴(Figure 1.1 is a detail of the city's official school districting map for white junior high schools for the 1953-54 school year; another map, almost identical, shows how these same areas were divided up for Negro schools.)

Map of the Dissertation

In fact, Elvis Presley—the figure for crossover in American culture—grew up in

¹⁴William Graebner's *Coming of Age in Buffalo: Youth and Authority in the Postwar Era* (1990) offers comparative information on crossover in this period. Graebner's interests are in a sense broader than mine: he uses subcultural theory to criticize the analytic category of "youth culture," and explores issues of race, class, gender, and authority through an incredible array of ordinary people's photographs. Music and crossover are one aspect of his argument, but he does not explore the geography of crossover or the implications of white ethnic categories for black-white race relations in any detail. We do learn that Buffalo's schools and some of its neighborhoods were integrated in this era, but neighborhoods were so identified with ethnic groups that Graebner can ask whether a "race riot" on a summer excursion boat is about neighborhood, race, or youthful rebellion.
Figure 1.1
"1953-5 JUNIOR HIGH: WHITE"
Cossitt Archives, Memphis/Shelby County Public Libraries
one of these mostly working-class, racially complicated neighborhoods, that is, North Memphis (near Sammy). In talking to people from that neighborhood, many of whom had interacted with Elvis at one point or another, I gained a much more grounded sense of Elvis as an actual person; ironically, this was during the same year that there was a massive tribute to Elvis in Memphis, that Lisa Marie Presley married Michael Jackson, that the new Rock and Roll Hall of Fame showcased Elvis's clothes and guitars—in short, when Elvis as a cultural icon moved even further away from his actual history. Peter Guralnick's biography of Elvis, published that year also, moved back in the opposite direction: He set out to "rescue Elvis from the dreary bondage of myth." This is precisely what I wish to do for Memphis, and for crossover itself.

Locating Memphis crossover in the history of crossovers, as I have just done, is a part of such a rescue, because it starts to specify what happened in Memphis. The history of these histories is also important to how I approach this work. The authors quoted above agree, for the most part, that "folk" is a category constructed by historians or contemporary social actors anxious over urbanization or in search of an authentic American voice. Robert Palmer (1981) goes a step further to show that, from the twenties, so-called folk musicians in the Delta relied as much on radio and records as on live performances to learn their art and to make money at it. Charles Keil and Steve Feld (1995) speculate that mass media produced these musicians. And Andrew Ross (1989) notes

the capacity of popular music to transmit, disseminate, and render visible "black" meanings, precisely because of, and not in spite of, its industrial forms of production, distribution, and consumption.
These commercial forms, whether on record or in performance, were, after all, the actual historical
channels through which "black" meanings were made widely available, and were received and used by
a popular audience, even a black audience. (1989:71)

But whether or not historians and ethnomusicologists conceive of musicians as part of a
folk community, they focus exclusively on musicians' lives as exemplars of whole social
groups, especially in examining moments of cultural change. In looking at mass media,
whether or not they distinguish it from earlier "traditional" modes of communicating
music, they focus on the music industry. Thus extended studies of audiences and
communities are, practically speaking, nonexistent. Interestingly, one of the few times that
critics even mention audiences in popular and scholarly discourses is precisely to discuss
crossover in the 1950s: the distinction of rock & roll from rhythm & blues hinges on the
shift from black to white audiences that occurred in the early 1950s as much as it does on
any generalizations about changes in musical styles.

This work, as I said above, does more than simply add evidence about listening
practices or information about demographics to existing work on the music industry.
Rather, it explores how audiences came to hear new music and how the musicians and
other entrepreneurs devoted a great deal of their time to anticipating and trying to meet
audience desires (if not to influence them). In other words, I use an interest in audiences to
reconceptualize questions about the relation between production and reception, and about
the construction of agency itself. Instead of trying to get beyond what I identify as a
culturally and historically specific opposition, I explore how it informs a range of
discourses. I follow anthropology's mandate to attend to "the native point of view", or
more elegantly, "situated knowledges" (Haraway 1988), not only as ethnographic thick
description but in thinking about my own categories of analysis and ways of knowing.

Specifically, the dissertation has three sections, which move doubly to ground
theory and to theorize ethnography. The first section echoes the scholars I have begun to
critique in this Introduction, offering top-down accounts of the music industry and of
Memphis urban policy under segregation. They focus on social institutions and official
discourses as central terms of analysis. More specifically, the first chapter draws on
interviews with mass media entrepreneurs and contemporary reactions to Elvis Presley's
success in order to look at the emerging institutions that made new sounds available. It
locates these new forms within the social and technological changes of the postwar period
and maps the specific musical practices they engendered. It begins to discuss the music
itself, asking how different racialized genres intermingled in particular ways and what was
audible as white or black. The second chapter, based on newspaper accounts of urban
planning, official maps, and transcripts for trials of the 1960 sit-ins, looks at the city's
racially based urban policies as they shifted over the decade of the 1950s from slum
clearance and housing project construction to urban renewal. Central to these policies is a
discourse of pollution which casts the separation of races and classes of people as natural.

The second section turns to ethnography and feminism in order to further explore
the opposition of structures and individuals as a uniquely Euro-American construction.
Life histories of two women who taught me about Memphis—one black, one white—help
explicate the gendering of race, class, and listening practices. Here, too, I start to explore
my own positioning. The moves in these first two sections—from structure to production,
from media to history, from objectivity to reflexivity—echo in the third section, which focuses most explicitly on audiences and their specific listening practices. The first chapter here tracks the movements and histories of Sammy and his friends, a clique of mostly working class white male teenagers brought together from different high school by their passion for dancing and for black music. Their exceptional mobility highlights the possibilities and limits of crossover community. A chapter on the Plantation Inn, a club where the hottest black bands played for the hippest white audiences, explores the different kinds of movement available to specifically positioned social actors. These chapters reveal the concept of call and response, itself a crossover category, as the engine of this ethnography: a culturally specific, complex, and elegant theorization and practice of people "making history in situations not of their own making." The dissertation thus circles from discourses on resisting audiences back to discursive audiences, using the repetition with a difference that is a central feature of African-American signifying (in music, in discourse, in historical consciousness).  

Throughout, I make explicit the tropes of mapping and positioning: the different ways of knowing offered by overviews and by moving through a landscape; the different

---

15Lipsitz 1994 deploys Bakhtin's notion of dialogism to similar effect in discussing black and white working-class practices as constrained resistance. See Gates 1988 and Houston Baker 1984 for elaborations and celebrations of signifying and, to a lesser degree, call and response as specifically African-American forms; see Gilroy 1993 for agreement but also a call for historical specificity so as to be able to name which antiphonies in which parts of the African diaspora are actually similar and which are different. Malone 1996 begins this work, describing fascinating and particular histories of call and response in specific African-American forms, including marching bands, "stepping" in black fraternal organizations, and dance on stage from vaudeville to Motown. All of these authors are concerned with specifically "black" histories, however, and deal with dominant or other white traditions only when black traditions signify on them.
constraints and opportunities available to specifically positioned social actors, including the ethnographer. Thus I show how constructed subjects construct meaning, how form and content here are interrelated and interdependent, and that ethnographers' interpretive processes are as culturally bound as those of the people we study.
Chapter Two: 
Centralization in the Music Industry, and Elvis: Racialized Genres at Risk

This chapter focuses on the distribution of popular music in the 1950s, showing that entrepreneurs' fundamental categories of description and promotion were explicitly racial. Regional and national changes in distribution--primarily centralization--brought about a juxtaposition of different kinds of music from these racialized categories. In Memphis, sites of such juxtaposition included a central record store which sold "black" rhythm and blues, "white" pop, and "white" hillbilly music; the first radio station in the country playing only black artists; and a radio show on another station featuring all of these types of music. These mixings did not bring about the end of segregated circuits or marketing categories, but they heightened the contradictions within this version of segregation. The resulting musical feast, available to any remotely attentive listener, literally made possible the music of Elvis Presley. Turning from Elvis as listener to Elvis as a figure of uncertain race, I explore how his promoters, listeners, and critics tried to figure out where in the racialized circuits he and his music fit. In one response to the confusion he represented, mainstream country music became even "whiter", as Nashville entrepreneurs and musicians reasserted the boundaries under threat.

Postwar Changes Nationally

The American music industry was highly regional in the postwar period: instead of simply radiating outward from major labels in New York and Hollywood, new voices came from small independent recording companies in Chicago, Memphis, Cincinnati,
Houston, Los Angeles, and other cities affected by national migrations. In turn, there were strong connections between regions—artists toured, radio stations broadcast over large areas, distributors and pressing plants often operated far from the recording studios. These cross-regional connections between regions were highly specific and personal, links between individuals rather than official hierarchies between branches of the same company. The big broadcasting networks participated in these relationships, increasingly so over the decade of the fifties, but generally focused their attention on television. Meanwhile, the federal government increased the number of radio station licenses from 930 in 1945 to 2350 in 1952, mostly by allowing more stations in each region; and the formation of Broadcasters Music International (BMI), a song-performance licensing organization which began to regulate the hillbilly and blues that the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP) considered inconsequential, made it profitable to exploit those markets. (Jackson 1991: 345n) That is, ASCAP and the major labels focused on mainstream pop, marginalizing and leaving unlicensed the markets for country and urban blues. Thus there was considerably more airtime to fill, less network interest in filling it, and money to be made. Leaving behind pop music, live music, and drama, staples of network radio, the sometimes flamboyant disc jockeys at the new independent radio stations across the country relied on small independent studios for this music; jukebox operators and record stores distributed it; and Memphis's Plastic Products, one of the few record pressing plants between the coasts, mass produced many of the
independents' actual records and financed many of the other companies as well.¹

This chapter maps out the personal and professional connections between the entrepreneurs in Memphis—nearly all of them white men in this early period—listening especially to what they can tell us about the racial nature of musical circuits. In order to trace their specific roles, I look at the record store where these men congregated in the normal course of business. Then I follow Elvis Presley's first hit from production through distribution, attending to the ways in which its producer used these networks to promote the song but also to how it confounded the racial divisions of the circuits.

**Poplar Tunes: A Neutral Zone**

Joe would say "Jerry, have you heard this record, this guy is great and you can't give em away." And then they say "You're right, you know what?"—say, "I wonder why?" And there was a lot of that kind of stuff. And we always had a drink and we always had probably some nutbread and salami. Really everything was real cordial and friendly...There was quite a few, in fact I'd say everybody in the mid-South area has probably been through...And quite a few artists too. (Novarese 1992)

Poplar Tunes (so called because of its location on Poplar Avenue on Memphis, but the pun on "pop" and "popular" didn't hurt) was not only a retail record store; it eventually became a one-stop wholesaler which carried new releases from a wide variety of labels.

independents as well as majors. It was one of the first institutions of its kind in the mid-
South. Thus jukebox operators, disk jockeys, record producers, and musicians from
Memphis and the region would come to the store not only to buy records but to pick up
information, hear new records, and talk shop. These records—intended to publicize
musicians, winning them gigs and promoting their appearances—could cross into places
that musicians could not. By bringing together many different kinds of music, as well as
people and information, the owners at Pop Tunes inadvertently started to break down the
segregation of the music circuits in which they participated.

Like a number of other record stores around the country, Poplar Tunes got its start
because of the jukebox business: The first owners found that they could make some extra
money by selling the used records off the boxes.

It was called Shirly's Pop Tunes, Poplar Tunes, and his name was Shirly Rank. And him and
his wife ran it, it was a small record shop. And he was involved in amusement machines.
And she kinda ran the record shop and he took care of the amusement machines. And that's
what we bought. Not the amusement machines, but we bought the little record shop.... We
had a friend that had the biggest jukebox company in probably this tri-state area, his name
was Clarence Camp. And for years, he had filled his basements up with his 78 records that
had come off the jukeboxes. And course one of the first things that happened to us, he sold
us all those records. Bout a pickup truck full at a time, and we put 'em on tables and we had
customers that would spend hours every day going through them.² (Novarese 1992)

These records had played on jukeboxes in a wide variety of urban and rural locations; a
map of these locations is also a map of segregated musical genres.

²Note that "customers" could conceivably include ordinary listeners, not only those
interested in starting a record store.
There were probably three categories...of places to put jukeboxes in. One would be where people congregated to play country music, hillbilly. Now that could be beer halls. It could be certain country grocery stores frequented by people who liked to hear the country music.

You had other places, similar to the country club, the higher class so-called, restaurants where people dressed up to go. They would play the Guy Lombardo-type music, if they wanted to hear [music]. So that was the other category. Then the black folks had their own blues type [music]. That was mainly the big seller in their area, and it was a combination of restaurants and beer halls. They would, some of 'em were just simply places to go drink beer. Some actually served good food and kind of downgraded the drinking of the beer. But they all played the B.B. King-type music mostly, and the Sonny Boy Williamson-type music, the Lightnin' Hopkins, and the old blues that you might be reading about being resurrected in the forefront of today's music. They were often open all night long. (Gist 1992)³

In other words, the genre categories of country, pop, and urban blues did describe one level of social practice--"black" music went to "black" bars, and so on--although it is also important to remember that they do not necessarily delineate other distribution or, especially, listening practices.

When John Novarese and Joe Cuoghi bought Poplar Tunes in 1948, the jukebox operators⁴ only got rid of records there. But to buy new records for the machines the

³There were some [black] places that used gospel records...But the problem it caused, if on the beer-drinking nights somebody went over there and played one of those gospel songs, it would affect the people who wanted to drink beer and do other things that night, and kind of ruin the man's business, so to speak. So they wanted a way that we could shut down the possibility of playing gospel on certain nights, and then let only gospel be played on Sunday. But I never did solve that problem. That was beyond my mechanical skill. (Gist 1992)

⁴In the early 50's, late 40's, there were a group of people that were designated as the operators for Memphis, Tennessee. A political leader, E.H. Crump, Ed Crump, did not allow new operators of machines to come into the city of Memphis, it was kind of a closed business. So you were either born into it or you worked for a person that was one of the nine operators that Mr. Crump would allow. and you would get into it kind of through the back door, so to speak. And that's how the machine business was run here in the city of Memphis. Course we're in a point in Tennessee where right across the river to the west is Arkansas. There were a lot of Arkansas operators, there were a lot of Mississippi operators...Some of the old operators were Jack Kanipe
operators had to go elsewhere--to the individual record companies, many of whom had offices in Memphis. Morse Gist, a jukebox man and music store owner based in Helena, Arkansas (about 60 miles southwest of Memphis), described the logistics of obtaining records in the 1930s and 1940s:

In those days every record producer had his own distribution point. So it meant going to Memphis one day a week for me, and going to the Capitol record distributor, going to the RCA record distributor, the Decca record distributor. You spent half your time driving from one end of the town to the other side to find the distributor and then listen[ing]. You stood at the counter and listened to what you thought might be a good record and talked to the clerks, "What is everybody else buying?"...[T]hey would suggest things, they had a lot of literature and flyers touting the newest artists they had found, and so forth. They had on the table there samples of all their stock, so you could listen, if you wanted to spend enough time in there, you could play the records and see if it had the beat you wanted or whatever....I would just take chances. If it was a new unknown artist I would buy a few records, and I had some locations that I could put em out as samples. And then I would take a meter reading within a week. If it showed unusual activity, then I would get enough to cover everybody-- we just called it covering the route.

Even this particular operator, who professes no personal interest in music, conceived of his job as more than the mechanical re-stocking of jukeboxes. In order to conduct business as usual, he paid attention to what listeners liked and disliked, and even began to

and Guy Kanipe and my father Bob Roll and Allen Keller. Frank Smith and Earl Montgomery owned S&M Amusement Company, Joe Pesotti owned J.O. Pesotti out in east Memphis, a jukebox and cigarette vending machine company. There were about nine different operators. There was Jake Kent, there was also a Jake Weinstein that was in the business who later on in the early 50's resigned or sold his route out. And since then there are quite a few new people in the machine business now and I would say there is probably 30 to 35 machine operators just in Shelby County. That's just about the way things have come through from the early 40's to where we are today. (Roll 1992)
anticipate their tastes. Several things here hampered any jukebox operator in pursuing this
goal in the old way of doing things: the time and energy it took to get around to all of the
different companies, the limited knowledge to be picked up from individual clerks or other
buyers who happened to be there too, and the difficulty of choosing what to buy from one
company without knowing what other companies might have on hand.⁵

The new owners at Pop Tunes soon offered a solution to these problems when
they began selling new records—from both independents and major labels—to jukebox
operators as well as to the general public.

They could go to all the places and buy these records. But you talkin' about getting here
[Memphis] early and staying all day. Or they could come to Poplar Tunes and pick 'em up all
at once. In other words make one stop and then from that—we had a few that did it, but we
didn't, we didn't really know there was that many interested. But then it wasn't long, we
started doing a little mailing and then George Sammons would give us the names of people
that would buy jukeboxes and we'd mail to them. So it wasn't long before they'd just write in
and tell us what they wanted. Or if they came by they would come here instead of spending
all day, in two hours they could get everything they needed, maybe one hour.....(Novarese)

The "little mailing" included local charts indicating which records were popular,
information which operators could also hope to glean more informally by going to the
store itself. That is, Pop Tunes also offered a "neutral zone" where operators could find
out what was hot on their competitors' routes.

Other operators around the vicinity would come in and buy from them. And it was an

⁵"We would meet...other operators at these various distributors' points, and try to pick, guess, and choose
which record. Because you simply would not be able to afford, in our case I couldn't afford buying everything
that they came out with at every spot. It was a tremendous amount of guesswork in that record business.
Billboard had come along...but it wasn't of much help. It was a national publication." (Gist 1992).
advantage because they would share information that was highly competitive. You didn't have, you VERY seldom had friendly operators. It was a, I don't know of anything more competitive than the jukebox business was, once it got started. So the only way you could get information...bout what was doing good or what was not doing good, was from a neutral zone. Now, I would tell those folks at Pop Tunes when I went to buy records which I liked and which I didn't like and which was getting play, and which wasn't. But I certainly wouldn't have told my competitor even if he was from another state, I wasn't about to [laughing] tell him my favorite money-producing records. And in fact most of the time we didn't even talk, unless we met in that neutral zone, and it was always by coincidence. That was the only place you got true tips, you didn't get that type of information from the factory, from the distributors. So that was a big advantage. (Gist 1992)

In turn, the owners parlayed the knowledge they gained from these conversations into active advice and service to the operators, which of course increased the attractiveness of Pop Tunes as a resource. George Sammons, who had jukebox routes throughout Mississippi and Arkansas plantations⁶ and who sold jukeboxes to other operators, says,

We'd sell a guy a box, we'd ask him what kind of a place he's going to put it on, and he'd say

"That's going to be a hillbilly joint" so I'd call over to Poplar Tunes, I'd say "Pick me out fifty of your best records for a hillbilly joint," and they would. (Sammons 1992)

Note that the description of the music and the place it is put is racial: Distribution is a

⁶...all up through Arkansas I had jukeboxes [on] plantations. A plantation, every plantation would have a big house, and they allowed the folks to have crap games in the house, they sold white whiskey, old bootleg whiskey, and they gambled in there, and you could do anything you wanted in there. The boss man that owned the plantation found out that if he kept his people in there and let them do what they wanted to and kept them to themselves, they'd be happy. And they kept them broke: the guys that run the place knew how to gamble, and the, the cotton-picker didn't know how, and he'd [the owner would] end up winning all the money. And Monday morning, when the cotton picker was broke, he had to get back in the field and pick some more cotton. So all the, 99 percent of all my places, we had blues. And I used to love the blues, and every week I'd come in with new blues. And every now and then I would pick up a blues singer to ride with me, and he'd go in and out these joints with me and he picked a guitar and passed the hat and take up a collection, and they'd give him a big old hatful, jarful of white whiskey and he'd be happy and he'd sing the blues. (Sammons 1992)
matter of locations, and in this period and in this region, locations were a matter of race
(and, in the “white” locations, class). Again, asked how operators choose music for the
jukeboxes, a company director explains:

If he was going to forty locations in a week let’s say, and he knew half of ‘em were primarily
black locations, he would come into a place like Poplar Tunes and buy enough records to
give the location a change of record and give ‘em something that he knew that location would
play. You get to a point to where you knew, you know if one location will play blues more
than just the regular R&B. He would actually listen, preview records, here in the record
shop at Poplar Tunes, and make sure that those were the records that he wanted to buy for
certain locations out in the territory. The same thing applied to the white locations. Some
white locations liked soft music, big band sounds, rhythm type music. The locations more or
less determined what kind of music the jukebox man put on there. If you got a location that
liked soft, background music and big band sounds and you brought ‘em something that was
abusive they wouldn’t let you put it on the jukebox. So you had to go along with the owner
of the lounge, or the owner of the club. (Roll 1992)

Ironically, although the locations were generally segregated, the same operators
served all kinds of locations, and Pop Tunes served them best by bringing together all
kinds of music, regardless of racialized genre. In this sense Pop Tunes functioned again as
a kind of “neutral zone” where potentially debilitating differences could be negotiated
safely. It is also true that only black music, and occasionally black musicians, participated
in this mixing: the owners, operators, studio men, and disc jockeys were all white men,
and in this as in other crucial respects the economy and power relations of the music
industry in this period were like those of sharecropping.

Disk jockeys who programmed their own shows also came to rely on this access to
records from all labels at once as well as to information about what was hot.

This was before you know the top forty and that type of formatted play that they have on the radio. But back then it was, we had quite a few disk jockeys that would come by here almost daily. You know, they'd look at all the new releases, they wanted something new to play....They would pick up new records and play 'em on their stations that day! Records would get heard that way and also they would get heard through jukebox play. People would actually go in and, you know, ask the people "Well, what do you got new today?" and that's how they would hear new records or new artists. And course, between the disk jockey and the jukeboxes here in this area, I saw many a record that was never heard of become an overnight hit. (Novarese 1992)

*WDIA, Dewey Phillips, and Willie Mitchell: Changes in Memphis Mass Media*

Two radical changes occurred in Memphis radio in 1948, and the centralization of distribution at Pop Tunes was crucially connected to both. The first was that the white owners of radio station WDIA, who were losing money playing pop and country, ventured into broadcasting Negro music. The second was that another local station hired a disk jockey to compete for this "new" audience, and inadvertently found a white teenage audience as well. In order to avoid offending anyone in their potential audience, regardless of race, the white owners at WDIA hired Nat Williams, a respected black teacher, entertainer, and journalist, as their first disk jockey, and they programmed both white country and respectable black pop and gospel at first. They had no precedents to help them: in 1948, there were no other stations with extensive black programming, let alone an entire schedule aimed primarily at black audiences. Luckily, black audiences responded enthusiastically to WDIA's venture, and the station both committed itself to only black
music and widened its programming somewhat beyond pop and gospel. But disk jockeys
couldn't rely on their relatively limited personal record collections for long:

> Once it became obvious that [WDIA] had in fact captured the black audience, it then made a
frantic search for the so-called race music. Don Kerns was assigned the difficult task of
procuring it. "The only place around," he recalls, "was what you call a one-stop...." Kern
remembers that there were already a few records around WDIA like Big Boy Crudup, Fats
Waller, and Ivory Joe Hunter, but the one-stop distributor was a lifesaver because "they had
the off-brand stuff and they started feeding to me." (Cantor 1992: 51-52)

Surveys at the time indicated that, along with its hoped-for black audience, the station also
attracted white listeners.

> In response to the phenomenal success of WDIA, another station decided to
experiment in programming some black music. WHBQ hired the lunatic Dewey Phillips
away from a downtown department store, where he had been selling records by
broadcasting over the PA system, to attract the newly-discovered black audience when
WDIA went off the air at sunset. Dewey was so popular--among black people of all ages,
and unexpectedly, among white teenagers--that the station soon extended his 15-minute
show to two hours, then three. Dewey, who was white, would play anything and
everything:

> ...In one night, three hours, you could hear anything you wanted to hear....He played [black r
& b artists] Little Walter and Johnny Ace but also Frank Sinatra [pop], Nat King Cole [the
rare black pop artist], and Jimmy Reed [country]....WDIA played only one kind of music.

Dewey played it all. (Don Nix in Gordon 1995: 17)

Poplar Tunes both sponsored Dewey Phillips's show and provided him with the music. In
turn, Dewey advertised the store on his show and graced it with his crazed energy in
person. Memphis music historian Robert Gordon quotes a Poplar Tune employee:

Dewey had made Joe Cuoghi legendary, a household name. But Joe Cuoghi didn't want to be famous. He used to hate when Dewey would come in the store because he created such chaos. Dewey'd get behind the counter and handle records, put 'em on the turntable, didn't care if there was two or two hundred people in the store. He'd say, "Joe! Come here, buddy boy. I want you to hear this. Hottest record in the country!" He'd crank the volume up, Joe would say, "Turn that goddamn shit down, there's customers in here." (Gordon 1995:18)

Nonetheless, Dewey became an active part of the advice and promotion network anchored by Pop Tunes:

There were guys that knew, they heard this guy singing or something and they wanted to get a record started on him. And then they would promote the record and they would bring it out here and we'd listen to it and get Dewey to play it, or some other disk jockey. (Roll 1992)

Dewey's "Red, Hot, & Blue" radio show thus became an important outlet for new Memphis music. Further, in its eclectic unpredictability and the kinds of audiences that it attracted, Dewey's show became another "zone" where white and black styles could safely intermingle.

The performance scene that these records, jukeboxes, and radio shows fed offers a more complex version of this intermingling. Memphis clubs were nearly as segregated as the jukebox routes, the only exceptions being those black clubs which occasionally let in white patrons, or white clubs where black musicians played regularly, both of which would seem to confirm segregation rather than to challenge it. Yet by the early 1960s, this limited crossover in the realm of live performance had spawned two more large changes in the Memphis music industry: a formerly white-run recording studio producing mostly
instrumentals transmogrified into a black-run soul studio; and another independent soul label, Stax, emerged from the collaborations of white and black musicians to become nationally famous (this latter story is told in Peter Guralnick's *Sweet Soul Music* [1996]).

First of all, these changes occurred because both white and black musicians were already playing across stylistic lines. As African-American bandleader Willie Mitchell puts it,

> If you're going to work the clubs, you've got to play what's on the radio. We usually opened with a jazz set, you know, warm the musicians, up, we'd play pop music, we'd play r & b, we'd play hillbilly music, anything. The bigger variety you had the more popular your band was, so we, we could play polkas, we'd play anything, we'd play country and western and anything, you know, that's how you really appealed to the people in the clubs. (Mitchell 1992)

Black and white audiences alike expected bands to replicate the breadth that mass media offered. At the same time, the (white) entrepreneurs managing the studios and many of the clubs knew the musicians' community intimately and would call on specific musicians from these bands to play on various studio sessions. Joe Cuoghi, one of the owners of Poplar Tunes, also ran a recording studio called Hi Records which specialized primarily in instrumentals. In 1959, he asked Willie Mitchell if some of his musicians would be available to play on a record with Bill Black (who had been Elvis's bass player a few years earlier).

From the late 1940s to the early 1960s, Willie Mitchell led or managed big bands, small combos, and vocal groups which dominated the Memphis music scene. Most of the clubs he played were patronized by whites only, but he had never met Mr. Cuoghi before
the producer called him about the Bill Black session. After this, however, Mitchell became Black's arranger and started to produce records by black artists for Hi.

Saturday nights he'd come and listen to the band all night and he'd come over smoking his cigars, he'd say, "Willie, do you want a comment from me?" I'd say "yeah," he'd say "You know what, just a little bit ahead of your time, but ain't bad," he would say, "you're a little bit ahead of your time, let me catch up with you." [He] was like a father to me really, I loved him and he loved me, he used to come by on birthdays and everything." (Mitchell 1992)

Just before Cuoghi died in 1970, he officially turned the studio over to Mitchell, who shortly thereafter scored an incredible series of top ten soul hits with singer Al Green.

This story highlights as well the fluidity between professional roles characteristic of Memphis entrepreneurs and musicians. Here, a record store owner also runs a recording studio while a performing musician moves into production; I have already described how Morse Gist ran both a jukebox route and a record store,7 and how Pop Tunes itself originated as a spinoff of the jukebox business. Another set of overlaps was crucial to the development of the Memphis music scene: Plastic Products, one of the rare pressing plants not affiliated with a record label and between the coasts,8 was run by Buster Williams,

---

7Now the front part of this building was completely vacant. All of the jukebox space we needed was in the back part of the building, but we didn't know what to do with [the front part]. It's interesting, I wrote to the ...U.S. Department of Commerce asking 'em what type of businesses they would recommend, that I was thinking about something in the line of music. And they sent me some literature back. Mainly it ended up saying that you ought not enter into any kind of music unless you were a talented musician. Well, none of us could play anything but a jukebox (laughs)...In big black print: DO NOT GO INTO A MUSIC STORE BUSINESS UNLESS YOU ARE PARTICULARLY TALENTED IN MANY DIFFERENT INSTRUMENTS. (Gist 1992)

8[We were] dealing with three pressing plants, you'd have a press in Philadelphia, Paramount record manufacturers; Monarch record manufacturing on the west coast for things west of El Paso;...and the central section of the country from Chicago, all the way down, over to Detroit and out to Dallas, came from Plastic Products in Memphis. (Sam Phillips 1992)
who also, with Clarence Camp, ran another distributorship called Music Sales and owned jukebox routes. From these enterprises, Williams gained enough capital not only to set up the pressing plant but to finance independent labels in Memphis and all over the country. (Gordon 1995: 27-28; Escott 1995: 13)

The most famous of these, and the inspiration for many local studios, was Sam Phillips's Sun Records. As Colin Escott and Martin Hawkins recount, Sam (no relation to Dewey) started off as an engineer for live big band concerts at the Peabody Skyway and a disk jockey (his show was called "Songs of the West"). Soon he was also recording masters to lease or sell to established labels (RPM/Modern in Los Angeles, Chess in Chicago), but decided in 1952 that he would do better to go into business for himself. He spent a lot of time at Pop Tunes, promoting his records and picking up on the r & b and country music that other independents were recording, and talking shop with the owners. (More fluidity of roles: Dewey Phillips was briefly a partner, and Ike Turner acted as one of his scouts.) Sam recorded strange music, black musicians playing rural blues or country-tinged r & b; white sharecroppers playing blues-inflected hillbilly music. In 1954, he brought forth a fine example of musical miscegenation, Elvis Presley's first 45 rpm single: "That's All Right" a countrified version of an r & b song by Arthur Big Boy

---

9Records off Camp's jukeboxes constituted an important part of Pop Tunes' initial stock (see first page of this chapter).

10By the end of the 1950s, literally hundreds of recording studios had tried to make a go of it in Memphis—in the back of a barber shop, in a furniture store, at a radio station, almost anywhere someone had an interest in music, some extra capital, and some space. (Jim Cole, conversation)

11He also was an early investor in Holiday Inn.
Crudup, backed with a fast blues version of Bill Monroe's bluegrass hit, "Blue Moon of Kentucky.

**Elvis Presley's First Record**

[A musician would] run down here to the Sun Record joint and cut them a record; then we had a man here named Buster Williams that had a record pressing plant and he'd press you up, I think, a minimum of a thousand, for so much, 12 cents apiece, 13 cents apiece. Now you've got your thousand records, you think it's a hit, what are you going to do with them, how are you going to get it on the chart? So they didn't know. So they would first start out, they'd call on the operator. We, there ain't no way you can cover the whole United States selling out of the back seat of your car, that ain't the way to go. So then a lot of them would stop by to see me, and give me boxes of them to give away, say "As you call on an operator, how about leaving him four or five samples of my record?" And Elvis did that, first record Elvis made... he came by and bought me a box of records and said, "How about passing these records out as you go." And Elvis got famous in our area, but I'd go to Chicago to a sales meeting and talk about Elvis and they didn't know what I was talking about up there, he was real strong in this locality but he was never strong until...RCA picked him up, and then he took off like a kite in a March wind. (Sammons 1992)

It was a giant wedding ceremony. It was like two feuding clans who had been brought together by marriage. (Marion Keisker, quoted in Greil Marcus 1982: 174-175)

To me rock and roll is the blues
with a mania.
It really is.
And I don't know how anything in the world could be better than blues with mania. I mean
when you take it, I mean you take the blues,
and you pull that tempo up,
and you get that intensity there with your instrumentation in addition to your singing in an uptempo
and people wonder whyyyy that was exciting to young people?
aah, listen! hell, I could be pretty dumb and figure that one out.
(Sam Phillips)12

The recording of this single is perhaps the most-written about moment in rock and

---

12Here and in Chapter 4 I set spoken words in this poetry-like form both because it comes closest to showing how long the pauses actually are, and, especially, because early on in the project I read Gerald Davis's wonderful explication of African-American sermons, *I Got the Word in Me and I Can Sing It, You Know: A Study of the Performed African-American Sermon*, which sets sermons this way. I use the style to indicate informal preaching. Whether Sam picked up this style from black or white fundamentalist preachers, and what the historical and social connections are between racialized preaching styles in general, are open questions.
roll, in part because it is often taken as the definitive beginning of the genre. How Elvis Presley came into Sun Records to make a record for his mother and Sam later called him back in, how Sam put Scotty and Bill in the studio with Elvis to see what they could come up with, how Sam's "belief in the accidental, the unexpected, the unique" (Guralnick liner notes) allowed the moment to happen—all this is very familiar territory for most readers of the rock and roll literature (the most vivid and most historically careful version is in Guralnick's 1995 biography). Instead of retelling this story once again, I want to follow this particular single through the circuits of distribution I have been discussing, in order to show them at a moment of crisis, that is, when faced with a racially and musically unclassifiable sound.

Everyone in the studio knew right away that they had something unusual on their hands that day in 1954, and right away they discussed this weirdness in terms of genre and promotion. Scotty Moore, the guitarist, remembers:

Played it back and we were all standing listening and looking at each other and [Sam] goes,

"Yeah, it sounds pretty good but," you know, "what is it?", I mean, "Who, who you going to give it to?" (S. Moore 1992)

In light of the subsequent uproar (both positive and negative) about Elvis's challenge to white middle-class propriety, Scotty is at pains to emphasize that they didn't mean to rebel:

I went into music to try to make a living....and so I wasn't running from anything, I was trying to run toward it if anything.

---

13 See Dawson and Propes' What Was the First Rock'n'Roll Record? (1992) for a whimsical and useful discussion of the issues involved in such origin narratives.
Elvis, too, was singing out of his own rich musical experiences. Although he had never played a true live performance, he had steeped himself in music from wildly various Memphis radio broadcasts, live (white) gospel performances, records, and jukeboxes around north Memphis, and he had taught himself to sing and play guitar almost secretly. Scotty Moore described Elvis's musical background, partly in terms of his own more professional experiences:

[The musicians of the time play[ed] a little bit of all types of music in their background and listening and playing. Elvis didn't have quite the experience that Bill and I did, but he was an avid listener to radio and records and loved gospel music, loved R & B music, loved all types of music...].

Not surprisingly, he bought his records from Pop Tunes, and he spent a considerable amount of his free time there as well. Mr. Novarese recalled:

Well, I met Elvis in the record shop...he worked cross the street. And he would come over during his lunch hour, and listen while he ate his lunch and listen to music. And then...after he made a record for Sam Phillips he became a real good friend of ours.

In a sense, "That's All Right" compresses in one small biscuit of vinyl all of the sounds and all of the border crossings lying in potential at Pop Tunes.

Even before getting the record pressed, Sam took the acetate to Dewey, who put it

---

14Interestingly, although Scotty Moore's previous experience had been primarily in western swing bands, he was drawn to Sam Phillips because of the producer's rhythm & blues work:

I had sense enough to know that you need to get some airplay, get a record out...to get better club dates and so forth. I had...heard about Sam having a studio and a record label, and knew he was cutting a lot of R & B stuff that he was farming out or leasing to Chess and various labels. So I went to see him."

Of course this quote also lays out the connections between live performance, recording, and "airplay" (which could refer either to jukebox play or radio broadcast).
right on the radio to tremendous acclaim. This story has also become legend: the crucial moment for my purposes is when Dewey, interviewing Elvis on the air that day, made a point of Elvis's race. "I asked him where he went to high school, and he said, 'Humes.' I wanted to get that out, because a lot of people listening had thought he was colored." (Escott and Hawkins 1991: 65) Everyone listening in Memphis would have understood that Humes High was a white high school, that this question was pointed and polite way of establishing that the singer was white. After all, the song itself does not make this distinction clear, combining as it does different racially marked genres. A jukebox operator speaking from years of experience described the violence that boundary crossing itself could provoke in this era:

[Y]ou had to be very careful not to mistakenly, now you were still in a critical period of

human relations, and you could cause all kinds of emotional trauma if you made the mistake

and put a black blues record on a honky tonk machine, because somebody would go over

there and play it, just for devilment, and the whole place would explode. (Gist 1992 )

The paradox here is that it was this kind of mixing which had produced Elvis in the first place. Yet even on the radio show which denied or ignored the racial boundaries of the music industry and of society as a whole, boundaries were such a vivid and taken for granted social fact that uncategorizable music presented Dewey and his fans (and Sam, and Elvis) with a problem of definition.

Sam faced this when he tried to figure out how to promote the record to other regional radio stations:

I remember talking to T. Tommy Cutrer at KCJ in Shreveport [a country station]...T.

Tommy told me, "Sam, I would [play this,] but if I put this on, they'll run me out of town."
Just down the street from KCIJ, Fats Washington played R & B on KENT. "Fats played my R&B records," asserted Sam. "All of them. But when I went to play him "That's All Right" he played it for me but he said on the air, "I just want to tell all my listeners I got Sam Phillips in the studio with me and he thinks this is gonna be a hit record. I'm tellin' him that this man should not be played after the sun comes up in the morning, it's so country."

(Interview by Charles Raiteri with Sam Phillips, quoted in Escott 67-8 and Guralnick)

He took an ad out in Billboard billing both sides as "folk blues." Cashbox reviewed it as a blues; Billboard said, in inimitable Billboard style, "Presley is a potent new chanter who can sock over a tune for either country or R&B markets....A strong new talent." (quoted in Escott and Hawkins 1992: 65) There are a number of other examples of musical crossover and critical dithering in this era. Arkansan Billy Lee Riley, a white musician from a sharecropping family, was heard as a black blues musician as often as he was identified as a white rockabilly (and since he recorded under a number of different names, he is even now listed in some blues histories as African-American). (Riley 1992)

Reviewers and record companies identified Leadbelly, a black Texas musician "discovered" by Alan and John Lomax, as a folk musician as often as a blues singer. (Wolfe and Lornell 1992) In general, faced with ambiguity as well as the responsibility for description, critics reasserted the genres.

Meanwhile Elvis was haunting Pop Tunes, and the owners encouraged this promotional opportunity.

And Elvis used to come down...and a lady would come in and buy his record-- "That's All Right Mama"--and Joe says, "That's the guy that sings it right there." He would hide behind the front door, between the door and the Coke machine, and he would tell Joe--he always called him Mister Cuoghi--he'd say, "Mister Cuoghi, PLEASE don't do that," says I'm all
dirty and I don't want folks to see me like this." But Joe said, "They don't care how you look. They just want to meet you" (Novarese: 19)

It's not clear from this description--or, for once, from Sammon's account in the epigraph to this section--that genre or race are problematic categories here, and this is appropriate to both Elvis's music and Pop Tunes as an institution.

Despite his r & b inclinations, Presley's whiteness meant, finally, that he moved in country circuits; ultimately, what this meant was that he changed country music. From the beginning it was clear that he had won over regular country fans. Peter Guralnick relates a story told by a record scout for RCA Records, a major label which soon enough would "buy" Elvis Presley from Sam Phillips:

My bell-cow area was East Tennessee. If a record made it in the tri-city area of Kingsport, Johnson City, and Bristol on down through to Knoxville, it would go national, so I was just very conscious of that area. One of our best record dealers was Sam Morrison in Knoxville, right on Market Square....This one particular time Sam grabbed me and said, "There's something very interesting happening here, it's really weird," and he went and got Elvis's record, which was just out, and put "That's All Right" on the record player. "What do you think?" he said. "I can't get enough of it. I'm selling at least a box a day." I was amazed, but I said, "It's just a normal rhythm and blues record, isn't it?" He said, "No, it isn't, it's selling to a country audience." Well, at just that point an old country man in his fifties came in, I say jokingly he had more hair growing out of his ears and nose than he did on his head, and he said in an easy Tennessee drawl, "By granny, I want that record." I couldn't figure it out, because here was an obvious country fan." (Guralnick 1995: 123)

One of Elvis's first regular gigs was at the Eagle's Nest, a club attached to a swimming pool complex called Clearpool in suburban Memphis. The house band was
hillbilly dj Sleepy-Eyed John's western swing outfit, and Elvis and Scotty and Bill played when they took a break. The fiddle player for Sleepy-Eyed John's band\textsuperscript{15} described Elvis's difference partly in terms of audience reaction:

Shortly after we started playing this club called The Eagle's Nest, a kid by the name of Elvis Presley came in and started doing the intermissions; we were the house band and Elvis Presley and Scotty Moore and Bill Black, they did the, when we'd take a break, they'd come on, you know, and that was my first knowledge of who Elvis Presley was. And we of course noticed that there was quite a lot of enthusiasm when they came on, you know, a little different from ours, especially from the ladies, they would just, you know, there was this amazing reaction, you know, we had not experienced anything like this, you know, when he would hit the stage. (Stewart 1992)

As the reaction built, Sam continued to put Elvis on country venues. Instead of live local radio, he aimed at regional multistate radio broadcasts of live performances: the Grand Ol' Opry, out of Nashville, whose audience, crushingly, didn't like Elvis; and the slightly looser Louisiana Hayride in Shreveport, whose audiences adored him. The emcee for the Hayride recognized that Elvis combined styles in a new way, but he ultimately understood him as someone who would transform country music:

Sam Phillips had sent a copy of "That's All Right" to the Opry's rival, the Louisiana Hayride, broadcast on KWKH out of Shreveport, Louisiana. In his covering letter and the phone calls that followed, Phillips stressed that Presley was a "white boy."...The Hayride emcee, Frank Page, [asked Presley], "I'd like to know how you came up with that rhythm and blues style....Because that's all it is. You're mighty lucky. They've been looking for something new in the folk music field for a long time now. I think you've got it." (Escott 1991: 69-70)

Two aspects of Presley's performance (besides the songs themselves) marked him

\textsuperscript{15}Jim Stewart, who later went on to found Stax Records, which became a soul studio.
as different from the usual white performer. One was his movement. As his drummer D.J. Fontana described it,

[H]e'd be standing here and the next thing you know he's on the other end of the stage, you know, just dancing around and moving around, and I said, "Man, what's this guy doing, where's he going?" you know, we never knew where he was going to go...[T]hey weren't used to seeing anything like that; the country artists would stand up straight and they'd sing their songs, and, you know, that's about all they did, and the big band guys were sitting down, and they're, you know, so nobody moved like he did. (Fontana 1992)

The other difference was this very fact of having a drummer. Country bands didn't normally have drummers at this point. (One exception was white western swing bands, who forged their own brand of crossover music from cowboy songs and big band instrumentation, both of which had both black and white antecedents. But when Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys played the Grand Ol' Opry, the drummer had to play behind the curtain.) By the mid-1950s, the extent of percussion onstage was a muffled snare drum. Adding a fully equipped, loud drummer wasn't Elvis's own innovation, but something that happened at the encouragement of the Louisiana Hayride's managers, perhaps to lend volume. Interestingly, the drummer they picked up, D.J. Fontana, had previously played at Shreveport's strip joints, experience which stood him in good stead when the crowd noises drowned out the music and he could only follow Elvis's body cues.

Movement and drumming by this point were read as "black," even though country music fans danced to their music and Elvis's fans did not. Fontana tells us

They wasn't really paying any attention to us anyhow, they was listening, watching Elvis, they didn't, they wasn't dancing, they was standing in front of the stage about to kill each
other, you know, [for] getting in the way. (Fontana 1992)

Nonetheless, when RCA became interested in this new singer, the major label sent their
country scouts. Steve Scholes, who bought him from Sam Phillips’ Sun label, held a
position in "specialty" sales, which covered both r & b and country, but Elvis recorded his
first 45s for RCA in Nashville. Chet Atkins produced the sessions.

These recordings, construed by the company as a new version of country music,
grew out into the world to be successful on all three charts, pop, country, and r & b. Elvis
redefined boundaries for himself, but country musicians responded to his cultural and
commercial threat by becoming even more country, emphasizing the whiteness that
distinguished them from Elvis. Drums became more common, but they simply accented the
pulse. The chord progressions carried all of the emotion now, as did the melodic
comments effecting transitions between them, while twangy accents and the verticality of
the rhythm only increased. This response offers a powerful parallel to the contemporary
"Massive Resistance" conservative whites mounted in response to Brown v. Board of
Education, which mandated another kind of desegregation, but whether there is any actual
connection between these two constituencies remains for other researchers to discover.

Eventually, Elvis himself landed squarely in pop music. Peter Guralnick argues that
he had this ambition from the beginning, in part because pop represented the mainstream,
the biggest possible success. (In this formulation, his role model was Dean Martin.)

Another issue here, however, is the racial economics of the music industry. There were
other crossover musicians around: Sam Phillips had been trying in any number of ways to
produce a crossover musician, recording black singers who mixed hillbilly elements into
their blues long before Elvis walked into his studio, and Bill Haley and the Comets offered
uptempo western swing versions of r & b songs in the same era. But Elvis and, to a lesser
extent, Haley could be successful in ways that black musicians never could be, given the
racist structures of both the music industry and the distribution systems. Here is another
parallel with sharecropping. In the music industry, both blacks and whites were producing
radical new music, based in part on crossover styles; both black and white musicians were
at the mercy of labels' murky bookkeeping practices and thin royalty deals; most musicians
really did have to keep working at other jobs to make ends meet. But white musicians had
the opportunity to make more money and to reach wider audiences: they were treated less
badly by the labels, and promoters construed audiences in racial terms which precluded
stardom for black artists. Similarly, in sharecropping, both poor blacks and whites labored
on other people's land, at the mercy of others' accountings, rarely breaking even. But on
moving into Memphis, it was far easier for whites to move ahead, even though public
housing projects and decent (albeit segregated) schools were available to both. Available
to whites were: cheap mortgages, segregated occupational categories reserving better
jobs, segregated wage scales guaranteeing relatively higher wages even in the less skilled
jobs, and residence anywhere in the city.

In popular discourse, both Elvis and early rock & roll stand for either an ideal
moment of racial harmony or white theft of black traditions. But asking about the
distribution of popular music opens up questions about how segregation actually worked
in social practice. Racialized genres of music both reflected a segregated reality and
constituted it as well. Centralization of distribution at Pop Tunes and the opening of new
media outlets for black artists brought these genres together and made a wider range of music possible. New musical syntheses resulted, for which "Elvis" is the shorthand. Musical entrepreneurs did not set out to challenge racial boundaries, in pursuing new markets and responding to consumer desires, they nonetheless contradicted their own racialized categories. But while transformations of the music business juxtaposed racialized genres, the context in which listeners encountered this music developed in precisely the opposite direction: the city of Memphis itself became more segregated, by race and by class, over the decade of the 1950s. In the next chapter, I map this geography, exploring where city officials constituted racial boundaries and what happened when Memphians crossed them.

_Coda_

George Sammons, a longtime Memphis jukebox operator, talks about changes in his business:

Now we've had a lot of things, well in the past twenty years, to come into the jukebox business to make it draw up, in other words we're not a growing business, we're a, a declining business. You say, "Well, how did that happen?" Okay, I'd say one of the first things that happened, after the war was over, here in our city and, and just about every city in the United States, we had old, decayed buildings, and these buildings couldn't command good rent, so you put a cheap beer joint in there. Up here we have an auditorium, and north of town some eighteen miles from here we have a naval base, and we had busses that picked up these soldiers at night, these sailors at night, and they would pick them up there by our auditorium, and at one time we had between eighteen and twenty little beer joints all around the block, scattered around the auditorium, these sailors would come in there and they got to kill some time waiting for the bus.

All right, urban renewal came in, they bought all the property, they tore it down, we got a brand new
federal building, we got a brand new city hall, we got a brand new county building, we got a brand new jail, but no joint at all. Now where did these people go--we don't know. Okay, that knocked us out. They not only did that down there on that part of town, they did Beale Street the same way. Back in the pre-war days when we had segregation, that was the only place that the black man could go, he'd go down on Beale Street and get drunk, he'd go down on Beale Street and get him a hot dog for a nickel, be a foot long, be that long, get him a hot dog for a nickel, he could get him some whiskey, he could shoot some craps, they had seven, eight, ten joints down there, in the back room he could shoot dice. Okay, if he walks all the way down Beale Street, west, he'll run into the Mississippi River. Memphis was known as the cotton capital of the world, and they would, the cotton man would bring his cotton down there and they would put it on the levee, and these, we call them stevedores, these black guys would go down there and unload these big trucks and, and throw them bales of cotton there, now they're going to put the cotton on barges, ship it down to New Orleans and then it's going all over the world. So a black man could get him a job, if he wanted to work an hour, two hours, wanted to work all day, he could work as long as he want to....Now when they started segregating the town, if he's got money in his pocket he can go anywhere and eat that you and me can go, so he didn't want to go on Beale Street, hell that's where he went before.

Now [down around Beale] we had, I, I bet you we had 2,500 maybe 3,000 what, we call them "shotgun houses," had like three rooms, and there'd be about 6 feet between this house and that one, you could jump off this porch on the other and just run on down the street, jumping off one porch on the other. Urban renewal went in there and tore all of those houses down, they displaced those people. They moved out, we don't know where they went but they just scattered, they went everywhere. Now, they're talking about why, why don't people come back to Beale Street? The black man don't care about coming back to Beale Street, number one. The prices down there are beyond his pocket book....

The next thing that we had: the expressway. Now, expressway comes through your town, it's going to take everything in its path, and we lost some joints that happened to be in the path. Then it's going to re-route our traffic, and that traffic used to come through town two or three times a week, and he'd stop at this little joint, now it takes them around town and he don't stop, ain't no joints on the expressway, so he don't want to get off
the expressway, he's riding so good, so "I'm going to stay on it." So these little places closed up.

Then we had another big thing that knocked us out. We used to have a lot of, we called them "mom and pop" hamburger joints, the old man and his wife would run the joint, and around every school house you'd have maybe four scattered, and one on this corner and one over here and one across the street. Now, what happened? McDonald's comes to town, and man, he likes to get close to the school house, where the kids are, he squats down right in between the two mom and pop joints. He don't have a jukebox, he says, "I don't want no jukebox, I want to, I want to play free music, I want them to get their stuff and get out of here, jukebox music'll make them, make them loiter, hang around." Okay, he put mom and pop out of business. Where did they go, we don't know, they're not out there anymore. So that put us out of business.... And then we have the nice hotels come to town and open up, got bars, you say, "well, man, that'd be a good spot," but "I want me a band, I want me a three piece band in here playing music."

So we had a lot to contend with.

(interview with Charlie McGovern and Pete Daniel,
Chapter Three:
Blight, Filth, and Encroachment: The Discourse of Pollution and the "Logic" of Segregation in Memphis, 1919-1960

"Citizens just don't believe it when you tell them the average older, larger city in the U.S. has four or five squares at its center which forms a dark, unknown continent. It isn't across the ocean in Africa—it's right here. Expeditions are being organized all over the nation to let light into this dark slum continent. American enterprise and initiative can make this expedition a success." —Guy T. Hollyday, head of Federal Housing Authority, quoted in Memphis Press-Scimitar, July 15, 1953

Orelle Ledbetter, assistant director of the Memphis Housing Authority, showed the [mayor's Rehabilitation Study Committee] where the city's slum areas exist. Using a map with the slum areas in brown, he referred to them as "the dark brown taste in the mouth of Memphis." —Commercial Appeal, August 6, 1953

From the 1920s into the 1960s, a range of social programs sorted out Memphis by class, race, and land use. Throughout this period, black people lived all over Memphis, rather than being concentrated into anything like a ghetto or one specific "black neighborhood." While there were a handful of historically black neighborhoods—Douglass Park, Orange Mound, Klondyke, New Chicago—most census tracts included black Memphians as well as white.1 Similarly, poor people lived relatively close to those of other classes, and grocery stores and small industries populated these neighborhoods as well. These mixed neighborhoods formed a different kind of segregation rarely described in the literature. This is not to say that the 1920s or any earlier period was a golden era of integration; this was a time when black Memphians had no access to public parks or libraries, when streetcar segregation was first encoded in the law, and the only reason they

1Sociologist Thomas Wooten found in his 1928 study that the Memphis black population, which was only slightly greater than Richmond's, occupied nearly three times more urban space. Blacks occupied 28 percent of the residential land in Memphis, which amounted to a density of 21 persons per acre. In contrast, Richmond's black community squeezed into only 10 percent of the residential land and boasted a substantially higher residential density of 46 persons per acre....Memphis had no single black concentration such as Jackson Ward or the more spacious West Side of Atlanta to accommodate population growth or to absorb displacees. As a result the city's rapidly growing black population in the 1920s and 1930s fanned out to the north and south of the central business district in search of new housing." (Silver and Moeser 1995)
could vote was that it was in the interests of the Crump political machine that there be a
large bloc of votes readily available. Nor is it clear that black and white people in the
"same" neighborhoods interacted in any significant ways. One factor in this was that the
children, who often bring adults into friendship, attended separate, segregated schools;
further, a complex racial etiquette prescribed elaborate behavioral codes to mitigate this
residential proximity.\textsuperscript{2} Certainly racism closed most occupational categories to the black
community. Nonetheless, these mixed, non-integrated neighborhoods formed a different
kind of segregation rarely described in the literature, and the simple fact that whites and
blacks lived peacefully next door to each other into the 1950s and even 1960s highlights
arguments for residential segregation as historically specific and even quite strange.

In the previous chapter, I discussed how transformations of the music business had
the side effect of juxtaposing racialized genres. This chapter shows that the context in
which listeners encountered this music developed in precisely the opposite direction: The
city of Memphis itself became more segregated, by race and by class, over the decade of
the 1950s. This process, as anti-erotic as the musical practices were erotic, started in the
1920s, with the hiring of the first city planner, but it accelerated in the postwar period
because new prosperity enabled the city to address wartime housing shortages. The mixed
(though not integrated) neighborhoods in the main part of the city became the domain of
mostly poorer black residents, while the growing suburbs were limited almost exclusively
to middle-class white people. These standard passive phrases, which I echo by choice--

\textsuperscript{2}White people still living in inner-city Detroit today may well have cross-racial friendships,
in large part because they attended integrated schools as children (Hartigan 1995). See
also Doyle 1937 on the etiquette of race relations in an earlier era.
"became black", "the growing suburbs", "were limited"—constitute a typical naturalization of deliberate work rather than the description of a natural process. The official line held that "the separation of the races"—geographic, economic, social, and most of all, sexual—was profoundly natural. Yet it took tremendous effort and expense to create and maintain "natural" distance. That is, in contrast to inadvertent integration of genres in the music industry, this sorting out did not simply develop out of other decisions: powerful white Memphians created, inherited, and perpetuated an intentional and longterm strategy to segregate people by race and by class.  

This chapter departs from the specific exploration of musical practices to focus on a central discourse through which Memphians in power expressed and made real their sense of segregation as natural: the rhetoric of cleanliness, or put another way, of the violation of cleanliness. That is, those who believed in racial boundaries as the defensive demarcation of pure whiteness, or even simply as the natural order of things, saw the challenging or blurring of those boundaries as pollution. They labelled those who challenged boundaries as polluted as well as polluting, regarding them as less than fully human and inappropriately physical.  

Those who could label others so damningly included public figures with tremendous power—mayors, the city commission and their hired city planners, the editors of the Press-Scimitar and the Commercial Appeal (the two daily

---

3See Caro 1975 for an account of official discourses and practices of segregation in New York City.

4It is impossible to tell chicken from egg here: segregation could be an expression of belief in purity, but then again, if segregation is both one’s daily experience and in one’s various interests, then anything different will feel polluting and unnatural, in which case accusations of pollution are an expression of a belief in segregation.
newspapers), the film censorship board, the City Beautiful Campaign, the school board--who fostered the sorting process of segregation in these decades. Nor was this a purely local process: federal standards of neighborhood evaluation, mortgage policies, and public housing programs encouraged the homogenizing of neighborhoods and the growth of exclusively white suburbs and predominantly black inner cities all over the country. 

I discovered their discourse of pollution quite by accident, while looking through the Memphis public library’s idiosyncratic collection of newspaper clippings files for information on housing and neighborhoods and everyday life in the city in the 1950s. I found peculiar, recurring language in the files on housing, segregation, and business development. Later I found strikingly similar language in articles about anticommunism and movie censorship, and all of these were echoed in the maps I found in the Urban Renewal Archive in the downtown library when I went in search of 1950s maps. Although I was initially looking for contextual material, I came to see these articles as central to an understanding of music and race in the city: while the pleasures of music might offer an erotic understanding of race, practices of segregation and racism stand as anti-erotic, turning human beings into bodies into figures of terror and pollution. That racism also constructs polluting bodies as sexual, and sexual bodies as polluting, makes it crucial to be as clear as possible about definitions of eroticism, which I leave for Chapter Four.

Three terms recur throughout these discussions: blight, filth, and encroachment.

---

5 After the Supreme Court struck down school segregation in 1954, segregationists in the South mounted a campaign of "Massive Resistance" to federal laws. Segregationists, no longer the invisible status quo, had to make their arguments explicitly: some formed and joined White Citizens Councils, others joined neighborhood associations, others attacked civil rights demonstrators. (Southern: 155-185)
Each refers to natural and moral conditions simultaneously, allowing for a range of attributions of agency. Although the terms overlap considerably, close attention to them shows that they generally refer to distinct conditions. **Blight** tends to describe areas of the city characterized by higher population density ("crowding"), the absence of indoor plumbing and electricity ("breeding grounds for disease"), "substandard housing" ("breeding grounds for criminals"). By association, the term also comes to refer to the poor and black residents of these areas. **Filth** tends to describe specific conditions in blighted areas, but also refers, in the discourse of the Memphis censor, to various kinds of "obscene" movies, including those showing black and white children in school together. I learned from Michael Honey's extraordinary book on Memphis workers, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers* (1993), that anticommunists also used the term in accusing radical labor organizers and other (real or suspected) "pro-integrationists" of communism. **Encroachment** describes these latter "corrupt" and "un-American" folk, and--again blaming violence and blight on their victims--the black students involved in sit-ins of public facilities in 1960 and the black families who "invaded" "white" neighborhoods, both of which outrages were extensively reported in the newspapers.

By the end of the 1950s, however, black Memphians appropriated the discourse of pollution, redefining civic health and citizenship in terms of fairness and antifascism. Christopher Silver and John Moeser argue in their analysis of the dynamics and

---

"Blight" may well be an official term in urban planning, perhaps even codified in statutes or codes, but I have been unable to locate a specific definition or quantitative standards.
demographics of the separate city that middle-class blacks could speak in this period for "the" black community precisely because segregation had muffled class distinctions and formed a community of common interest based on race (1995).

BLIGHT

Blights: [orig. unknown] n. 1. Any of several plant diseases that result in the death of leaves, growing tips, or an entire plant. 2. An adverse environmental condition, as air pollution. 3. One that withers hopes or ambitions, impairs growth, or halts prosperity. 4. The state or result of being blighted...v. 1. To cause (a plant, for example) to be affected with blight. 2. To cause to decline or decay. 3. To ruin or decay. vi. To suffer blight. -- American Heritage Dictionary, 1976

Questions of agency attend the term "blight" even short of its specific application to city conditions. First, it connotes a natural condition removed from human dominion, not only as a plant disease but one whose "baleful influence," according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is of "mysterious or atmospheric origin." Further, the locus of corruption itself drifts mysteriously from passive symptom to active agent to the sufferer itself. In reference to cities, this definitional contagion lets the term refer ambiguously in turn to areas with "substandard housing," to the housing itself, to the residents of those housing, who are accused of carrying responsibility and agency for blight. Thus the term stigmatizes and limits the housing choices for the very people--the poor, African-Americans--who suffer most from blighted conditions. Finally, the naturalization of

7 The O.E.D. also shows that plant blights themselves mysteriously creep: specific examples of creeping blight include "mildew, rust, and smut (in corn)."

8 The O.E.D.'s articulation of the figurative uses of the term specifies "anything which withers hopes and prospects or checks prosperity"; although the first reference for "urban blight" is as late as 1938 (Lewis Mumford), this more general, but still economic, figuration dates to 1661.
economic and social processes allows labellers to disavow responsibility or the possibility of healing. Like botanists, the city planner and appalled suburban taxpayers assert positions decisively yet helplessly outside the teeming natural world they try to describe and control.

American middle-class rejection of and flight from urban areas—at once creating inner cities and suburbs—dates at least to the mid-nineteenth century, as does the sorting out of residential, industrial, and commercial areas. Amy Kaplan describes the resulting fear of the racialized Other left behind, and the distancing from responsibility that characterizes contemporary realist rhetoric.

The "unreality" of urban life was magnified as vast metropolitan tracts became off-limits to seasoned city-dwellers as well as to outside observers. Onto this geographic and social terra incognita the middle classes projected anxieties about the lack of cohesiveness within their own families and communities. Violent events, such as the Haymarket Riot, crystallized the fear of internal instability and change in the external threat of class warfare. [Urban critic] Josiah Strong's comparison of the working classes to "cannibals in some far off coast" both articulates the unreal and menacing qualities of urban life and implies a solution. Journalists, reformers, and pulp novelists depicted the city as a new frontier or foreign territory to settle and explore and regarded its inhabitants...as natives to civilize and control. (Kaplan 1988: 45)

Powerful Memphians inherited the language and attitudes of this history, but they also deployed them in specific historical circumstances and with particular effect on the shaping of their city. From the 1920s, city planners described particular areas as blighted not only because of "objectively" bad conditions (substandard housing, unpaved streets, and so on) but also because black people lived there. The newspapers, drawing on realist and
muckraking traditions, wrote shocked exposes every decade of horrid conditions. Committees of realtors and homebuilders and mayors periodically announced optimistic new wars on slum conditions, with weapons ranging from rehabilitation to fullscale destruction by way of urban "renewal." Although all of these social actors "campaigned" in "wars" to "clean up" or "eradicate" slums, they also perpetuated categories, assumptions, and policies which made further slums nearly inevitable.

City Planning I: Blight, Public Housing, And Suburbanization

In 1924 Memphis hired its first urban planner, Harland Bartholomew of St. Louis. Bartholomew had already formulated the nationally influential Baltimore Plan, which mandated, in part, a program of rehabilitation and slum clearance to address the problems of poverty (which it defined primarily as poor housing). His plan for Memphis recommended a similar combination of rehabilitation and slum clearance to deal with the blight he noted; he also tracked early suburbanization. Silver and Moeser (1995) note that, while he didn't deal in explicitly racial terms, all of the areas of blight that he mapped did coincide with mixed and black residential areas of the day. Memphis commissioners never officially adopted this City Plan (over the decades they would, strangely, hire Bartholomew again and again but never fully use any of his plans), but his analysis did influence the siting and segregation of the city's first two housing projects, Dixie Homes "for Negroes" and Lauderdale Courts "for whites." Both of these were also "slum clearance" programs which uprooted neighborhoods relatively mixed by race and class.
Neither program provided for those displaced either temporarily by construction or permanently because there were fewer units in the new housing than in the old (Sigafoos 1979, Silver and Moeser 1995).

These housing projects were built through the federal Public Works Act of 1933 (PWA), setting a pattern of federal funding filtered through local racial and class politics. Urban historian Kenneth T. Jackson (1980, 1985) describes how, after the emergency powers of the PWA had expired, the federal government set up the Home Ownership Loan Corporation later that same year to create jobs and housing in various localities across the country. Jackson shows that the most important contribution of this office to the shaping of American cities, including Memphis, was a formal system for evaluating the status of neighborhoods. Their City Survey Maps delineated four categories, declining from "Best" to "Still Desirable" to "Definitely Declining" down into just plain "Hazardous." (Figure 3.1 shows the official map for Memphis.) Jackson's analysis of the HOLC materials and my own comparison with other Memphis maps make it clear to me that they put black and mixed neighborhoods by definition into the latter categories. Although they do not use the term "blight" here, "undesirable" areas here match areas marked as blighted on other Memphis maps. As Jackson points out, this is literally the invention of redlining—the mappers marked Least Desirable Areas in red, the heated opposite to cool green of "Best." (They marked Still Desirable areas in blues and Definitely Declining areas yellow, filling in the spectrum.) Jackson emphasizes that, initially, the HOLC used the categories to stimulate investment in the lower two categories of neighborhood.
Figure 3.1
HOLC City Survey Map of Memphis, 1940
(National Archives)
Nonetheless, the Bartholomew Plan description of blight and suburbanization in the 1920s and the PWA public housing projects in the 1930s began as much as reflected the residential segregation of Memphis. Starting in 1934, the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) adopted the HOLC system of maps, but acted on their implicit judgments by avoiding investment in these undesirable areas (as did the subsequently ubiquitous G.I. bill based on the FHA guidelines). Further, lending institutions across the country clearly had access to the maps as well. By the early 1960s, Jane Jacobs, a fierce critic of urban renewal, could argue that "Credit blacklisting maps are accurate prophecies because they are self-fulfilling prophecies" (Jackson 1985). Like localities across the country, Memphis suspended public housing construction and domestic spending of all kinds for the duration of World War II, although rural migrations into the city intensified during these years (because of defense jobs in the city factories and because the development of agricultural technologies displaced increasing numbers of rural workers). Housing construction and the process of division intensified in the postwar period for various reasons: rapid population growth; the growing use of automobiles; white reaction against the rising militance of a black community tired of gradualism; and, especially, the availability of federal funding to express local standards.

Besides the FHA and the G.I. Bill, two important sources of federal monies for

---

5See also McKenzie 1994 for an elaboration of the dynamics of decisionmaking among realtors, homeowner associations, and community developers; R. Helper for a discussion of racial politics among realtors in Chicago in the postwar era; and Mohl 1996 for an analysis of the forces and discourses shaping Miami.
city planning in Memphis and other cities in the postwar era were the highway program and public housing programs. Questions of race and local control were fundamental to the structure of the latter: non-southern senators did propose an amendment to restrict funds from housing projects mandating segregation, but it fell off the legislation when southern senators reacted against it by threatening to kill the whole housing bill. Finally, Congress delegated dispersal of the money and decisions about race to local authorities. (Silver and Moeser) The Memphis Housing Authority chose to locate public housing in already "blighted" areas, conflating slum clearance with the originally separate agenda of housing project construction. By building separate housing for black and white people, by displacing middle-class people to suburbs and poor people to already crowded zones during construction, and by concentrating poor people in similar neighborhoods afterwards, the MHA also exacerbated the class and racial segregation of local zones.

Newspaper articles and documents in the Urban Renewal Archive also make it clear that the city also linked the building of new freeways and the enlargement and streamlining of existing state highways to slum clearance. As with public housing, officials used the displacements of road construction projects to foster segregation, although they never discussed them explicitly in terms of race or class.\(^\text{10}\) Further, expressways made suburbanization more possible by speeding up travel time between various parts of the

\(^{10}\) The articles make clear that, by the late 1950s, construction of public housing projects, "slum clearance," and, to a certain extent, freeway construction had given way to "urban redevelopment" and finally to "urban renewal." These attempts at "revitalizing" blighted areas tied slum clearance to the fostering of light industry and the construction of city and federal buildings. As far as I can tell, none of them resolved the issue of the relocation of uprooted residents.
city, so that streetcar and bus ridership declined (which led, circularly, to the building of more roads for cars). Through slum clearance and through encouragement of the automobile, then, expressways linked (white) suburbanization and public housing even as they constructed increasing literal distance between people.

These forces—suburbanization, public housing, expressway construction, segregation—converge visibly in a Traffic Commission map illustrating a highway proposal for Memphis (Figure 3.2). Dated 1950, it shows that city authorities construed very specific interrelations between these issues early on, even though they did not start to build a version of this highway for several years.\textsuperscript{11} The map literally marks commercial, Negro, and "less desirable white" areas and leaves unmarked the residential, presumably "more" or "most" desirable white areas. Thus, the further east one moves from downtown (rivers, marshlands, and state lines block the other three directions), the whiter the map gets. While the Traffic Commission does admit here that whites do live near blacks in many (if not most) parts of the city, it follows federal policy in labelling these as "less desirable white areas" and as at least "in the process of blight." In fact it emphasizes that heterogeneity is the definition of undesirable, whether it be racial or land use categories that are being mixed. The map's legend reads:

\textsuperscript{11}It also shows that anxieties about race, blight, automobile traffic, and suburbanization vexed city authorities much earlier than myth would have it. The nineteen fifties here were no glory days of stability, urbanity, and prosperity—rather, the problems that would fracture Memphis and other cities in the 1960s were already present. Population peaked in 1952 and only grew through annexation thereafter; suburbs already stood in opposition to the inner city; traffic was already an issue; racial problems already simmered; and employment also peaked somewhere in here, so that just as black workers were moving into factory work in larger numbers factory work itself was declining; and so on.
Figure 3.2
(Cossitt Archives, Memphis and Shelby County Public Library and Information Center.)
NOTE THAT LEAST DESIRABLE WHITE SECTIONS ALWAYS ADJOIN:

1. HEAVY TRAFFIC STREETS
2. COMMERCIAL, OR
3. NEGRO SECTIONS.

Interestingly, the main title of the map—Extent of Existing Blight Due To Excessive Traffic and Commercial Encroachment—leaves out only the racial terms, although clearly these are fundamental.

This process of abstraction makes blight a mappable, objective condition that exists and must be addressed. The proposed solution is an expressway which will carry white suburbanites from newly annexed areas past the blighted areas to revitalize and reclaim the already troubled downtown area. This process suppresses such issues as the relocation of those displaced by the new roads, the fate of the midtown areas beginning to blight, and the origins of the blight itself.

City planners' labelling of blighted areas based on racial categorization led to the perpetuation of those areas as blighted; supposedly objective descriptions of blight legitimated the separation of people by race and class. This was not as extreme as the "blight by announcement" described by anthropologist John Hartigan in his study of

---

12When Poplar Plaza, Memphis's first suburban mall, was constructed just outside the parkways, it marked the transformation of what had been the outskirts of the city into "midtown." City directories and ads of the from the 1930s to the 1960s show several address changes for prominent businesses as they followed their customer base eastward: from downtown to midtown, from midtown to just outside the parkways, and as far east as Germantown. During the period of my fieldwork, a handful of restaurants moved back into midtown and downtown, the first reversals of the eastward trend that I could discover.
Detroit 1995 and in Caro's description of Robert Moses's strategies in redesigning New York city (1975), where planners apparently declared their intentions of building a freeway in a particular area in order to depress local property values and make the acquisition of land for the project cheaper. What happened in Memphis was a more gradual process, in which negative labels (and the financial incentives connected to them) discouraged class and racial mixing, sending whites to suburbs and concentrating poor and black people in the heart of the city. Thus planners' prescriptive descriptions had local force, influencing realtors and the availability of mortgages.

Newspaper Campaigns: Anxious Ethnographies and Hopeful Overviews

Both of Memphis's major daily newspapers, the Commercial Appeal and the (slightly less conservative) Press-Scimitar, supported the various city projects to fight blight. Through editorials, regular reporting, and, especially, bylined muckraking articles, the newspapers campaigned for public support of local programs. They worked on two fronts: shock and dismay at existing blighted conditions, and pride and celebration of new civic projects that replaced them. As with city planning, this coverage takes segregation utterly for granted, and racial issues undergird worries about disease and citizenship in complex ways.

Throughout the decades that I researched, journalists consistently employed two modes in their articles, photographs, and maps for expressing these hopes and fears: ground level views of slums or new housing projects, and map-like overviews of afflicted or healed areas (unfortunately the microfilm prints of possible examples are too blurry for
reproduction here). A 1955 article ("Life Cleaner, Better In Census Tract 44—Slum Clearance Progress Is Evident Everywhere—6 Months of Work") offers an excellent example of the reporter's-eye view of a slum area, bringing together the "before" picture exposing grim substandard conditions and the cheery report "after" city policies have wrought their good works. (More commonly, these occur in separate articles.)

Life is cleaner, safer, and more pleasant in Census Tract 44 than it was only six months ago. The area—first to be entered by the Memphis housing rehabilitation program—has undergone a nearly complete face lifting. Last December, inspectors of the new program went into the tract which is bounded by Crump, Calhoun, Florida, Mississippi, and Wellington. The 1950 census reported 93 percent of all dwellings were substandard—dilapidated, filthy, crowded, and without necessary inside plumbing. The inspectors found rat-ridden rickity [sic] tenements and rows of leaning, leaky shacks. Methodically, they collected detailed reports on [the] condition of each dwelling. The rehabilitation department issued orders for improvements to bring housing to a minimum legal standard.... The change was slow. Some below-par housing still remains. This largely consists of places tied up by the courts in estates. But today, [the director of the program] estimates that not more than 75 of the 800 dwellings in the tract remain substandard. The 93 percent blight has shrunk to less than 10 percent. The last of the illegal hovels gradually are being renovated or destroyed. Neat and Fresh A drive through Census Tract 44 reveals the remarkable change. This is no longer slummy. Houses are not fine and fashionable, but they are neat and fresh. Gone are the outside toilets, litter, and rats. New roofs and siding glint in the sun. There seems more room to live since shacks and trash have been removed... New construction is noticeable. A neat brick apartment house at 558-570 Hernando replaced ramshackle housing. Another four-unit building is planned next door. Property values are climbing in the area. The change means more city taxes, fewer fires, and less crime, said John T. 'Buddy' Dwyer, public
services commissioner. This lessens the strain on the pocketbooks of taxpayers in other areas.

The newspaper holds the residents of this area at figurative arm's length, as does the city. (In fact the conflation of the perspectives of inspectors and reporters is characteristic, in spite of the newspapers' watchdog stance.) The details of the area's blight themselves distance implied middle-class readers from these conditions, even as the details are marshalled simultaneously to engage those readers' sympathy and taxpaying support. The language of the article reinforces this message of distance. Outside the normal experience of inspectors (and by implication readers), the area is presented as passively "entered by" the MHA, whose "inspectors...went into the tract" as if it were a jungle, or at least a foreign country, and the reporters anthropologists. The article closes with reassurance that this work will benefit "taxpayers in other areas," neglecting to note that this area's residents pay taxes as well. It implies that without intervention the blight will spread to "other areas" via crime. Thus the paternalistic interest in helping residents of this local zone happily coincides with the interests of the city and its white middle class.

The article's quiet interest in plumbing is part of this enlightened self-interest, as well as typical of this type of article (and this kind of city investigation). It points to concern not only with contamination but with the connected issues of class mobility. At a time when new emigrants poured into the city, most of them from rural areas where normal living conditions by definition meant no indoor plumbing, the emphasis on toilets can be read as part of the civilizing uplift of unruly country folk, black or white. Handbooks for new residents of segregated housing projects reinforce this reading. Their
careful instructions on basic cleaning, and their descriptions of the sanitation amenities in
the new housing, come alongside expectations of upward mobility: the MHA motto reads
"From slums to private housing by way of public housing." Similarly, public housing
project newspapers--the one remaining volume of which a sharp-eyed archivist grabbed
for me, in case it might be helpful, while on his way to look up something else--ran
articles mandating decorous use of public areas and decreeing delinquent teen crime
(especially blighting graffiti) alongside gossipy, small town newspaper-like accounts of
new or sick residents, dances and movies, and reports of organizational meetings of
church or scouting groups. Housing rehabilitation not only deters crime and swells the
city coffers. It offers the hope that scary and dirty residents can be transformed into
taxpayers more like the (implied) readers of the newspaper.

Whether or not this possibility is truly available to all in the neighborhood is
unclear: the startling and unique thing about this Commercial Appeal article is that it
makes no clear mention of race. Every other version of this argument that I found
weaves race right into these issues, and in fact usually focuses explicitly on black

---


14It is unclear who actually wrote and published the public housing newspapers. Several of
the columns carry bylines of tenants, and the masthead claims that it is tenant-published;
but articles about MHA policies and supervisors, as well as these admonitions towards
uplift, signal landlord involvement as well. At any rate, there were two sets of newspapers
bound into this volume: the Memphis Housing Appeal, representing residents of the white
projects, and the Better Housing News for those in the black projects.

15On the other hand, the area delineated by specific street names was a predominantly
black census tract, and most readers of the Commercial Appeal would probably have
recognized it as such. Still, the absence of even more explicit racial classification is very
unusual.
Memphians.\textsuperscript{16} For example, an article dated April 5, 1951, with a series of alarmist headlines ("Slum Area Revealed By Families' Plight--Steps Taken To Protect 19 Living In Shanties--Conditions Deplorable") makes the presumed connections between race, overcrowding, and sanitation all too clear.

The City Building Department, which has the power to condemn hazardous housing, has taken steps to protect the lives of 19 persons, including 11 children, living in shanties protruding over a bayou at 598 Beale....The deplorable housing conditions of four families living in wood sheds brought to light one of the city's many squalid slum areas. The wood sheds are along the side of a lot fronting 50 feet on Beale and extending north 150 feet. A bayou borders the lot. Besides the sheds, there are seven houses on the same lot. The frame units are only about three feet apart, and are built side-wise in a row extending to the very back of the lot where the bayou runs. An investigation of the seven shotgun dwellings shows 58 persons live on the 50 by 150 lot. There were 77 before the other 19 moved out....Negro residents of the congested housing area said that the dwelling fronting on 598 Beale is the only single family unit in the group. Lined directly behind it are six frame duplexes....Despite crowded conditions, each unit had its radio and some seemed to have new kitchen furnishings. There were three television sets in the seven houses.

Mr. Slover did not order the wood sheds demolished. He only told the owners to clean up the premises, and not to allow humans to live in the sheds. He said he intended to request the Fire Department to investigate the location to see if fire regulations are being violated. Before World War II, such locations as that at 598 Beale were razed in connection with public housing developments. The city's Building Department also condemned such

\textsuperscript{16} Poor Memphians were more likely to be black people than white, but these articles never analyze why this might be. Indeed, arguments outlining why local black people should be grateful for what they have been given form another minor genre of newspaper articles and official pronouncements.
dwellings as being unfit for human habitation. Because of the housing shortage, the practice
of condemning dwellings was halted during the war. Very few condemnations have been
made since the war. The health menace at 598 Beale was called to Commissioner
Fredericks' attention by the City Beautiful Commission.

This article's (fairly typical) muckraking tone marshalls history and a kind of advocate
ethnography to criticize local conditions and city policies; at once appalled, judgmental,
and voyeuristic, it adds overcrowding and outdoor toilets to black people and concludes
that these constitute a health menace and inhumane conditions. The reporter offers no
sense that these conditions could be either symptoms of local economic practices
(segregated wage scales and housing policies) or reflective of different cultural styles
(whether rural or African-American). Although it is clear that city departments were in
various ways responsible for cleaning this area up, the non-analytical description would
have allowed racist readers to blame lazy or dirty residents for the state of the
neighborhood. The article never says this outright. In fact, the easier reading is that these
poor folks are forced to live in conditions "unfit for human habitation," which is
"deplorable." But given the prevalence of such conditions among poor blacks, and given
racist common sense, the adjective "unfit" could well drift over to the residents
themselves. This reporter's bemusement at the presence of televisions and radios and new
kitchens (in a way that prefigures more recent worries about "welfare queens") reinforces
this distancing. How could these people afford such luxuries, how could they choose this
over good housing, how dare they have fun? Living in places unfit for human habitation,
how could inhabitants exhibit human desires?

These details again express a proprietary interest in the lives of these "other"
people. The newspaper manifestly shares this interest with a fairly amazing number of city offices: the City Beautiful Campaign (see below), the Building Department, the Fire Department, the Memphis Housing Authority (not named explicitly, but responsible for "public housing developments"), and a city commissioner. (None of these officials could have gained the same kind of access to or right to judge middle-class white homes.) Neither the inspectors nor the residents are visible in the pictures that accompany this kind of article, however, so that the grounded vantage point can work to draw newspaper readers either into a kind of sympathy for residents or, equally, into this proprietary outsider dismay and interest. Even in criticizing the city for not doing enough, these kinds of articles and photos function as public relations for civic programs, rhetorically eliciting disgust, empathy, racism, civic self-interest, and, optimistically, support from middle-class readers and taxpayers.

Complementing this type of vivid experiential-but-not-quite account is the strategy of surveying an area from some ideal outside reference point. An excellent example of this is the March 8, 1950 Commercial Appeal article, part of a series on Memphis housing, with the sinister headline "Tentacles of City Slum Areas Choking Our "Twilight" Zones":

The 19 slum areas of Memphis, when located on the Land Use Map of the City at the Memphis Housing Authority, look as though they have been scattered on the city from some giant salt shaker. They have developed in the low spots of the city, the bayou areas and the overflow areas. As Memphis grew, land developers purchased more and more acres. These acres were developed for housing with good substantial white homes being built on the uplands and Negro slums being built in the bottoms. They have sent out tentacles surrounding them and more and more of the white areas have slumped into what are known
as twilight areas. Eventually, these too become slums....In the surveyed area there are 754 family units, of which 650 are in need of major repairs. Only 104 need minor repairs or no repairs. Of the 754 families, 631 are tenants and 179 hope eventually to own the property they occupy. Many have bought contracts on the property, but have no deeds. There are 304 single units and 450 units in multiple housing. Numerous of the latter are old fashioned Negro arks with no sanitary facilities worth mention. Highest rent paid in the area is $60 a month and the lowest paid is $4 a month with the average being $20.65, including utilities. Three hundred of the units have no water inside the house. All toilets in the area are connected to sewers, but many of the outdoor toilets are communal, each being used by several families. Some 221 of the units are lighted with oil lamps. Coal or wood stoves are used to heat 522. There are only 154 bath tubs in the area. The district has been surveyed with an idea to slum clearance. Another district that the MHA is planning to survey is that lying generally between Fourth and Waldran from Court north to beyond Jackson. Practically every type of property known to man is found in this territory. There are areas that are very good. There are Negro shacks that appear as though they are ready to collapse. There are old, strongly built homes, some even that might at one time have been termed mansions. There are white apartments converted from old homes that would make you hold your nose. And there are also good apartments, well kept up. There is also, real estate men say, a beautiful mess up on titles in some areas, no one knowing for sure just where his lot is supposed to start and end....

Mixed blight metaphors and the passive tense spread like disease across this article: slum areas "were scattered by a salt shaker"; Negro and white neighborhoods "were developed" but then the white areas, touched by "tentacles" reaching out from the black areas, "slumped" into "twilight zones" which then "became" slums. Even the blighting Negroes seem to be moved around by these hideous natural forces. Blight or its metaphors
metastasize until even the property titles themselves are in "a beautiful mess." Distance is achieved through the riot of natural metaphors; likewise, tenuous control is asserted through the steady recitation of numbers. The level of detail—the numbers, the street names, the close attention to specific conditions—maps the magnitude of the problem and also works to establish a sense that the problem is fixable, perhaps even on the way to being solved.

Unusual here is the mention of poor whites, in converted apartments "that would make you hold your nose," making explicit the class inflections always present in blight discourse. Race, in contrast, dominates this kind of article, on one level functioning as another kind of specificity but more insidiously undermining reportorial objectivity. The maps (and angled aerial representations that hover between realism and abstraction) offer an extreme version of this objectivity, with not only racial indications but people themselves rendered invisible. And in contrast to the "shacks" and "hovels" of the past and of the grounded view (also showing no people), these maps offer the pure, objective, and clean view of the progressive future. Unfortunately for the success of this rhetorical persuasion, the repetition of these strategies over four decades of newspaper articles serves mostly to highlight their ineffectiveness, especially when the researcher goes from the archives into late 1990's Memphis to find that poverty, racial divisions, and residential segregation still grip the city in their tentacles.

*Breeding Grounds For Disease And Citizenship*

What are the specific contagions that blight spreads? A keynote of the worry about
blighted areas is that they are "breeding grounds" for disease and criminality, while pride and hope about the city are issues of citizenship and class mobility. In 1951, declaring "war" on slums, Mayor Frank Tobey linked Memphis problems with national studies of delinquency and argued that America itself was at stake\(^{17}\):

> We can brag about our City Beautiful, but let's be frank...we have homes in Memphis that are breeding places of crime and disease. Behind the Fulbright and Kefauver reports lie the criminal breeding conditions in our cities. Our situation is not as serious as some I have seen in New York or Chicago, but the time to stop it in Memphis is before we get in that shape. I don't think anybody is going to conquer America, but if we let crime and greed undermine us, we could easily go the way other countries have.\(^{18}\)

Similarly, a *Press-Scimitar* article, straddling the line between journalism and boosterism, celebrated the 1940 opening of Lamar Terrace, a white housing project, as "another step in Memphis' efforts to rehouse its low-income citizens in clean, healthful, and happy surroundings"; the article goes on to invite "citizens of Memphis, the real owners of Lamar Terrace...to inspect their new housing project." It further weaves together citizen-residents and citizen-taxpayers in arguing that

> the benefits of Lamar Terrace will be reflected in each of your lives, its sponsors believe, whether you live in the Terrace or elsewhere in Memphis. The benefits of good housing are not confined to the tenants, they say. They are reflected in less disease, less contagion, a happier philosophy throughout the city.

\(^{17}\)See Gilbert 1986 for an excellent explication of federal postwar anxieties about juvenile delinquency, offering another set of institutional expressions of anticommunist paranoia in terms of both citizenship and censorship of movies and comic books.

\(^{18}\)A Springboard to War On Memphis Slums--Real Estate Men, Builders, City, County, and C. of C. Officials Map Strategy, *Press-Scimitar*, May 17, 1951
Thus public housing heals the civic body. Slum clearance gets rid of contagious areas, while public housing itself uplifts slum residents into the related conditions of citizenship and health.¹⁹

Public discourse did not, for once, limit this hope for uplift, the possibility of cleanliness and citizenship, to Memphis' white citizens. At least two mayors proclaimed that every Memphis child—"white or colored, rich or poor"—deserved decent housing. The public housing handbooks for the segregated projects are identical in their advice about cleanliness, while the separate project newspapers articulate similar hopes and stories of neighborliness. In 1953, the Memphis Community Council reported in the that it located an "experiment in Negro Community Living" in the Lemoyne Garden housing project

...because of its outstanding record with the Housing Authority for efficient housekeeping

and grounds care. Residents who have moved from this housing project into their own

homes have proven to be substantial citizens and civic leaders in their new

neighborhoods...²⁰

In this case, however, specificity about race also undercuts the possibility of universal advancement; in the absence of economic analysis, of a white "experiment," and of class specificity (this last implying that "the" black community resides exclusively in public

---

¹⁹ The public housing projects of these periods were apparently quite successful in this mission. All of my informants who had grown up in public housing are now solidly in the middle class, judging by occupation, current residence, college attendance of children, and apparent income. Reading through the project newspapers, I recognized many names of subsequently prominent politicians, musicians, and entrepreneurs. See also Guralnick, Last Train To Memphis (1995), for a powerful evocation of daily life in a white project.

housing), the program could have easily become associated only with black people. The problems to be addressed could themselves have resonated with stereotypes of Negro life: Emphasis is on mental hygiene, family budgeting, marital concord, rehabilitation of broken families, parental training and being good neighbors in a heavily populated environment. This example of ambiguity points to a more critical reading of other hopes for black citizenship: with no admission that segregation places blacks at general disadvantage, even these hopes (and the programs designed to realize them) seem faint.

The complexities of the connections between black people, civic dirt, and citizenship are visible in images from the scrapbooks of the City Beautiful Campaign, also brought to my attention by the sharp-eyed archivist. More than many public images, these can be said to represent official and civic beliefs, for the Campaign reached into many aspects of Memphis life: it was an arm of the city government, and explicitly supported by commissioners and mayors; it was a media blitz involving all local radio and television stations and newspapers, as well as billboards and movie theater marquees (Figure 3.3); and it was an annual citywide event enlisting the participation of schoolchildren, homeowners, landlords, marching bands, companies, potential beauty queens, and so on. (The city also won the national City Beautiful Campaign contest for cleanest city every year for nearly two decades running.) Run by white middle-class women (3.4), with a separate, segregated division for the Negro community, it also offers a window on the intersections of class, race, and gender.

The elaborate scrapbooks for the City Beautiful Campaigns replicated the divisions
Figure 3.3
A Memphis theater advertises the City Beautiful Campaign, 1955
(City Beautiful Campaign Scrapbooks, Cossitt Archives, Memphis and Shelby County Public Library and Information Center.)
Figure 3.4
Clean-Up Paint-Up Fix-Up Officers at Firestone, 1953.
(City Beautiful Campaign Scrapbooks, Cossitt Archives, Memphis and Shelby County Public Library and Information Center.)
of the crusades. Not only is there a separate section for "Colored Activities," but the image chosen in 1952 to sum up black participation in the campaign is none other than the figure of the happy janitor, contorted in an unlikely position (Figure 3.5). The section itself offers images of black Memphians engaged in a wide range of actions, but photos of actual sanitation workers show exclusively black men (such as Figure 3.6), reminding us this was one of the few job categories open to them, as domestic work was one of the few jobs open to black women.21 Figure 3.7 is the second in a series: in the first (not shown) these white policemen direct this man to clean a yard littered with lumber, while this "after" photo shows the police to be grimly satisfied with his work. It speaks eloquently of power relations, of the coercion and civic interest inherent in the linkage between blacks and cleaning, and of the level to which black men had to perform powerlessness to remain safe. The juxtaposition of these three pictures suggests that the association between blacks and cleaning is, ironically, connected to the association between blacks and blight I have already described.

But the ambiguity of the article on the "Negro housing experiment" runs through the City Beautiful Campaign images as well. The complexity of the images offers plenty of evidence for the dignity and aspirations of blacks and illustrates the ways in which black Memphians claimed cleanliness and citizenship as their own issues. For example, Figure

21 These workers probably include some who carried the famous signs stating "I Am A Man" in the sanitation workers' strike of 1968. The sign and the strike expressed inextricable connections between economic issues and civil rights--between union recognition and social visibility--which harmonized with Martin Luther King's shift from racial to racial/economic issues in the Poor People's Campaign he intended to start. Thus King came to Memphis to support the strikers, his presence and speeches and, shockingly, his assassination making these issues even more vivid.
Figure 3.5 Detail of title page for the "Colored Activities" section, 1952, and
Figure 3.6 Sanitation workers, 1962
(City Beautiful Campaign Scrapbooks, Cossitt Archives, Memphis and Shelby County
Public Library and Information Center.)
Figure 3.7 "Inspection and Cleanup," 1949
(City Beautiful Campaign Scrapbooks, Cossitt Archives, Memphis and Shelby County Public Library and Information Center.)
3.8, documenting and advertising the Campaign in the newspaper, links two stereotyped images of black people: doing the dirty work, and playing music all the while. Yet it cannot be read as only racist. It is manifestly a picture of real people, taking pride in their abilities, playfully aware of the silliness of the picture. And the young trombone player, who grew up to be nationally famous organ-playing Booker T. of the MGs, still remembers the excitement of getting his picture in the paper (Charlie McGovern, personal communication.) Similarly, a picture of young black women in the segregated beauty competition (not shown) not only their gendered role as spectacle and their fundamental segregation from the white women's competition, but also their true claims to beauty and middle-class taste, and their economic ability to express these.

In fact, black citizens themselves began to deploy the discourse of citizenship and disease in the 1950s to argue for better public facilities within segregation. Appropriating the strategy of surveys, numbers, and ground-level descriptions to point out in 1952 that city parks designated for black people were consistently dirtier ("The pool at Beale was half-filled with stagnant water, littered with debris and filth." and less well equipped

---

22Not only were there separate contests, but separate levels of prizes as well. The winner of the "Miss City Beautiful" competition represented the city on a trip to Washington, DC, while the "Bronze Queen" simply got a grand tour of Memphis and represented, or so her title implied, only her race.

23"Some Negro Parks are Like Vacant Lots--Play Facilities Are Lacking, Survey Reveals--Three Are Excellent," Commercial Appeal, June 20, 1952.
Figure 3.8
"No Blue Note, This," featuring Booker T. Jones on trombone, 1956-57
(City Beautiful Campaign Scrapbooks, Cossitt Archives, Memphis and Shelby County Public Library and Information Center.)
than parks for white people, black leaders successfully challenged the city's claim that the parks were "separate but equal."

....We have gone along with the "City Fathers" in their statements and references: 1. "To the good schools we provide for your colored people." 2. "That funds are not available for lights at Negro parks." 3. "That the time is not ripe for integration at the public supported Fairgrounds Amusement Park, the Zoo, Crump Stadium, the MOAT, the lovely parks, tennis and golf courses." But we cannot in all fairness to our children teach them the democratic principles of our government and ask them to go along with us. We can't even sell them on the Southern philosophy of separate but equal facilities because there is no equality. For fear that the "City Fathers" and the Park Commission, even though we have made written and verbal requests for more recreational facilities, are not cognizant of the deplorable lack of facilities, and of the deplorable condition of existing facilities, we have made a survey and study of the recreational facilities for Negroes in Memphis, and have made these recommendations. We do this in an effort, not only to fight juvenile delinquency but the foe of democracy, communism. Is there a better way?24

The city denied the charge, arguing that poor conditions were simply the result of a winter's neglect, but it also allocated thousands of dollars to address the problem. Black leaders thus established a precedent for the argument that, as citizens, blacks deserved better than filth. A few months later, two young Negro park directors issued a report calling for further facilities for night recreation for young black people, linking disease and citizenship in more subtle ways:

There is an ever increasing need for night recreation in Memphis for Negroes. This need is caused by numerous congested areas where economic standards are pathetic, forcing adults

---

24"Negroes, Worried About Youth, Present a Nine-Point Program", Commercial Appeal, June 19, 1952
as well as the youth to congregate on street corners. This is their only means of consuming their spare time. Such idleness breeds immorality and delinquency. The fact that there are no recreation facilities available for Negroes after 6 pm can hardly be evaded by the Memphis Park Commission on realizing that 38.5 per cent of the population of Memphis is Negro. 25

Rather than implying a natural, blight-like connection between blackness and moral disease, this argument makes a clear case for the political and economic causes of and solutions for delinquency. 26

When the NAACP successfully sued the city to desegregate the city swimming pools, the Parks Commission simply closed the pools for three years. Clearly part of the reason is that the city did not want to allow the alleged contagion of racial mixing; the justification, although expressed evasively in the following account, is that racial violence is a risk when black and white bodies meet without proper strictures, so that it is in "manifest" civic interest to avoid the situation altogether:

...The Park Commission and the City of Memphis will abide by the law as announced by the Supreme Court of the United States. It must be recognized, however, that the Supreme Court

25 "City Urged To Widen Negro Recreation Aid--Park Commission Gets Plan for "Operation Occupation"--Backed By Judge M'Cain", Commercial Appeal, September 5, 1952

26 A 1950 Press-Scimitar survey and article make the same points, but with a more lurid framing. "Crime and a Bad Time: Why? So Few Places For A Good Time--A Murder Was Bred In Honky Tonk: More City Negro Facilities Needed" screams the headline. The first four paragraphs describe a "carnival of carnage," complete with a black man killing a white woman and a shoot-out with police, setting up a long article in much smaller type on "the lack of suitable places for negro recreation." The remainder of the article offers a summary of segregated public facilities (only one place to play basketball, no access to speakers at Goodwin Institute, few "nice" black restaurants, only a nine-hole golf course, the zoo open to blacks only on Thursday, etc.), focussing on the unfairness of the situation and referring only once to the crime rate this inadequacy "has some bearing on."
decision will necessitate changes in the operation of the Park System. In the opinion of the
Park Commission, compliance with the law will require in the immediate future, with
respect to some of the public recreational activities, curtailment or suspension thereof. In
particular, the Park Commission feels it is in the manifest best interest of all the people of
Memphis, both white and Negro, that the operation of swimming pools and wading pools be
suspended, for the time being....With respect to the operation of other facilities such as
playgrounds and community centers, in the light of the ruling by the Supreme Court, the Park
Commission is giving further study. It is hoped that the recreational program can be
continued for the benefit of all citizens but if curtailment or suspension of the playground
activities proves necessary, appropriate steps will be taken.

Although black citizens had won their point about equal treatment, establishing legally that
blackness was not contagion, segregationist city officials would not disentangle these
concepts. (See figure 3.11.)

Further, the evasiveness of the article expresses an ambiguity about agency, a
hallmark of the rhetoric of blight. Although the legal ruling opens all park facilities to
black citizens, the Park Commission opines that "the law will require...curtailment or
suspension" of park activities for anyone, in other words managing to elide their belief in
segregation with the Court's ruling against it. This makes sense only if readers agreed that
racial mixing makes parks unusable, or if they preferred the absence of park facilities to
integrated ones. Failure to specify exactly why such curtailment might "prove necessary"
leaves equally open the possibility that black contagion or white reaction could be the
reason; and not only does this statement abstain from challenging possible white reaction
against integration, its reluctance and evasions betray a sense that such reaction would be
only logical.
Figure 3.9
"Opponents of Integration"
December 9, 1955, Commercial Appeal
FILTH

filth: 1. foul matter, esp. loathsome dirt or refuse; 2. moral corruption; 3. obscenity; from foul, offensive to the senses

As I made my way through the files and as I read Michael Honey's study (1995), I found that the rhetorics deployed by local movie censors and anticommunists (sometimes in national forums) also elided segregation, citizenship, and civic health, in part by pouncing on any hint of "pro-integration" activity or symbolism as evidence of communism, and by demonizing these as "filthy." Head censor Lloyd Binford inveighed against the dangers of gangsters, lewdness, and the "social equality of the races" as he protected the moral fabric of the city and the country, while local politicians, labor leaders purging their ranks, and businessmen interested in keeping labor costs low all raged about real or suspected communists who dared organize labor across racial lines to challenge segregated working conditions and wages. These discourses increased in vehemence during the cold war, and, amazingly, connected: in October, 1947, the House Un-American Committee took on Hollywood in order "to expose those elements that are insidiously trying to...poison the minds of your children, distort the history of our country, and discredit Christianity." Locally, police power enforced both discourses as well: city ordinances gave the censorship board its power, and police brutalized specific organizers, supported scabs in countless strikes, and drove black leaders from the city in campaigns of harassment and outright violence. Fueled by the cold war nationally, this policing of non-residential arenas reinforced racial distinctions in housing and employment alike.
Censorship

Although the excesses of its language occasionally drew ridicule even at the time, censorship from the 1920s affected the racial map of the city. Those who wanted to see risque movies or those with black actors patronized the theaters of West Memphis, Arkansas, ten minutes away on the other side of the Mississippi. Gambling, prostitution, burlesque shows, lax liquor laws, and wild nightclubs also characterized that wide-open town (Gordon 1995, Berger 1994), and it seems clear that Memphis's nationally notorious censorship policies played a significant part in the development of West Memphis as the den of iniquity for Memphis proper. Although there was an entire board of censors issuing ratings on local movies and shows, the notorious Lloyd T. Binford (Figure 3.10) was the most eloquent and the best known, and he ruled on Memphis entertainment from 1928 to 1955. He was nationally (in)famous, and with reason: not only finicky in his tastes, he wrote highly quotable opinions.

In banning a now-forgotten movie in 1954, Binford argued that it was "vulgarly vile, a gangster picture with murders and robbery. It is offensively defiled with filth." He worried especially about the power of movies to influence the behavior of youth: "There is no need to show a picture that might influence boys to be gangsters," he noted in banning a movie called "Dead End." Thus, as with housing authorities focusing on overcrowding, he felt that delinquency was a kind of disease. The list of films banned at the same time as "Dead End" in 1945 suggest the range of definitions disease could carry.

...Also banned by unanimous vote of the board were: "Dillinger," which Binford also said encouraged crime; "Brewster's Millions," because Rochester, negro actor, "was too
Figure 3.10
"Censor at Work"--Lloyd T. Binford, just after his retirement, 1954
(obituary, Commercial Appeal, August 28, 1956)
prominent"; "The Southerner," because it pictured Southerners as "illiterate mendicants."

And relatively explicit sex, of course, was an ongoing concern. Occasionally, Binford's prose could become so overwrought that it read like an advertisement for a movie rather than outrage at it. Asked to review a cut version of "Duel in the Sun," Binford responded

We do not plan to preview the picture again....It was the vilest thing we ever saw on the screen, which was why we banned it in the first place. It is dirty and filthy, so that they couldn't clean it up....This production contains all the impurities of the foulest human dross. It is sadism at its deepest level, It is the fleshpots of Pharaoh, modernized and filled to overflowing. It is a barbaric symphony of passion and hatred, spilling from a blood-tinted screen. It is mental and physical putrefaction. "Duel in the Sun" begins with a double murder which takes place in the bedroom of a saloon and dive theater, and which is spawned and instigated by infidelity. The picture ends with a double murder brought to pass by a series of seductions and the destruction of a young woman's virtue. It is a tale of two lust-driven delinquents who rush through reams of sadistic lovemaking toward a final catastrophe of minds filled with murderous mania to the exclusion of even the tiniest spark of human decency. It is a story of jungle savagery which might have amused the people of Sodom and Gomorrah in the final moments of the destruction of those ancient, evil cities.27

This verbosity seems to have been infectious. In 1947, a Mississippi senator and fierce cold warrior read into the Congressional Record a statement of support for Binford's ban on Charlie Chaplin's "Monsieur Verdoux":

...Representative Rankin (D-Miss.)...said [in Congress that] he wanted to pay tribute to Mr. Binford "for banning a rotten picture made by Charlie Chaplin. If every other city in America

27"Elderly Binford Bucks Tcbev In Film Censorship Squabble--Spurns Mayor's Request To Review Cleaner, Watered Down Version of 'Duel In the Sun', Motion Picture Once Banned Here As 'Vilest Thing Ever Seen', Commercial Appeal, September 16, 1954."
had a man like Binford at the head of its censorship bureau, we would get rid of a lot of this
filth that is being spread before the eyes of our children through the moving picture shows,"
Rankin declared. "I am demanding that Atty. Gen. Tom Clark institute proceedings to deport
Charlie Chaplin," the Mississippian said. "He has refused to become an American citizen.
His very life in Hollywood is detrimental to the moral fabric of America. If he is deported, he
can be kept off the American screen, and his pictures can be kept from before the eyes of
American youth."²⁸

Thus the rhetoric of censorship links gangsterism, integration, bad images of the South,
explicit sex, and implications of communism as bad influences and filth.

Those who argued against Binford's rulings also connected Americanism with
these other issues, but they spoke in terms of democracy and anti-fascism and charged that
Binford himself was, in effect, un-American. In response to Binford and Rankin, for
example, Chaplin issued a statement declaring that "this type of procedure is the usual
Fascist technique in trying to suppress free speech and free expression through the motion
picture." When Binford ruled against a movie version of "The Little Rascals" called
"Curley"—stating "the South does not allow Negroes in white schools, nor recognize
social equality between the races, even in children"—the producers sued in federal court.
They claimed that the ruling would "be seized on throughout the world, and taken as
evidence that American democracy is rotting." Undeterred, Binford went on to decry
"Annie Get Your Gun" as an example of "social equality in action"²⁹ and 1950's "Imitation

²⁸"Rankin Lauds Binford for Barring Chaplin—Says He Is Asking Deportation of

²⁹ He also assailed it on the grounds of inaccuracy: "We don't have any Negro conductors
in the South."
of Life" as "the worst case of racial equality he ever saw."

Although in these cases he seemed to worry that such equality might be contagious, he restricted newsreels of the Marciano-Walcott boxing match for another reason. Limiting them to theaters allowing only whites or only blacks (that is, restricting them from theaters which allowed on a segregated basis members of both races), he explained that "this was done to prevent the possibility of racial trouble." The article goes on to reassure readers that Binford "had no objection to the fight movies, between Marciano, a white man, and Walcott, a negro, being shown at negro theaters or all-white theaters. The Strand has no facilities for negroes." This decision does represent a kind of progress in Binford's reasoning. In 1936 he would not let any local theater show images from the fight between German Max Schmeling and African-American hero Joe Louis, citing a federal law of 1912 prohibiting distribution of prizefighting movies across state lines. In neither of these cases does the censor articulate who might be responsible for this potential violence.

---

30 The Press-Scimitar, occasionally a less conservative voice in Memphis, subtly questions this logic slightly in 1953, when reporting that Binford would not permit white table tennis and trampoline performers to go onstage for their intermission show during the Harlem Globetrotters' show for black audiences, although earlier the same artists had performed for the white show.

"...Asked if there was any difference between a group of white persons performing before a Negro audience and a Negro basketball team performing for a white audience, Mr. Binford said: 'I don't think there was any social equality in the Negro ball team playing before a white audience.'"

As I read it, the reporter's question to Binford makes the so-called logic of segregation not only clear but absurd in its clarity, and Binford's response only heightens the ridiculous niceties of judgment such logic demands.

31 The 1936 article notes that Congress passed this earlier law "after Jack Johnson, negro, became heavyweight champion."
Binford had real power in at least three ways. Most nebulous is his role as arbiter of public opinion. It is difficult to tell at this remove how much popular support he enjoyed, although the newspapers did print a slew of letters supporting his ban of all Ingrid Bergman movies (because she left her husband for Roberto Rossellini) and noted humorously that 135 Memphians had named their children after him. More concretely, any number of movies, from the intentionally pornographic to "Monsieur Verdoux," never played in Memphis because he refused his imprimatur. Further, the combination of his rulings and Boss Crump's (occasionally more lenient) vice and liquor rules, sent many "filthy" businesses to the town of West Memphis, Arkansas, about 5 miles across the Mississippi River. This is where teenaged boys and others looking for some wickedness could go to find strip shows, dirty movies, gambling (especially in the black neighborhood), and nightclubs with rowdy bands (some black, some hillbilly) with liberal drinking policies (later hours, younger ages). In other words, Binford literally affected the geography of the region, and further reinforced the equation of blackness and poverty with vice and sexuality. Finally, the 1921 city ordinance which empowered the censorship board called on them to "supervise, regulate or prohibit any entertainment of immoral, lewd, or lascivious character, as well as performances inimical to the public safety, health, morals, or welfare, or performances denouncing government." If Binford had not existed, perhaps the law would have created him.

Anticommunism

Machine politics, with its standard preference for order over democracy,
dominated Memphis politics from 1919 until Boss Crump's death of in 1954. Initially elected as mayor, E.H. Crump consolidated his power by capturing the vote of black Memphians (through poll taxes, paternalism, and various kinds of voting fraud), by "reforming" city politics, and by "cleaning up" local vice (which he subsequently controlled through kickbacks). He went on to rule Memphis from various positions behind the scenes, and was generally celebrated for running an orderly city. The politics of race, cleanliness, and the vote were thus crucial to his ascendance. Although he held the upper hand throughout his reign, he did have to work to maintain his power through ongoing and often brutal reassertions and debates, especially with the local black community. Physically, these reassertions took the form of beatings, harassment, and even killings of local black and white labor organizers; verbally, he denigrated challengers of the status quo as "communistic." In turn, these challengers described their own actions as patriotic, democratic, and anti-fascist. (Tucker 1980, Beifuss 1989)

Nationally, arguments between anti-communists and anti-fascists date at least to the World War I era, when many voices responded to the Palmer raids on supposed communists and race agitators with calls for true democracy. The argument gained relevance again in the 1930s, when Americans articulated antifascism in the 1930s partly in response to events in Germany and Italy but also, in 1938, in response to a new upsurge of anti-communism in Congress, the first version of the House Un-American Activities Committee. Michael Honey's detailed and extraordinary book, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers* (1993), shows that, locally, throughout

32Crump personally appointed Lloyd Binford as censor in the late 1920s.
intensive labor organizing during the Depression, a "reign of terror" over workers and anti-segregationists in 1940, a flurry of successful strikes during the war, and the purging of the CIO of communists during the Cold War, business and civic leaders accused radical labor agitators of communism so often that it became a cliché. It wasn't just that these workers were organizing to challenge businesses that outraged those in power; specifically, it was that they organized black workers and challenged segregation. Thus the cliché was not simply "communist labor agitator" but, as Crump put it in 1945, "We ain't gonna have any nigger-loving communist union in Memphis, Tennessee."

Honey maps out the dynamics of Boss Crump's fundamental strategies: to repress wages and unions to attract industry, to turn the police into armies for industry in its battles with unions, and to exacerbate racial tensions among workers in order to prevent them from recognizing their common class interests. Here I focus on the parts of Honey's account that articulate the rhetorical connections between anti-communism and segregationism locally (especially the hysterical language of disease and filth), and the contestatory discourse of antifascism and democracy.

Honey shows that civic leaders aimed charges of communism against labor's challenges to segregated wage structures, and looming behind that, the specter of an organized, non-segregated labor force with extraordinary power to close down plants and make demands of owners. My own argument emphasizes that civic leaders expressed these claims about Americanness in terms of pollution or purity. Thus Honey describes how, in 1940, Police Commissioner Boyle's men

had 19 black professionals under surveillance for 'fanning race hatred' and claimed 'foreign
born agitators' had been stirring up 'a young element of the negroes' who were becoming
'insolent.' He warned blacks that 'this is a white man's country, and always will be, and any
negro who doesn't agree to this better move on.'

Not only does Boyle worry about the infiltration of immigrants, he implies that blacks themselves are by definition un-American. Similarly, Mississippi senator Theodore Bilbo accused the CIO in 1946 of being an "un-American, negro social equality, communistic, mongrel outfit"—mongrel, here, apparently pointing to feared impurities of miscegenation, and equality itself being un-American. By 1950, Senator Eastland of Mississippi claimed that his Congressional hearings about the Memphis CIO proved it to be

a Communist-controlled organization designed to overthrow the government and promote the interests of the Soviet Union by setting up a negro republic in the South.

Here, the body being polluted is that of the country itself (akin to the "moral fabric of America" invoked by Rankin in attacking Charlie Chaplin). The kernel of truth here is that the end of segregation would indeed have entailed the "overthrow" of local government, although the most radical demand of these "communists" seems to have been the proposal to do this through democratic means.

And labor and civil rights organizers explicitly proclaimed themselves as democratic. In 1940, Honey tells us,

the Southern Negro Youth Congress wrote to President Roosevelt that the situation in Memphis constituted 'the beginnings of an American fascist stronghold within our very borders, with its race hatreds, enmity to labor, and suppression of civil liberties.'

The war in Europe, nationally promoted as a war to save democracy and to end fascism, supplied further rhetoric as well as rich ironies. Honey cites frustrations that even German
POWs stationed in the Delta received better treatment than local blacks, as well as a survey that indicates 75% of local blacks believed that they would fare better should the Japanese win the war. In 1944, national civil rights and labor leader A. Philip Randolph spoke to an interracial meeting (after considerable efforts by the city to keep him out), denouncing Crump for "out-Hitlering Hitler." (1993: 206)

Of course some workers and labor organizers were, indeed, communists, especially those in the CIO. In Memphis and across the country, communist organizations were often the sole white voices naming segregation as injustice, and the only ones practicing integration in the allocation of organizational power, in the seating arrangements at meetings, in the use of honorifics such as "Mr." in conversation with black workers, and crucially, in willingness to go on strike on behalf of those workers. (They also had a much better record on gender issues.) As Honey makes clear, Memphis workers affiliated with the CIO and with the Communist Party for a variety of reasons—to advance specific struggles, because it articulated class issues, to gain training as an organizer or education in literacy—and "worked together on goals they could all agree on and did not debate the finer ideological questions." (1993: 128) In particular, black workers contrarily found the equation of communism and anti-racism at least a cliche—

"A lot of our people were called Communists. [Blacks] didn't pay attention, because they knew how white n. n. felt about another white man speaking up for the Negro. He was just branded as a Communist."

—and sometimes downright attractive. Honey quotes black leader Owen Whitfield in the 1930s: "Everybody who wants a home or a loaf of bread is a red or backed by reds."
Unfortunately only black workers consistently saw through this cliché. White rank and file workers were all too susceptible to anxieties about pollution, which played on established differentials between black and white workers in wages, job categories, and opportunities for advancement. Most chillingly, the CIO turned on itself in the late 1940s to purge black and white communists from its own ranks, using the same language and the same tactics as outsiders to destroy itself. Sometimes they were even more vehement:

Contending that "no loyal American" could be a Communist and that Communists had "infiltrated" local unions, the Industrial Union Council called on local unions to establish vigilance committees to "guard" themselves from the "cancerous growth of the filthy disease of Communism." (257)

Senator Eastland, in the hearings described above, called an individual alleged communist (a New York Jewish lawyer) "damn scum", but here communism itself is the disease, growing like a cancer on democracy, treatable only by vigilance and loyalty and, in practice, abstinence from the fight for "social equality." To honor the anticommunist CIO leaders for these purges and this vigilance against the enemy within, the Memphis Veterans of Foreign Wars presented them with an award for citizenship in their "campaign in the interests of Americanism." (Honey 1993: 272).

This version of the connections between disease, race, and citizenship was supported by extensive official violence ranging from beatings to violent support of strikebreakers to killings and disappearances of key labor and civil rights leaders. If they commented at all, the newspapers, the police, the mayors, or Crump himself blamed this violence on the strikers. As Honey relates,

Saying nothing about the [series of beatings of white CIO organizer George Bass], Mayor
Chandler condemned union organizing and ordered the police chief to prevent any disturbances that might arise out of the Firestone campaign—implying that the CIO, not the company or its thugs, was the source of the problem. "Memphis will not tolerate intimidation, or threats of bodily harm to those who wish to work, and foreign labor agitators who seek to stir up strife and trouble are not welcome here," the mayor declared. In an article titled "City Closes Doors on Labor Agitators," the Commercial Appeal highlighted the statement of the mayor and Police Chief Carroll Seabrook, who declared that "lives and property in Memphis must be protected," presumably against CIO agitators.33 (1993: 157)

Thus the rhetoric of pollution both expresses civic belief in the unnaturalness of black citizenship and thereby enables leaders to shift blame for violence from themselves to the very people who suffer from it.

ENCROACHMENT

encroach (from OF encrochier to catch hold of, to seize): v.i. 1. to advance beyond proper, established, or usual limits; make gradual inroads...2. To trespass upon the property, domain, or rights of another, especially stealthily or by gradual advances.

The language of encroachment captures white Memphians' deep sense of entitlement, as well as the attendant belief that black rights involved white loss, especially of property. It completes the shift of agency implied by blight and filth, refusing to see the violence (structural and personal) of the status quo but squarely locating responsibility for violence on those who challenge that status quo. When black Memphians and others challenged segregation, often literally putting their bodies on otherwise implicit racial

33 Bass replied, "This is the first time I ever heard a man ignorant enough to say that because I come from another county of Tennessee that I am a foreigner. He cannot run us out of Memphis." (Honey 1993: 157)
lines, whites from the mayor on down accused them of causing trouble, being un-American, polluting, infiltrating, corrupting, and inciting violence. In contrast, the city disclaimed its own relationship to explicitly racist practices, annexing large rural areas rather than confronting racist whites resisting black "encroachment" into "white" neighborhoods, and using the excuse of possible racial violence to avoid desegregating public facilities for as long as possible. Similarly, police met unorganized resistance to streetcar segregation during World War II with violence they blamed on their victims, while in 1960 courts accused (relatively) organized protesters at public facilities of issuing "an open invitation to mob rule." What is the connection between official discourse and the beliefs and actions of more ordinary white Memphians? Who responded to whom? Who represented whom?

City Planning II: The Negro Housing Problem and Annexation

As I have been arguing, city planners would not question their own policy of segregation, which comprised a complex and interlocking set of beliefs. Along with the sense that black residents marked blighted areas, as I have tracked above, came a perception of black populations as naturally invasive, and of the transition from white to black ownership as ecological. A late 1930s description of Memphis for the Home Ownership Loan Corporation expressed this dynamic clearly:

...The sections are so spotted with good, bad, and indifferent intermingled that no particular area can be judged without an exhaustive inspection. The large tract lying West of Elmwood Cemetery and adjacent thereto is for the most part the older section of the city once occupied by white people, and containing years ago many attractive and valuable homes. However, as
these houses deteriorated and the city expanded to the East, the whites have gradually given way to the negroes. The section lying Southwest of the portion just mentioned, is adjacent to the industrial section of the city and naturally attracts a negro population. It is difficult to say with accuracy in just what direction the negroes are moving; but the section around Elmwood Cemetery will become more thickly populated with negroes, as will also the section along the Northern side of the city. The... Wolf River lies just beyond the city limits on the North side, making that portion undesirable as a white residential section; future development will therefore attract negro population. (Home Owners' Loan Corporation 1940)

The only agency detectable here is that of "the negroes...moving," and the writer himself found it hard to track, although he could predict that "undesirable" areas would "attract" that population. Again, we are back in the language of spreading blight.

By the 1950s this tone of considered objectivity had become handwringing anxiety, because a combination of extensive public improvements and white resistance to new black neighbors had created a "Negro housing problem." In other words, poor blacks--dislocated by public housing, highway construction, and the new medical center--had few options but to move into "white" housing. Although they do name white racism as a problem, housing authorities talked in vague terms about the need for "more land" rather than challenge local practices; their worst case scenario is forcible "infiltration" by black residents."

.... "The Negroes particularly," Joseph A. Fowler, executive director of the Memphis Housing Authority, says, "are crowded into too little space. They total 41 percent of our population at least and are crowded into less than 20 percent of the residential area. And yet every time someone attempts to develop a Negro housing project, there is vigorous and angry protest.
The Negroes simply have got to have more land. The situation has to be faced. "..."Land is the question in Negro housing," W.A. Montgomery, president of the Real Estate Board of Memphis, said. Mr. Montgomery went ahead to point out the diminishing return angle in clearing of slums for new housing. "Rebuilding of the slums would result undoubtedly in the housing of fewer persons to the square mile than at present. The Negroes, particularly, must have more land on which to live. I repeat it. The Negro must have more land on which to live. It is a problem that should be faced realistically. If it is not provided, the Negro people will take it by infiltration into white areas. There are areas in Memphis," Mr. Montgomery added, "in which white owners are bitterly opposing Negroes. It is a natural expansion. These areas you might term 'white islands' in Negro areas. They are the results of errors in the past which must be corrected in the present. The question must be looked at in a practical way. Naturally, the whites don't want to give way, but the Negroes have to expand. In many cases it would be more sensible for white owners to sell to Negroes in infiltration areas than to attempt to hold out. At the present time they can get, and the Negroes are willing to pay, fair prices. And this would give badly needed good Negro housing, for a great proportion of the housing in these 'white islands' is good housing. Very few of these houses are substandard." Mr. Montgomery cited as an example one block in the near South Side area. This one block on one side of the street was white. Negroes filled the block across the street. Side streets on each side of the white area were Negro. There were Negroes to the rear. The first break in this white island has occurred. An owner has sold a neat brick bungalow in the middle of the block to a Negro. There has been no objection from white neighbors. "These people are accepting the inevitable in a practical way," Mr. Montgomery commented....

Ironically, the "inevitable" encroachment of blacks into "white islands" reveals precisely

---

34Memphis' Land Shortage Adds To Problem of Negro Housing, Commercial Appeal, March 6, 1950.
that neighborhoods are already mixed, that blacks already lived among whites. Not that city officials noticed this: When the zoning board decided as late as 1960 to map black residence patterns in the late 1950s, the surveyor was surprised to find blacks and whites living in the same duplexes in some neighborhoods.

John Hartigan argues in his study of Detroit that white residents living near blacks suddenly define their neighborhood as "white" when new blacks, or blacks of a different class, start to "encroach" upon their neighborhoods.\(^{35}\) It seems that a similar process occurred in this period in Memphis, and that the confusion of white residents was compounded by realtors’ claim that both segregation and racial transition were natural processes. Thus while realtors tried to legislate rules for "orderly" white-to-black transitions in "changing" neighborhoods, white civic associations turned their attention to new housing on their "borders" and petitioned the city to turn land into parks rather than into "Negro" housing.\(^{36}\)

While the associations did succeed in a few individual cases, the city’s big picture solution was to annex huge rural areas, so that whites could move out into suburbia and blacks could "naturally take over" formerly white housing. Thus, the siting of public housing in poor neighborhoods and the growth of white suburbs were policies linked by

\(^{35}\)Interestingly, Americans move in the opposite direction when the mixed-race body is that of a person, rather than a neighborhood: one drop of black blood marks a person as black. (Thanks to Beverly Miller for this point.)

\(^{36}\)See also Ewan MacKenzie’s Privatopia: Homeowner Associations and the Rise of Residential Private Government (1994). One lead I was unable to track down: the head of the joint Memphis homeowner’s association in the 1950s, Marvin Norfleet, filed an amicus curiae brief to the federal hearings on Memphis race relations in 1962 on behalf of the local White Citizen’s Council (United States Commission on Civil Rights 1963).
segregation. White residents refused to accommodate displaced blacks from various urban projects and politicians dependent on white votes agreed that the races should be separate; "rather than regulating change in existing white or mixed-race neighborhoods, Memphis opted simply to expand its boundaries to provide new areas for development" (Silver and Moeser 1995: 144). "Annexation" became the logical cure for "encroachment."

Newspaper articles and mayoral committees worrying over "the Negro housing problem" and "white-to-black" transitions in midtown neighborhoods point to the degree to which white Memphians felt that they were only reacting to natural changes embodied in the person of the invading Negro. Yet it was precisely blacks who were hemmed in, excluded, and generally moved around by the larger social forces directed by white Memphis fears. In 1953, one family even suffered a bomb attack, after numerous visitations at night of whites advising them to move out. (By chance, no one was hurt.)

In an extraordinary article in March, 1960, a reporter asked whites in adjacent rural Fayette County how they felt about increased black voter registration. (Race relations had been extremely tense over this issue for some time when this article appeared.) Entirely blind to their own history of unfair appropriations, they advance an economic argument for white supremacy.

"Just to be honest, the white people in Fayette County believe they should have the say so," said one of the county's leading and best informed citizens...."The white people in the county own right at 90 per cent of the real property and pay about 90 per cent of the taxes. We carry the load. If the Negroes got it they could vote any kind of a bond issue they wanted to and they could vote themselves any kind of salaries they wanted to. It could hurt everybody in the
Although not explicitly about housing, this expression of simultaneous power over blacks and fear of real democracy captures the "logic" of segregation. The implicit reference to the civil rights movement marks the reason for this frankness; because of voter registration and, as I shall discuss below, civil disobedience of segregationist policies—because "common sense" was changing—segregationist Memphians had to articulate their beliefs publicly. Because of various Supreme Court decisions, and because of local and national black activism, the fit between official discourses of segregation and rhetorics of Americanism had broken down.

Streetcars and Sit-ins

In fact, this article appeared in the midst of local controversy about such activism. From a brief account in Silver and Moeser (1995), I learned that there were sit-ins in Memphis in 1960. I turned to microfilms of the newspaper, stored in that very same library, to find that, on March 20, 1960 (just eleven days before the Fayette County


38No one told me about the sit-ins in conversation, whether because they didn’t think it fit within my project as I had defined it to them, or because they simply didn’t remember. The day that I uncovered the reference, I went over to my friend Thomas Wilson’s tailoring shop, around the corner from the midtown library. "There were sit-ins in Memphis in 1960!" I announced incredulously. "Well, yes," he said softly, amused. "I was in one of those..." It turned out that he had been part of the demonstration at the downtown Walgreen’s lunch counter, and left before the police arrived.
Figure 3.11
"OUT!"
March 21, 1960, Commercial Appeal
nineteen black college students had walked into the main library and sat down to study (Figure 13.1). Some even tried to check out books. Within moments, the frantic librarians had called police, who in short order came to arrest the students on charges of disturbing the peace: They had violated official (but as it turned out not legally codified) policy that black patrons could check out books only at one branch library and use the reference room at another location. (If books were unavailable at the Vance branch, the library required black patrons to order them in an early form of interlibrary loan from other libraries within the system.) The students found inspiration in spontaneous student sit-ins earlier in the month in Nashville and in North Carolina. Soon the sit-in movement would "spread" across town to lunch counters, the zoo and other public facilities, at the same time that it "moved" across the country, in the language of the startled newspaper accounts. But their actions also had extensive local history. Both the event and the history turned on debates about citizenship and agency.

One strand of the genealogy of the Memphis sit-ins is a series of decisions during World War II by individual black Memphians to defy segregated seating on streetcars, documented by Honey in his incredibly detailed account. These actions are visible to history mostly because of the reactions against them. In 1941, a professor at the local black college wrote to the national NAACP about Police Commissioner Boyle's

---

39Robin D.G. Kelley calls attention to this kind of protest in Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class (1994), identifying it as one of several types of "hidden transcripts" of resistance. Further, of course, one officially originary moment of the civil rights movement is Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat in Montgomery Alabama; and the legality of many Jim Crow practices rested on the "separate but equal" ruling of Plessy v. Ferguson, a case focusing on segregated train cars in Louisiana.
"continued campaign against Negroes," describing among other offenses how black Memphians
are pulled off street cars for the dire offense of not rising to give the very last seat in the car
to a white, and likewise arrested if they dare to make any audible comment about it.
The following year, Boyle assigned police officers to the cars themselves "to prevent any
'impudent' blacks from refusing to sit in the 'colored' section," which apparently provoked
even more young protesters to defy the lines. Sympathizers documented other protests:
another LeMoyne professor
witnessed...a plainly dressed black man refuse to move from his seat on the bus to make way
for a white passenger. "This is that damned democracy you all been talking about," he
ruefully asserted when he got off the bus. (Honey 1993: 172)

By the end of the war, whole communities would turn out in support of those in trouble
for defying streetcar or bus segregation. In 1944, a black teacher arrested for the same
"crime" was supported in protest to the mayor by 2,000 members of her church. Yet
another incident, in 1945, occurred at the Firestone plant, where an exhausted black
woman refused to wait for white workers to finish boarding the bus first, as dictated by
common practice:

A white plant guard...grabbed her by the arm and took her to the guard shack. When she
cursed him out, the guard slugged her in the mouth, knocking out several of her teeth. The
police, predictably, arrested the woman and did nothing to the guard. When blacks going to
work on the second shift learned of the incident, they walked out. Hoping to quiet the
situation, the company fired the woman and transferred the guard. Then six thousand whites
walked out, protesting the guard's transfer, and the blacks refused to go back. Between them
they closed the entire plant for three days. (Honey: 208)
Inadvertently indicating the power a united workforce could wield, these workers tragically demonstrate the depth of passion connected to "symbolic" racial boundaries in everyday life.

Eleven years later, the NAACP took the issue to the courts, bringing a federal suit to question the constitutionality of the segregation on the Memphis Street Railway. The NAACP attorneys, including Thurgood Marshall, defined the issue as one of black citizenship:

The suit asks that " negro citizens be granted similar privileges and immunities given all citizens of the United States, due process of law, and the equal protection of the laws secured by the 14th Amendment to the national Constitution."40

Although Memphis public transportation was to remain segregated for nearly another decade, these dual strategies—physical protest and legal recourse, both accompanied by claims about democracy—became the hallmark of challenges to segregation.41

---

40Memphis Is Target of U.S. Suit--NAACP Asks For Hearing Before Federal Judges, Press-Scimitar, June 5, 1956

41In 1957, for example, a "Memphis negro group" issued a statement in response to a local white supremacy group's denunciation of the Supreme Court, linking desegregation of public transportation to other issues of "first-class citizenship":

Dave Harsh, chairman of the Shelby County Court and a leader of the Citizens for Progress political group which has the slogan "Keep Memphis Down in Dixie," has received a statement from a Memphis negro group. The statement threatened reprisals at the polls against the Shelby legislative delegation, elected with CP backing, and other Tennessee legislators who signed a "Tennessee Manifesto" denouncing the U.S. Supreme Court.... "As citizens of this government which pledges under democratic rule that all people shall exercise the same rights and privileges without reservation based on color or race, we shall protest any act of the Legislature that is in opposition to the laws of the land as interpreted by the Supreme Court," the statement said. "We do not believe that organizations which are dedicated to lawlessness, mob rule, and willful disregard of human rights represent nor reflect the thinking of the intelligent electorate of the State of Tennessee. Nor do we believe that the majority of citizens of Tennessee advocate disrespect and disobedience of the laws of the land, as the voice of some isolated reactionaries would have us believe. We are dedicated to the task of working without ceasing for full, first-class citizenship. We seek
This last account points to the other genealogical strand of the sit-in movement. The earlier landmark case involving Thurgood Marshall was, of course, Brown v. Board of Education, the ruling that reversed Plessy and set precedent for the end of segregation in public facilities. Memphis did not heed this precedent without struggle. It took an long series of court battles and public protests to bring about change, and school integration was, ironically, the last and least successful court victory. The suits and protests that specifically heralded the library sit-ins had started in the 1930s, when black Memphians had no access to libraries at all: the opening of the Vance branch represented, at the time, a significant victory for black leaders. Later, Jesse Turner, the head of the Memphis NAACP, started to try to get a library card and check out books from other branches in 1958: The library board's initial response to his threat of court action was to reaffirm segregation generally but to open the downtown reference room to black Memphians. His federal suit was still pending when the students took direct action in 1960.

Police had met earlier protests with violence, as above, or condescending dismissiveness. When blacks tried to attend the zoo on one of the 6 "whites only" days, the Police Commissioner

said he didn't attach much significance to it. "We have had several incidents there in the past, and usually it's the result of honest misunderstanding. A lot of Negroes, especially from out

——

equal protection under the law. We deplore the fact that many of our citizens are brutally and inhumanly treated by police officers before they are brought before judge or jury even tho they offer no resistance to arrest. We denounce the use of unnecessary force upon any citizen, regardless of race. We seek the use of public, tax-supported facilities without discrimination, including the parks, golf courses, libraries, zoo, art gallery, museum and city auditorium and schools. We seek unbiased treatment in housing for our people. We pledge our efforts to end segregation on public transportation in the City of Memphis. "Statement by Negro Group, Promising Vote Reprisal," Press-Scimitar, January 9, 1957.
of town, either don’t know or don’t remember that Thursday is colored day.\textsuperscript{42}

In contrast, Turner took the opportunity to disavow NAACP influence and to stress wryly the reasonableness of the protester’s actions: "All I know about it is what I heard on the radio," he said. "I guess they were just good citizens exercising their constitutional rights." In 1960, when the NAACP scrambled to keep up with the protesting students, they took this same tack. Even conservative black leader Lieutenant George Lee, known for working within the Crump system, spoke out in favor of the students "with the Bible in one hand and the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution in the other." He also sounded an explicit note against the idea of black contagion, here figured as both internal and external doubt about black abilities: he called the sit-ins necessary "to abolish the legal stigma of inferiority," as well as "the mental images which colored people have of themselves...[which] is a reflection of the attitudes of white society toward them. It brainwashes them, debases them."

The white daily newspapers reported all of this, and when police arrested the students at the library—-for disturbing the peace, among other things—the Commercial Appeal reported in detail not only the arrests but the trials themselves. The articles read like official court transcripts.\textsuperscript{43} The fact that the relatively conservative newspapers covered these events in such detail may indicate at least the power of the student’s

\textsuperscript{42}"6 Negroes Escorted From Zoo Shortly After They Enter," \textit{Commercial Appeal}, August 27, 1958.

\textsuperscript{43}The official transcript of the 1962 federal hearings in Memphis also contain a brief account of the 1960 sit-ins and the subsequent desegregation of public facilities in Memphis.
symbolic gesture, and, again, opens up the question of what the actual relationship between politicians, newspapers, and different classes of white Memphians might actually be. Certainly the librarians perceived black contagion quite differently from black leader George Lee, although they didn't quite have the language to express it fully. In the courtroom, their assertions lead to a debate about whose responsibility the "trouble" was, and what in fact the trouble might be to begin with.

"I was very upset when this group of negro students walked in," Mrs. Karpinski said. "It was a very uncommon occurrence. They distributed themselves throughout the library, bunched up in the card catalog area, making it impossible for other library users to get into the card index area, and occupied a good many of the seats."

Another librarian testified that she "thought the children perhaps might be disturbed." A third said that "It is not the usual thing for a group of negroes to come into the library. The libraries have been segregated for years."

For the first time in the history of all of these protests, black Memphians had a voice in court to press for more detail, to question the "common sense" of a white witness. The students' attorney, H.T. Lockard, asked the first librarian if she was upset because the 19 students were Negroes: She reiterated that it was such "an unusual experience," and that their coming in all at once without "proper supervision from a teacher" was distracting, as any group of such size would be. Here Judge Boushe interrupted to return the discussion from these dangerous waters back to the safe ground of law and order:

"I'm going to repeat, I'm not concerned with the question of integration or segregation or civil rights. For 19 people to invade a library and take over was an open invitation to mob violence. It was a spark that could have set off trouble."
Clearly the judge occupies the same perceptual universe as the librarians, but with more rhetorical weapons to hand. The students "invaded" the library, "taking over" in an "open invitation to mob violence"—these loaded words supposedly become neutral truth because spoken by a judge.

But Lockard spoke up to challenge this characterization of events, objecting specifically to the phrase "take over." Boushe replied with an appeal to natural law and a reiteration of the worry about "mobs": "Well, for 200 years, the libraries have been segregated, and we're not going to have mobs move in and take over." Another lawyer for the students, Benjamin Hooks, disputed his logic, pointing out that "the witness testified there were 100 whites in the library, and only 19 negroes. It looks like the whites were the mob." Boushe, stubborn, reverts to the language of takeover and finds footing in the question of intention:

"If 19 moved in from any organization, regardless of color, and took over a library, I would deal with them. This group went there for the sole purpose of stirring up an issue...I don't want to cut you off, but that's what I'm just about to do. It appears to me this group was a mob, presenting an invitation to trouble."

At this point, Boushe stipulated that "public places like the libraries are segregated."

Nonetheless, the black attorneys returned over and over to the illogic of segregation and of the arrests themselves, and with a certain level of success. Not only did they push various witnesses to articulate their reasoning, but at one point Boushe apparently threw out one of the charges ("loitering") simply because Hooks questioned the arresting officer about it. After the city closed its case, the black attorneys made several motions to dismiss the case altogether: on the grounds of insufficient evidence of
"disorderly conduct"; on the grounds that "there is no jurisdiction," since the students were arrested solely on the basis of their color; on the grounds that they were exercising their 14th Amendment rights; and on the grounds that they were exercising their rights under a ruling of the federal court (presumably Brown). Boushe denied all of these, but not after another exchange over "your race issue again": Lockard interrupted his own motions to say

"We want to know how long we are going to have to wait before the negroes can exercise their rights. We are a nation of laws, not of men. The negroes do not have adequate facilities at the Vance Avenue branch library, and should be allowed to go to any library they want to to get a book... We have tried to work with the white communities. The white communities have refused to work with us."

Boushe's only reply was dismissive:

"This again brings up your race issue. If any 19 white students had moved in on the library to break the peace, I would have felt very strongly against them."

Case closed--except that all charges were eventually dismissed because the city desegregated nearly all public facilities within the year.

Boushe reiterated his position in a press release:

This situation (segregation) has been in existence for more than 200 years. It is not only the custom, it is the law. When a custom or rule has been recognized for so long a time, it takes on the efficacy of law in every respect. We are not trying the question of civil rights or segregation or integration here today. Those questions are properly before the higher courts at this moment, and from this very county and these same locations. The sole question with which this court is concerned here today is that of maintaining the peace and dignity of the community. This sort of thing hints strongly of mob rule by intimidation especially while this
very question is before the higher courts. Mass demonstrations of this type can only breed contempt of the law. It is an open invitation to violence and is intended to completely disrupt the due processes of law. A test case could have been instituted with one or two defendants just as well if it were not for the fact that a case is already in court. The kindest thing I can say is that this was wholly unnecessary. It was ill-advised, ill-timed, and premature. I have said many times from this bench and I will repeat, we will not tolerate anything in this city that smacks of mob rule or gangsterism and race, creed and color has nothing to do with it. 44

The Press-Scimitar editorialized in agreement with Boushe:

Our advice to negro citizens is not to put on any more demonstrations. Appeals to reason and good will if directed to the right quarters will profit them more and will avoid the negative results always possible in any mass demonstration.

The front page of the Commercial Appeal on March 31, 1960, makes vivid these contemporary white Memphis worries about mob rule: the aftermath of the sit-ins occurred simultaneously with extensive racial violence in South Africa. An article about the declaration of a state of emergency in that country literally frames an article about Memphis protests. (Figure 3.13) The South African government states that "it would not ask the police to 'commit suicide' by withholding fire against menacing race rioters" in the article on the left, while the sub-headline on the right-hand article reads "30,000 Negroes March on Parliament to Protest Arrest of Leaders." Meanwhile, in between, the headline reads "Mayor Decries Racial Pressure," and the article quotes Mayor Loeb also claiming the moral high ground of legal self-defense: "I favor exhausting all legal means of holding on to what we have had. Violence will not be tolerated in the community and I do not

favor giving in to group pressure.\textsuperscript{45}(Note Loeb's use of the word "we," which more strongly than ever implies that the newspaper readers and the moral community are white.) These juxtapositions occupy the front pages for most of April, and the two accounts share language about "racial protests" and "violence" even though their scale is so different. These events lend force to Silver and Moeser's argument that the Memphis Racial Reconciliation Committee persuaded Chamber of Commerce officials to desegregate downtown relatively easily by pointing out that such a move would forestall "further action" by the NAACP: Similarly, Atlanta civic leaders took one look at Selma and Birmingham, and decided that business would be better served by the avoidance of violence. Although the violence they avoided was actually their own, the only threats they could see were those made by black protesters "demanding" their constitutional rights (Silver and Moeser 1995).

Although I have presented the sit-ins and the end of the segregation of public facilities as a victory, a narrative in which black citizens persuaded white elites that they had real power, it is also important to acknowledge that there is another, less optimistic story that can be told about ongoing white fears of black power. Anthropologist Charles Williams and education scholar W.W. Herenton\textsuperscript{46} document the precipitous drop in white


\textsuperscript{46}Later the superintendent of Memphis schools and currently the mayor of the city of Memphis.
enrollment in the public schools in the late 1960s and early 1970s, after the Memphis school board finally began to integrate local schools in late 1960s and early 1970s. Joan Beisus maps out a profound difference in white and black Memphians' responses to the 1968 sanitation workers strike for better working conditions and union recognition: Blacks understood that workers had gone through official channels and been patient about gradual change, and that they were reasonably frustrated at the absence of improvement; whites were shocked and felt the strikers to be unreasonably demanding and frightening, apparently simply because they were black people challenging the status quo. When Martin Luther King came to Memphis in support of the strikers and was assassinated, and tanks and curfews became the norm, blacks speak of terrible sadness and fear, while whites talk about buying guns and getting locks on their doors for the first time.

CONCLUSION

Thus from the 1920s to the 1960s, segregation remained a taken-for-granted discourse of pollution which organized city officials' decisions about the shape of Memphis. By 1960, however, supported by federal rulings, black Memphians had made their perspective on segregation both audible and visible. In response, both powerful and ordinary white Memphians had to actually express their racial/economic beliefs. Again, these expressions were both verbal, in the public spaces of the newspapers and courts, and embodied, in avoidances and attacks. One white narrative about these changes, documented especially in Honey's history of local labor politics, was that "outside" agitators and court orders had disrupted local race relations which were otherwise
peaceful. I have constructed a history here which, first, makes explicit the work of segregating which the discourse of pollution obscures through assertions that segregation is natural. Further, this history tracks a genealogy of local black protests, arguing that federal rulings gave important encouragement, affirmation, and legal grounding for moral and political claims that black Memphians had been making at least since World War I.  

Agency is a central question throughout these histories. Whose actions have social force? Whose narratives make it into the newspaper? Who can truly claim citizenship? Within these questions, disentangling the agency of everyday whites and official white discourse is a complex matter. Various public officials claimed to be helpless in face of ordinary racism, to be responding to everyday decisions of citizen/voters. Like jukebox operators, they worked in a complex dialectic with their audiences. I can imagine a range of actions that city officials could have taken to make some kind of stand against this violence—finding perpetrators and holding them responsible, encoding open housing laws, at least rhetorically supporting integration, making sure that blacks and others in mixed neighborhoods could get mortgages, and so on. But officials were themselves also ordinary white Memphians: they themselves were not necessarily inclined to challenge the status quo. Nor was it in their interests to think about segregation. They may really have thought the social order would end with "social equality," if only because other whites

47 It is also important to note that federal law and federal courts do not stand outside cultural constructions of race, and that in this period especially, black lawyers and activists were able to push for the redefinition of race, race relations, and citizenship within constitutional law. See Lee Baker's dissertation (1994) for a mapping of the intricate relations between constructions of race in anthropology, mass media, law, and African-American activism between *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 and *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954.
would be violent. They may at least have thought they would be voted out if they weren't segregationists (consider George Wallace).

Music is not separate from this history. This is the geography within which people heard music. Changes in the organization of the city profoundly affected the structure of the music industry (as the epigraph to this section makes clear). And there are instances in which the discourse of pollution becomes audible in musical crossover: In the story with which I opened the dissertation, police enforced the separation of the races by escorting Sammy Lobianco and his friends out of a black nightclub. Smithsonian curator Pete Daniel reminded me in a letter that "When Sam Phillips was recording blacks...his colleagues would make comments about him smelling 'like a nigger.'

But in my research I could locate no storm of controversy over mixing in music, or over white kids going to black clubs. Neither city officials, newspapers, or censor Binford spoke up in any systematic way against these practices, although I fully expected to find such outrage given all of the other policing going on. This could indicate that white interest in black music was entirely consistent with other racist ideas; it could mean that some kind of consumption of blackness was part of being white or being working-class white; it could mean that specific instances of crossover occurred in the interstices of segregation but never challenged it. I argue that these questions are not answerable through the examination of official discourse, but rather through attention to everyday life and the strange paths of popular culture. In this chapter, attention to black protesters and to some ordinary white Memphians, not only to official white discourse, begins my analytical shift in attention to everyday practices and the positive valences of embodiment.
The next chapter makes this turn explicit, drawing on academic arguments that link ideas about "experience" to theorizations about gender as well as on life histories of three actual women in Memphis.
Chapter Four:  
*Ruby, Bettye, and Laura*

Powerful Memphians constituted both the music industry and their city in fundamentally racial terms, as I have shown. Local codes of segregation explicitly differentiated between kinds of people, kinds of music, and parts of the city, marking boundaries as normative and derived from nature. The utter normality of this discourse is suggested by the inability of urban planners to question it. But black Memphians' civil disobedience—individual, and later collective—made clear that not all Memphians shared these assumptions, thus highlighting both the unnaturalness and the absurdities of segregation. Naming racial differentiation as unnatural, unfair, and unconstitutional, they challenged persistent white myths about blacks choosing to be apart and agreeing that racial separation was good. Their civil disobedience dramatized the non-neutrality of supposedly public space: Their physical presence, and official resistance to it, in forbidden public libraries and department store lunch counters made theater out of the everydayness of segregation.

Before the sit-ins made boundaries visible and official segregation ludicrous, how did segregation work in everyday life? Where were racial boundaries? The sit-ins make clear that we cannot ask these questions generally, or at least we cannot answer them in general terms. Different Memphians experienced segregation differently. While evoking the normality and taken-for-granted power of segregation in Memphis before 1960, it is also crucial to use the insights of the civil rights movement to be specific about whose experience of the city and of racial boundaries one intends to discuss.
All the following chapters take this play between normality and specific positioning as their grounding, building on the earlier chapters' overviews of racialized landscapes. In this chapter I enact an analytic turn to consider citizens' movements through those landscapes, and these last three chapters map Memphians' urban experiences of music and race. In discussing the 1960 sit-ins, the previous chapter began this turn, raising questions of agency, bodies, and experiences of race in urban public spaces. Here I pursue these questions further, through partial life histories of three women whose lives illuminate the entanglement of race, music, and the city.

I focus on women's lives deliberately. First, feminist scholars, especially black feminist scholars, have historically initiated these questions of experience, everyday life, and bodies by asking where women are in scholarly accounts and in history itself. I want to echo this move in order to mark the historical positioning of my own account within anthropology—feminist scholarship generally and anthropological critiques of ethnography have equally informed my own postmodern turn. Further, feminist scholars have begun to address the ways in which women's experiences of music, and more broadly, questions of everyday life are consistently written out of music histories (McClary [1989], McRobbie [1991], and McRobbie and Nava [1984]). I would add that, in turn, when audiences do appear, authors usually render them as sexual, or passive, or frighteningly irrational— in other words, as the all-too-stereotypical embodiment of "the feminine" (see J.M. Taylor [1979] on Eva Peron). This chapter furthers this critique by offering new specific information. Further, I emphasize the parallels between the construction of women's experiences and of black people's experiences. I'm avoiding the easier formulations
"gender" and "race" here, because I want the specificity of the marked categories rather than the relationality the latter concepts describe. That is, it is precisely women and black people, and especially of course black women, who are marked as embodied, as primarily bodies. In the world, reducing people to their bodies has been an incredibly damaging racist practice. Paradoxically, embodiment has also offered those people, as the last chapter begins to show, both a means of protesting exclusion and grounds for the critique of ideas of citizenship and humanity which exclude bodies.

In this chapter, I show how two women actually lived in this complex landscape, and elaborate as well how our encounters helped shape my fieldwork. I then turn to a discussion of my own experience of "racial" violence as I started work on this project. While initially this seemed only a horrible moment to get beyond, I came to realize as I went through my fieldwork and writing that in fact it highlighted crucial dynamics already at work in constructions of race in the city. Thus I focus on women in this chapter because one of the basic justifications for segregation is the "defense of white womanhood" against supposedly ubiquitous black rapists. This points to a dominant white concern with reproduction and the maintenance of the "purity of the race," as the last chapter indicates. A shift in perspective shows that this ideology also condemns women and black people to similar inferior, not-fully-human statuses while simultaneously setting them at odds. Thus while race and gender are similar systems they often produce contradictory kinds of experience and knowledge (again, especially for black women). Fears of pollution shape not only the city but women's experiences of the city; again, embodiment, or eroticism broadly defined, can work as a counterforce to contradict those fears. Specifying what real
women's actual experiences in the city are and have been, and thinking about musical practices as embodied power throughout these particular experiences, I begin to deconstruct sexist and racist myths.

Ruby Harding and Bettye Berger made 1950s Memphis particularly vivid to me. Others had better stories about going dancing or clearer evocations of particular neighborhoods, but these two had a kind of continuity with the city that enabled me to see the earlier city in the landscape before me. When I was with them, even if we weren't talking explicitly about earlier times, the city made sense to me. Part of this is that they came of age in the late forties, and were young mothers and working women through the fifties, so that their memories are not mediated by a wider nostalgia for "happy days" of teenage leisure. Part of it is also that they still live within the older part of Memphis that many of my other informants have moved away from. And part of it is that they are still working women, vitally engaged with other people and with their own complex lives. For them, Memphis is a landscape of joy and struggle which has changed dramatically but is both recognizable and full of meaning.

In a startling number of ways, their lives run parallel, although Ruby is African-American and Bettye is white. Both spent their childhoods in small farming towns not too far from the city. As teenagers, both moved to Memphis, where they had extended family. Both have built relationships across racial lines in their work which approach friendship. Music, especially African-American music, has been central to their working lives, their experience of the city, and their leisure. More specifically, Ruby waitressed at a nightclub on Beale Street and now runs daily operations at the Center for Southern Folklore on the
"revitalized" Beale Street. Bettye has worked as a disk jockey, songwriter, club manager, jukebox operator, and booking agent; currently, she manages the musical estate of the late Ivory Joe Hunter. Both have children and grandchildren, and both count family as centrally important in their lives, although I will focus much more in the following accounts on their movements through public spaces. The similarities between their lives and the power of music for them enable me to do a number of things: to begin to map musical geographies of Memphis, to highlight how race and class mattered in those geographies, and to evoke an engagement with life that, as I shall show in the final section, became a model for my own survival in the city.

*RUBY HARDING: Beale Street was a black street*

I interviewed Ruby Harding at the Center for Southern Folklore, where she runs tours, the gift shop, and general public relations. The Center is on Beale Street, once the center of black business and entertainment not only for blacks in Memphis but for those in the vast surrounding rural areas. Beale has been a crucial site for Ruby since she came to Memphis in the late 1940s, and which has gone through dramatic transformations in her lifetime. Ruby, a woman of powerful intelligence, humor, and warmth, has vivid memories and deep feelings about these transformations, and she used our interview to make these points for history. Of course other dynamics were at play here as well. Some of our relationship is reflected in the interview, which is to say that over the months I was in Memphis we worked a little together, talked a lot about work and family and music and people we knew in common, and generally began to build a friendship. But there was a
qualitative difference between our ordinary conversations and the interview itself, because of Ruby's awareness of an audience beyond me. More than many other people I interviewed, she was already aware of herself as an actor in history with a story worth hearing, and she had points to make: about the vitality of the black community, about the wonderfulness that was Beale Street, and, especially, about the tragedy of Beale's destruction. Ruby's turn away from the personal may also reflect other dynamics between us: that I am white and she is black, that I interviewed her relatively early on in knowing her, that I am a social scientist, that the interview was a more formal venue than everyday conversation.

At any rate, Ruby turned questions about her neighborhood and her work history into opportunities to talk about Beale Street in all its richness. The phrase "Beale Street" often functions in marketing and popular literature as shorthand for a vital blues and jazz scene, which itself often functions as shorthand for a vital black community. Ruby's discussion offers a nuanced elaboration of these connections between the geography, the community, and the music, both in their heyday and in their destruction via urban renewal. Urban scholars Christopher Silver and John Moeser also describe the "cohesiveness and community identity fashioned in the separate city," and they connect 1960s black activism with the strengths ironically fostered by segregation (1995). As Ruby describes it, it is clear that segregation also made possible the general avoidance of hostile white people. In turn, whites were attracted to this vital culture, and crossed over into it. In both the rural and urban contexts, talking about music leads to talking about race, race leads to geography, and geography leads back to music. To be sure, Ruby made these connections
partly because I was asking her to, but then again these are the points she wants in the history books, and, as she puts it, "That's just the way it was growing up in my era."

The African-American, working, dancing, vital, strong world Ruby describes has roots in its rural past and its rural surroundings. Ruby herself grew up in Henning, Tennessee, the same town Alex Haley describes at the end of Roots, and the nearby town of Ripley.

RH: It was segregation during that time, but being from a small town, we didn't have any racial problems, during my lifetime. Everybody in Henning and Ripley got along okay. There were sharecroppers, and farmers, and everybody in Henning and Ripley got along fine. The only difference—we got along with the other races of people, but we didn't go to school. We played together, we farmed together, and all of that, and going to movies and school was the only thing that was segregated, and going to the movie we sat in one section of the theater and they sat in another section of the theater, but we never really had any problem.

I felt a strong tension between the statement that "we didn't have racial problems" and the statement that "it was segregation," because my own sense of this is that segregation is a racial problem. But this is a distinction Ruby maintained throughout our conversations, and its effect is to highlight the self-sufficiency of her family and community.

This dynamic is apparent as well in her discussion of local musical offerings. She loves all the popular music of that era, and she makes the complex points that music was not off limits to her because of her race—she listened to country and big band music at fairs and on the radio—but also that racist structures did limit radio offerings.

Well, country music, back when I was growing up in Henning in the forties, is what we listened to. I'm very familiar with country music. And Ernest Tubb, Hank Williams Senior, the Grand—anyone from the Grand Ol' Opry, because as a matter of fact when I was growing
up, they toured. And they were always at fairs, and go to theaters, you could go to theaters and see em. I saw those people. I saw Minnie Pearl, and Roy Acuff, and many from the Grand Ol' Opry. You'll never (laughing) be able to name all of em. Folks like Gene Autry, and those people came to town, you could go see them. It wasn't no--(patiently) you went where you wanted to go, when you got ready, if this is what you wanted to see, because on the radio that was all being played in the forties was country music mostly, and big band sounds. And you had big band sounds with Glenn Miller, and Count Basie, and the Dorsey's, and people of such. Duke Ellington, and those people. They had hours and hours of music. And so, actually, it was a different kind of music with different kinds of people, cause people that liked music they liked music, regardless of who was singing, even the gospel songs. They played--cause all the radio stations back then was white owned, and when WDIA went on the air that was a turning point for the people in the area that could hear WDIA.

Only rarely do history books mention black audiences for the Grand Ol' Opry and other country music; a classic book on big bands, in turn, divides its subject into white bands (Miller's, the Dorsey's) and black bands (Count Basie's, Duke Ellington's) without discussing either this segregation or the issue of mixed audiences. So it is amazing to know how normal Ruby considers a knowledge of white country and swing music, and instructive to learn that, of course, such knowledge is only partly due to choice: Radio stations until 1948 were not only white owned but aimed at white audiences. Memphis's WDIA changed all this in 1948, when its white owners, on the verge of bankruptcy, thought in desperation that perhaps black people might be listening to the radio and might even be willing to buy products advertised on a station speaking to and for them.

But that change happened as Ruby moved to Memphis. In the meantime, there was country music and big band swing on the radio, and a lot of music making around her
house. Talking about this music making leads her directly to talking about church.

[My] dad, my uncles, all them would sing, and get together as a family. My dad and my
uncles sung in a quartet. A gospel quartet, when I was growing up. So I've always been
around music and I've always known music. And plus the fact we had a piano at my house,
which I couldn't play and I still can't play because I didn't want to play....I can read notes,
which I could sing if I wanted to, but I never really wanted to sing. Of course I sing, when I
was growing up we all had to sing in the church, there was no ifs no ands no buts or maybe,
we were brought up in the church....My dad's family, all my dad's family were Methodists, so
we was restricted as Methodists¹ and we had to sing in the church choir, in the young folks'
choir at church, sing in the young folks' choir. I sang in the choir at school. We all did. And
we were taught to sing. Growing up in the forties and the fifties was an entire different era.
Because everybody had morals, and everybody were taught religiously, and to believe. So
that's I learned how to do, I guess, to sing. And one of my former music teachers just passed,
Miss Emma Jean Hill. She taught my brothers, my brother and sister in the high school
choir. So all of us, growing up in a small community like Henning, we went to church, we
was in that church every time that door was open. Because my dad, my family were always
there, and they always held some kind of position in the church. On the board—my
grandparents, whatever, then we did too. So that made me stay in the church more than I
might have cared for.

Thus music and church offered intertwined sets of practices, both of them fairly separate
from local white musical and religious practices and both constitutive of a strong family
and a strong community.

¹I asked if "restricted" meant that she couldn't dance, and Ruby said,
Most kids, a lot of people said you don't play cards, they felt like that was something else,
you know, occult. But my family never told us that you don't dance, or can't dance, or you
can't play cards, or you can't play basketball, you can't go to the movies or nothing like that.
No. My people believed, but they weren't sanctified! (laughs) We had the privilege to live a
normal life.
Family connected Ruby to Memphis as well, and once she moved there in the late forties family relationships strongly influenced her experience of the city.

I consider myself a Memphian, because I always visited Memphis anyway, because I always had relatives in Memphis....I had visited Memphis a lot, because I had an aunt, and other relatives here, and uncles, and all—a lot of my family members here. Memphis, was, to me—it wasn't nothing that I wasn't used to, because I'd been to Memphis before. The only thing that I guess that I wasn't used to was the, more people, and the closeness, people living closer together. That's about the only thing that I wasn't used to.

My cousins have always been my best friends. We have always been a family that our relatives were always our best friends. So I had a cousin here, she and I are the same age, anyway, and she had lived here all of her life, so we were best friends, and we made other friends.

LH: What's her name?

RH: (with affection) Her name is Evva.

LH: Evva. Evva and Ruby, hangin' out. (laughing)

RH: (laughing) Oh yeah, we did a lot of hangin' out. And her mother is my aunt, so we went from house to house.

LH: Did you live close by?

RH: No, she lived in Lemoyne Garden, which is south, and I lived north, but meeting up, and getting with each other was no hassle. And I had another cousin named Ophelia. And she lived south, but that was no hassle. They lived closer than I did—but we spent more time in each other's house, anyway. But it didn't matter, whichever area we was close to that's the one we spent the night.

My family has always been a closeknit family. So it wasn't no big thing, because that's the way they raised us. Even to our grandparents. That was on our dad's side, because I was closer to my dad because my mother had a small family. And most of them were away.
LH: Are these the cousins you would go out dancing with? and listen to records with?

RH: Yes! Yes. Yes.

LH: Where did you learn how to dance, anyway?

RH: I, my aunts and my uncle taught us to dance at a very early, cause they were dancers. My uncle and my aunt used to tap dance as a team. They were all dancers. And they all liked to dance. My mother's sister, had a younger sister, which was a few years younger than she, so they all got together and taught us to dance....and what I remember, I can remember, I guess I when I was five, maybe four five years old, they would put us on the top of their foot and dance. (laughs) Dance with us on top of their foot. And they would teach us how to make different dance steps that were popular at the time. So I learned that way to dance. Because they always had music around em, they was all music lovers.

I quote this interview excerpt at such length not only because Ruby is so clear about these issues, but also to show a moment when Ruby does not herself make the move from family to music, but when asked, elaborates strong and vivid connections. Elsewhere she herself weaves these connections quite vividly. Throughout, it is abundantly clear that music in Memphis (as well as in Henning) is caught up in family dynamics.

Race relations in the city did not surprise Ruby any more than the city itself did.

Basically, it was like a larger version of Henning:

Same as when I moved to Memphis, it was the same identical way. Everyone went their own separate ways socially. We worked together, worked in the same establishments, but after work, it's you go your way and I go mine. We lived in our own neighborhoods in Memphis--well, actually, Memphis has a bad name for being racial, but actually I don't think Memphis has been as some other cities even across the Mason-Dixon line. Because when the early 50s, we lived on one street--people actually lived on one street, people lived in the same neighborhoods, but there were, maybe you could live next door and there was a boundary
line. And people talked, have always talked, but they never socialized, you know. We went in the same buildings, only we had one section to go in and the white or other race had another section to be in. So it was the same way on Beale Street, but Beale was a black street.

This is one of the most eloquent descriptions of the confusions of Memphis segregation I have heard. "We had our own neighborhoods" but "we lived on one street"—both of these statements are true in the weird geography of the 1950s, largely because "you could live next door and there was a boundary line." The difference between talking and socializing is the difference between acknowledging someone's presence and acknowledging a relationship with them, between seeing them every day and actually choosing to go somewhere with them. The difference in the Beale area was that the balance of power shifted somewhat, so that there it was white visitors who held the marked category, who looked like outsiders, who had to think about whether they belonged there or not.

The same elaborate distinctions and overlaps are there in Ruby's discussion of 1950s music. Initially, however, she describes a more democratic access to all kinds of music, with a kind of anarchy of genres on the jukebox. This seems strikingly different from the stratified routes and listening practices described by jukebox operators (in

---

2Here Ruby not only makes the point that segregation in Memphis has this weird characteristic of occurring in "mixed" neighborhoods, she also makes a move which became familiar to me during fieldwork, which is to point out to the northern-born (white) questioner of local race relations that Memphis is not the only place in the U.S. which "has a bad name for being racial." I myself found it useful, when describing my project, to explain that I had grown up in a segregated city (Columbus, Ohio) in which I had rarely actually encountered any people different from me in race or class. My sense is that this acknowledgement reassured people somewhat that I was not out to cast Memphis as some extreme case, or myself as outside the issue.
Chapter 2), but turns out to be consistent with them: The moment she describes first is precisely the moment of breakdown in the distinctions between the genres reified by the routes.

When the rock and roll came about, in the early fifties it started. Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Carl Perkins, Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis and all those guys came out—we didn't, jukeboxes and people did not discriminate. Music. Everybody played everybody's music in the club. On the jukebox, if you wanted to hear Carl Perkins, Carl Perkins was on the jukeboxes—and that happened at all places, because every restaurant that you want to call a restaurant or club or whatever, every joint in Memphis had a jukebox. And they had the popular music. It wasn't no such thing as no black and white music when it came to music—if you liked this kind of music then you played this kind of music. If someone requested, went in a place and there was no Elvis or no Jerry Lee Lewis music on the jukebox and the people wanted that, then they put it on there. Yeah, what ever!

Yet this breakdown of genres and this broad access to music via jukeboxes and record and radio does not produce or reflect a network of clubs or streets where black and white listeners listen together, that are simply public spaces without reference to race. I make this point emphatically because generations of music historians, mostly white, have implied that the breakdown of racialized musical genres in the world in this historical moment points to a breakdown of the racial genres in the world. Music remains a complex part of racial dynamics. For one thing, Ruby makes it clear, white audiences still mattered most to radio programmers.

Even though black people was listening they catered more to, you know, what they thought the white people wanted to hear. Hah. So when Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and all those people came out, and so they played their music, and then they caught on in the white
neighborhoods, and with the white people, so naturally they would demand that they play it, so they had to play it.

And on Beale Street, when—well, there were always white owners, the Jewish community, the Italian community, or whatever, they own the buildings and they worked down here with you. So it was black managers, but they owned the place, and it was always white people on Beale Street.

Thus Ruby's discussion of segregation and crossover in music here brings her back to the segregation and crossover in the geography of Beale Street.

Ruby's own experience of Beale was rich and wonderful, although for the most part she describes it in general rather than personal terms. This strategy supports her points, as she emphasizes Beale's multiple meanings. It is at once the neighborhood surrounding and larger than the street itself; a black community, which occasional whites would visit, especially those white Memphians who owned property there; and a vital area, the black business community for the entire region. The extraordinary music scene stood as a visible sign of the vitality of the "separate city," and the one most obvious to white people. Beale was its primary geography, and, as I have said, the shorthand for vitality itself. Ruby maps it out:

Beale was a black street. There were black merchants, doctors, and all professions of people on Beale Street and in the Beale Street area. Beale Street wasn't only confined to Beale Street—it was a community. When you speak of Beale Street back in the fifties, and until the urban renewal came in and messed it up, you were speaking of downtown Memphis.

LH: A public space where people from different neighborhoods would come.

RH: Yes. It was--People came from all over. All over the South and from everywhere....I've always lived in North Memphis. And I presently live in North Memphis. But I've always--
but Beale Street was the place to go, so no matter where you lived in Memphis at that time, you would always find your way to Beale Street anyway, because all of the clubs was downtown, and all of the business was downtown. So whatever you had to do, any kind of business at all, it was downtown....

She explicitly compares this vitality, and the breadth of Beale as "downtown," with the destroyed ruins of the 60s and 70s, and with the desolated empty lots which still surround the truncated, three-block strip of clubs that is the "revitalized" Beale.³

So, but it was interesting, Beale Street was interesting. Because you didn't see no parking lots, and no torn down buildings, no raggedy buildings, and all that. So—if you went from the Greyhound Bus Station to Crump, you could walk in the whole area, and there's always something to go in, some kind of club, some kind of joint you could go in, between here and there. And it was just many people. And Beale Street at nine o'clock in the morning it would look like it was noon. At midnight, or any time, it was cars always bumper to bumper. People walked up and down the streets all day and all night....As a matter of fact, people lived on Beale Street! Cause they lived above the shops.

Ruby and her cousins had their special place to congregate, a vantage point which offered them rich information on doings in the community. Even her description of it is embedded in such information, the beginning of an evocative litany of club names.

My favorite spot on Beale Street was at Third and Beale. Paul's Tailoring Shop, that was our hangout. Cause Paul sold tickets to everything that came to Memphis, all the shows—the Palace Theater, the Hippodrome, Curry's, wherever someone was performing. Club Handy.

And we would set in Paul's shop—Paul's an Italian—and we'd sit there and that's where all the

³"Beale Street" here refers to only three blocks of the literal street, rather than to a whole neighborhood. This fragment stands in vexed relation to the larger black community, which is itself even more plural and even more crosscut by class and geography than it was in the heyday of segregation.
gossip, you'd get up on all the gossip, and who was coming to town the next two months. At
Paul's!

That a tailoring shop came to sell tickets to music clubs indicates the interweaving of
music into the local economy, as well as the unexpected connections between professions.

Another important site in the area for Ruby was the club where she worked, which was
two blocks south of Beale. But she barely mentions it, turning it into a jumping-off point
for her musical excursions:

I worked as a waitress at Bessie's Chicken Shack, which was one of the famous and well-
known clubs, out on Vance. It was on Vance, and Bessie's was really a nice place. And so
we would leave Bessie's and go from one place to another one, and--it was really, clubs then
were more defined, they had jukeboxes in them, and you went in the club--it wasn't like it is
now, you didn't hear loud music. We had booths, people sat in booths, and you couldn't hear
the people in the booth behind you. They played the music low, so people wouldn't be
whooping and hollering. And you never heard any profanity used from your table! If anybody
was using it, it was at the table whatever (laughing). If anyone came in the clubs that were--
Like, ok, you had joints, you know, where people went in and fought and done all that....But
you just didn't go out and hear all kind of stuff that you hear now.

Here Ruby is at pains to dispel the racist stereotype of Beale Street clubs as necessarily
rowdy dens of iniquity. (Stories about Beale in the 1920s generally focus on murder,
gambling, and prostitution as much as on music and to a much greater extent than on
other businesses. [McKee and Chisenhall 1993]) As she continues, her descriptions of
patrons' clothing echo this concern to dispel racist ideas of black people as dirty or
slovenly. She also gives us an image of the "cohesiveness and community of the separate
city," in which segregation has rendered class nearly irrelevant, if not invisible, and race
ceases to be an issue because nearly everyone is black.

And people dressed up to go to clubs. It's not like—we didn't go to clubs in blue jeans and t-shirts (laughing). We had "after-fives", as we called them, you were dressed up. The black people on Beale Street dressed up and went to clubs. You usually could identify men from women (almost laughing). The men were clean, and women were—you went in your heels and your dresses and all, and you went to the movies. If you were going out you were really going out in style—you didn't go out with your work clothes on, as we would consider. What you wore to work, you didn't wear it out to clubs. You went out to clubs and sat there very quietly—some of the finer clubs, Nudies (?) was on Hernando—you would go to clubs like Nudie's and you'd listen to jazz music. The Four-way Grill always has been a favorite spot. Four-way Grill is right near Lemoyne-Owens College, and so it was mostly, college students went there a lot, and the whole neighborhood went there, because they always had fine food. And you would go from the back and into the back, is what we would call back then, the Blue Room. You went in the Blue Room. And you had dinner, or you listened to music, your favorite kind of music, most of the time at that time, the early 50s, was jazz. And everybody that was somebody (laughs) would always go there. Actually, you didn't know whether you had a white collar job or you was a dishwasher, because when you went out everybody dressed the same. They dressed up. And whether you was a farmer, or a politician. But you couldn't identify, and people didn't really make that an issue.

Ruby may also be contrasting club dress in the 1950s with what she might consider to be my expectations of club dress now, so that descriptions of people dressing up to go out differs not just from racist ideas of the fifties but from my own practice of going to shows in the same jeans and t-shirt that I wear on Saturdays and even, sometimes, when interviewing. Nor is this historical distinction unraced, in my limited experience: the 1994 African-American patrons going to hear r & b at Willie Mitchell's club or at the Ritz, on
the "black end" of the new Beale, wore fancy beaded dresses and sharp elegant suits, while
the white patrons of the New Daisy's alternative and punk acts wore ripped jeans and
flannel shirts.

Once again, I raised the question of dancing, asking this time which clubs were for
dancing.

They all were for dancing, they all were, except the Palace Theater. Curry's was on the north
side, and the Flamingo was on Hernando upstairs, Hernando at Beale, and the Hippodrome
on Beale across what is now Danny Thomas. And it's no longer there. Either one of those
places is no longer--neither of those places really. Actually the most famous clubs, famous
places that were downtown, on Beale Street, the clubs are not there any more. Curry's is on
Thomas, on the north side, across Chelsea. And it is still there but is not in operation.

And then you had--theaters, back then, brought in a lot of groups, and a lot of
entertainment, such as the Handy Club that's on Park Avenue and Orange Mound. You could
go to, we went out there a lot. But there were no dancing there. We danced--now don't ask
me what kind of dancing we did because I don't know.

The Palace Theater, I knew from other conversations, was Memphis's version of Harlem's
Apollo Theater. It offered vaudeville performances into the 1950s--comedy acts, tap
dancing, melodramas, skits, scantily clad dancers--and local and national musical
performers. Every Wednesday was Amateur Night, where local musicians competed for a
five dollar prize and the attention of a very demanding audience. It was such an anchor of
Memphis black life that the emcee for Amateur Night, a local history teacher and journalist
named Nat D. Williams, was the logical and very popular choice to be the first black disk
jockey when WDIA went on the air in 1948. The Handy Theater out in Orange Mound
(different from the Club Handy on Beale, both of them named for WC Handy, the "father
of the blues") brought in nationally famous jazz acts, including Lionel Hampton and various big bands. So dancing was part of a much larger landscape of music and entertainment, but an important enough part of it that Ruby's first inclination is to say that dancing happened everywhere. And again, her memories of the wonderfulness of this scene are all the more vivid because of its subsequent disappearance.4

Most of the places that Ruby mentions were in the Beale Street area (the exceptions being Curry's Club Tropicana on the north side and the Handy Theater, in Orange Mound to the east), but she had said that she lived on the north side, some distance from Beale. I asked her how she got around, whether she or her cousins had a car.

I didn't need a car. We didn't have, cars was, people that had cars left cars at home, because we, it was, people never worried about where they were gonna park. Believe it or not, the transit system was better than it is now. The buses ran all night, till 3 o'clock in the morning. So you could get a bus--you didn't have to do anything--and buses went in all of the neighborhoods! So, didn't anybody, everybody rode the buses. To football games, to every function they had. You could be dressed up and ride the bus. We had trolleys. So the trolleys went all over the city. And people just--you could either ride a bus or you could walk if you wanted to. I mean, it was just, it was safe to walk anywhere, and people walked all over the city if they so desired and if the weather was right. And the buses ran every, probably, five or ten minutes, so all night long people could leave the movies at midnight and go to Beale and Main and catch the bus and go whichever wherever they were going. We actually didn't have

4It's hard for me to sort out in this instance how much of Ruby's specificity about geography is a response to my interest in figuring out the musical landscape--and because in general she had to educate me about this earlier era--and how much it is grief at the difference between then and now.
to be bothered by a bus, only if you wanted—it was a bad night, and cabs—you could catch a


cab anywhere, there were cabstands all up and down the street.

To me, this was the most striking difference yet between Ruby’s experiences of Memphis

and mine. I drove everywhere, partly because three years of living in Houston had

renewed the unthinking dependence on the automobile I had grown up with but which two

years of Chicago’s fabulous public transportation had seemingly dispelled. Partly, too, I

was not used to the heat of much of the year in Memphis, and I’m relatively lazy. And my

recent brush with violence still kept me too scared to walk much, though, because it had

happened in my house, it also led me to inwardly scoff at local Memphians who warned

me about walking in “bad” neighborhoods (including those adjoining my own). All of this,

plus funding from the Smithsonian to keep me in gasoline and auto insurance, added up to

driving nearly everywhere. And driving everywhere produced a very very different idea of

distances and architecture and human relationships than walking, as I learned the few

times I did ride a bicycle or take a stroll. I was interested though that Ruby’s mention of

streetcars remained only a comparison with Memphis’s current system, which is relatively

very inconvenient, without bringing her to any reflection on segregation in streetcars.

In contrast—perhaps because this was the subject of my project—reflection on a

particular club brought her right back to the complexities of segregation, this time on

Beale itself, and the fame of Memphis (appropriately musical rather than inappropriately

racial). I quote her at length, because she is eloquent and because the connections she

makes here are crucial to her statements about Beale Street and to my understandings of

crossover.
The Hippodrome—wow—was a wonderful club. The Hippodrome had, was owned by the Vescolas and some other people, but it was a skating rink turned into a club. You used to could skate—there were no dances there, you could [roller] skate. So it had, the Hippodrome was a large space, and brought in a lot of entertainers from all over the world. There was—I saw Ray Charles, Count Basie, Lionel Hampton—you name em, they came to the Hippodrome. They came to Memphis. Anybody with a big name, everybody with a big name came to Memphis at that time. The Hippodrome was a club where we all went and they all met at the Hippodrome. Like I said, socially it was all black, for black people, but there were, well mostly there were white owners so you would see their families there, and politicians. People could go. It wasn't no such thing that you can't go because you white. You know. But they just didn't do that. And so it was like the same way at the Palace Theater....When a show came to the Palace Theater they had two shows, one for whites and one for blacks.... After the civil rights movement it became better in so many ways. It's on the books as a law, but people seem to segregate themselves. Memphis was, you know, white people just didn't go where they knew that they weren't wanted. So that it was sometimes that—cause people worked together, always worked together, and people always had relationships on the job, you know, regardless of race. I think there has always been, even way before my time. And some people are gonna always have conflicts with another other race, because that's the mentality that they have.

In the fifties, we were segregated. (she's preaching now)

We had our own clubs.

And it was enjoyable, you know

Didn't nobody bother us,

the police didn't bother you on Beale Street.

There was a lot of police harassment, though, especially just as the civil rights movement started because, you know, the civil rights movement started in the late fifties. You know, Memphis was a
target city, you know, with as many black people as it was, and it's close to Mississippi.

But we didn't have no reason to wanna go to the white clubs--because we always felt like the white clubs too dull for us, anyway! (laughing) So we didn't want to go anyway, when I was coming on, cause we enjoyed Curry's, the Flamingo, the Hippodrome, and wherever else we wanted to go, Club Paradise when it opened. So. It was fun being among yourselves, you know. It didn't matter to us. It seemed that they wanted more to come to our clubs because it was lively. And I think, and I will always feel that Beale Street was demolished because of the civil rights. It was because the mix, they didn't want mixing, the races to mix in clubs together--but you can't stop progress. It was just a dumb move.

In the interview itself, and on first transcribing it, I truly balked at the phrase "it was enjoyable." I thought that Ruby was saying that segregation was fun, which seemed crazy to me and unlike what I knew of Ruby's other opinions. But--call me slow--I finally figured out that "it" refers to the vital black community, to the statement "we had our own clubs." And she argues, and I agree with her, that this vitality attracted white Memphians, and was part of the civil rights agitation. Whether the mixing itself or the mixing in the context of the protests finally inspired the city to implement longstanding plans for urban renewal is hard to distinguish at this point. Another Memphian, white producer Jim Dickinson, told the Smithsonian interviewers that "they took every building that saw Martin Luther King." This feels accurate on many levels--geographically, politically, emotionally--and Ruby educated me to see that the infernal logic connecting the destruction of the music and of the community with the destruction of the buildings. Clearly she could imagine a kind of integration based on a strong black culture that was intolerable to the politicians.
At one point in my research, I went with various other Smithsonian workers to look at a collection of historical photographs. The Hooks Brothers Photography Studio had been on Vance near Beale for forty years, and the African-American photographers had taken pictures of every conceivable aspect of community life. They also ran a photography school out of their Vance location. Along with hundreds of formal photos (men's clubs, women's clubs, schoolchildren, individuals, etc.) there were candid shots of various kinds, including pictures of the neighborhood around the studio. One series, perhaps by the Hooks Brothers themselves, perhaps a photography school assignment, documents the construction of a new building down the street, an insurance company. It shows the new building taking shape in a vital neighborhood of houses and small businesses, the trucks maneuvering around parked cars, the new building's modern sleekness standing out from the older styles of its surroundings, pedestrians stopping to watch the workers' progress, and various traffic getting in the way of the photographer. I noticed these pictures because of my interest in everyday life, and I tried to figure out whether I had been by that street. We were looking at the photographs on Second Avenue right near Beale, so I decided to drive home by way of Vance to see if I recognized anything.

What I saw made me cry. The new building was there, looking almost exactly as it did in the photographs. It was easy to find because literally everything else was gone. Everything. I had driven past these vacant lots—they are like lawns—often enough before, on my way to Beale or downtown, and I had registered the oddity and general sadness that there was such emptiness in what should have been a built-up part of the city. I even
knew, intellectually, the irony that this exemplified "urban renewal." But going from the photographs of a bustling neighborhood directly to nothingness showed me this space as loss, as absence, as violence.

Earlier, I had taken Ruby home from work one day, and talking about Beale had made her cry. For her, the tears were of rage as much as of pain. In our interview, she put this into words--again, she started preaching.

Well, but you know, it was real beautiful back then. And it's kind of sad to know that the young people, it's sad now that they don't know what it's all about and that they won't get a chance to see the things that we have lived through. Because Beale Street, as a whole, it's, they're missing a lot of history. What they did, was, they tore down history. You can't--When you tear down buildings such as the Palace Theater and somebody comes along and you got a plaque sticking up there, and you say What was the Palace Theater? I think it's the most ridiculous thing that they could have done in Memphis was throw out history. All along the street it was something that told about some--even if it would be the same identical, like if they would take the sign down from Auction Street and say there was never a slavery auction there. And the people of Memphis were so narrowminded that they tore their history down. You can't rebuild history, whether it was good or bad. I don't think that it should have been torn down the way that they did, and then stick a plaque up and say "this is where Dr. Smith..." Or whoever.

LH: I was really shocked that they’d torn down Stax, actually.

RH: Yeah. Same as Stax. They tore it down. (preaching)

First of all, the city of Memphis and its so-called leaders I'm gon' say this
And you can print it.

Cause I don't care.

Because they need to know

how the majority of Memphians think.

There is a certain group of people in Memphis

that they cater to

and that they want to listen at what they say --They don't

listen at the majority of what the Memphians have to say and what the majority of

Memphians feel.

There's a set group that gets up there

And say We don't need this or We don't need that.

We as voters

should have more voice than we have.

And they need to contact us.

That's what happened to Beale Street.

And I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

But that is what happened to Beale Street.

And Beale Street will never

never

as long as Memphis will be Memphis

will be the same as it once was,

because they tore the whole place down.

They took the heart out of it.

You can't rebuild history. It was the most dumbest, the most stupid thing that they ever done

to the city of Memphis. One of, which they always doing something dumb.
And you can print it.

Cause I don't care.

Because they need to know

how the majority of Memphians think.

There is a certain group of people in Memphis

that they cater to

and that they want to listen at what they say -- They don't

listen at the majority of what the Memphians have to say and what the majority of

Memphians feel.

There's a set group that gets up there

And say We don't need this or We don't need that.

We as voters

should have more voice than we have.

And they need to contact us.

That's what happened to Beale Street.

And I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

But that is what happened to Beale Street.

And Beale Street will never

never

as long as Memphis will be Memphis

will be the same as it once was,

because they tore the whole place down.

They took the heart out of it.

You can't rebuild history. It was the most dumbest, the most stupid thing that they ever
done

to the city of Memphis. One of, which they always doing something dumb.
So (laughs) be it great or small.

They did it,

and it won't never be the same.

They can't put those buildings back.

LH: It must have been awful when they did it.

RH: It was. It was awful. It was awful.
BETTYE BERGER

I first met Bettye when I visited Memphis just after the devastating ice storm of 1994, but I had listened to the Smithsonian curators' 1992 interview with her well before that. She has an extraordinary voice—low, warm, a little breathy, with a hint of a laugh—and an impeccable sense of comic timing that can turn the most mundane statement into a joke, sometimes at her own expense. She flirts outrageously, often, ironically, to cope with sexism but equally as a strategy to outwit anger.¹ All in all it was like gaining an audience with a movie star, except that suddenly we were friends.

In my interview with her and the Smithsonian interview, both of which I draw on here, we interviewers were trying to do two slightly different things: to learn from her about Memphis music and social change in the 1950s, and to learn about her life specifically, in particular how she had managed to do so many different and interesting things in music. I almost didn't interview her at all, because my focus was supposed to be on ordinary Memphians and she felt too much like someone in the industry. But I changed my mind because I was trying to understand links between radio and listeners, because she was one of the only women in the industry, and (once I met her) because even her fans consistently think she is interesting because of the famous men she has been associated

¹One aspect of her style is that she rarely tells all the details in a story, preferring to keep some mystery about it and, perhaps, some control. Although I did push her for more information at times, and although I do tell her story more baldly than she does, I do try to honor her strategies. They do, after all, fit in with my own sense that a total life history is invasive and impossible, and my own argument throughout this dissertation that knowledge is always partial and from a particular position.
with and I think she is interesting in herself.

It is nonetheless true that many of the unexpected turns in her life, especially those regarding music, have happened through her relationships, good or bad, with men. To summarize in a distinctly un-Bettye sort of way: She moved to Memphis to work but stayed because she married; she inadvertently got into radio when she needed a job after the modeling job which ended her marriage itself ended; she met her second husband when she went to his nightclub, and after marriage started working at the club and looking after his jukebox route; she ended up running a booking agency finding other jobs for the African-American musicians who played the club (as well as other musicians); one artist she booked was the pianist Ivory Joe Hunter, whose manager she became and whose musical estate she now manages. For all the doors that opened to her because of beauty or character or luck or love, there were many times that these men and others ignored or ridiculed her simply for being a woman. It sometimes seemed that Bettye was using the interviews in almost the same way as the interviewers, as a forum in which to sort out her life, to understand how she had gotten to this point. From our many informal conversations, I know that she still struggles with deep anger and frustration at these battles, and that she would have welcomed a feminist movement years before it came. I think it is from this history of unspoken anger that she was able to see the black musicians she worked with as people, and eventually as friends.

Few of Bettye's subsequent adventures could have been predicted from her quiet upbringing on her family's small farm in rural Tennessee, outside Trenton and Decaturville. Along with all the farm work, there was some time for leisure, but nothing fancy to do.
Along with horseback riding, playing in the woods, and romping with her siblings, she said,

BB: Well, you didn't have that much to do in a little small town. You had people over to your house if you had a party. And you played records, and you had lemonade, and that was what you would do on maybe a weekend, you know? And then you go to maybe a movie—that was always on a Saturday. And church on Sunday. That was just about all we had to do in those days.

Music was always part of this. Besides listening to records with guests, the family sang in Baptist church.

They played the old, old-fashioned—when I say old-fashioned, when I'd go to church after that and I didn't hear any of those old Baptist songs I didn't, I couldn't, I didn't relate to them as much. And—it's the old spirituals that you hear, some of these recordings today, but I don't think they sing the same ones. I know that my aunt used to sing a lot of the church songs that I now hear that I didn't even know existed. And she died at 93, about five years ago. And she was one of the influences in my lifetime, I think, a good, good, upper person with a smile and—she and her husband were married seventy years, and never, I never, I'd go to visit them on a weekend and they never had a, I never saw them have a fight, not even an argument!

As with Ruby, music and church are connected to family for Bettie, but interestingly, here it is a specific marriage that she remembers rather than a community of music makers. She also, occasionally, went to church with her grandmother, who was a Primitive Baptist, and not only saw them wash each others' feet ("I never did understand that") but heard the congregation sing in the powerful sacred harp style.²

²Rather than preaching or testifying in spoken words, singing is the main activity of the Primitive Baptists. The entire congregation sings, full out, in traditional Baptist hymn structures but with singers choosing harmony lines on their own instead of singing in
Along with the records they would play at parties, Bettye and her sisters and brothers would listen to the radio. Her father, especially, liked the Grand Ol' Opry, which the family would listen to every Saturday night. There were other sounds as well:

I listened to a couple of different kinds of music. On Sunday we would listen to gospel, which I enjoyed very much. And through the week I would listen to my radio, and I would listen to the black music which was coming out of Nashville. And at night you could pick up more stations. And you could pick up loud and clear in the nighttime, from WLAC I believe.

WLAC out of Nashville was white owned, with white disk jockeys, but they played a lot of rhythm and blues, especially late at night when their signal went all across the eastern part of the country. Any number of people, black and white, have told me how important this radio station was in their education about music and the world, and they can still name particular disk jockeys and quote the ad for Randy's Record Shop.\(^3\) At some point, Bettye's older sisters taught her how to dance. There were clubs nearby which they would go to, all dolled up in nice dresses, and they would teach Bettye the dances at home.

unison with others in their range. One effect of this is that the congregation sets up a hypnotizing drone, since there are relatively few chords used and several share notes. For example, one alto singer might be singing a D in one chord; another alto singer might be singing an F# in that chord but a D in the very next chord. To a listener, it would sound as if the D continued unabated, although the first singer in fact had moved off of it. Also the rhythm is basically a thumping 4/4, with all voices generally moving at the same time in quarter notes, so the passion and power is generally carried by the combination of lyrics, melody, chord progressions and sheer volume. (Ethnomusicologist Lisa Carol Hardaway, in personal communication and also as my guide to a daylong Primitive Baptist singing convention.)

\(^3\)White blues singer (and anthropologist!) Sid Selvidge grew up in Greenwood, Mississippi, listening to blues singers on WLAC. He knew they were Chicago blues singers, but not until after he had left Greenwood did he find out that they too were from Mississippi, some practically from his own back yard. But he had to learn guitar from them via the radio. (conversation)
And Bettye had an odd kind of access to local black peoples' music as well: eavesdropping.

Oh yeah, you would find a little black church—sometimes we would go, we would sneak, my cousins and I? And go to the country black church, on Sunday night, and sit outside the window just to listen to them singing.

This fit in uncertainly with local practices of segregation, which said that sometimes it was acceptable for young children to play together. Not that the rules were entirely consistent.

Growing up, and living out in the country, we had some neighbors when I was like 10, and they had children aged—I had sisters older and younger than me—and we would play together sometimes. But on Sunday, somehow we knew not to. We went to different churches, and when we came home, we had a cousin, relatives came over, you know

LH: a family day

BB: Yeah, it was a day you did not go play with the blacks, because that was just the sort of thing you took for granted, didn't question it.

So in contradiction to regular children's play, the separate churches and the weekly social distance afterwards gave Bettye a sense that "the blacks" were somehow different. This was never actually spoken, though.

Other expectations about Bettye's life were also unspoken but powerful. There was no question, for example, about what she would do when she grew up.

I would play with my cousins and we would pretend to be grown ups. And we would play mothers and we'd get our dolls. And we would do what our mothers did. We would cook, and we would rock our babies. And that was sort of like, it was just a known fact that you'd marry and have a family, and take care of and cook for your husband—even if you have a cook you cook for your husband [laughter] and children and that's what you do.
Although this assumption translated into middleclass gender roles for Bettye's siblings, it seems that their mother's life had a different rhythm, that of running a farm. Her work was as respected and as economically crucial and as hard as her husband's, and this meant that Bettye also got the message that her own work was worth something.

At any rate, both the racial and the domestic expectations worked out differently in Memphis. Bettye went there when she was 17, to work at the soda fountain of the Whiteway Pharmacy. Because she moved at the age that she would have had to stop playing with the black neighbors anyway, the social change associated with age got mapped onto geography instead.

[Memphis was a] total different life, white church, white restaurants, white theaters, everywhere we went was white only and I didn't think anything about it. That's just the way it was. So my life was totally changed. But seeing the music, and hearing the music coming on the radio, it didn't make any difference what color they were, it just made me feel good.

So although Bettye felt the loss of her black playmates, the powerful normality of racial exclusion in her new life plus the ongoing presence of black music meant that she didn't question the changes. It was odd for me to hear the juxtaposition of the phrase "everywhere we went was white" with "I didn't think anything about it," because in my own upbringing, white people were never identified as such. Part of whiteness was not thinking about it. I think this was partly true in postwar Memphis, but on the other hand, under legal segregation there were also explicit signs saying "Whites Only." At any rate, I

---

4Incredibly, that is its real name. It is still there. Also incredibly, during my fieldwork there was at least briefly a black r & b band called The Whiteway Band, named that because it was their meeting place and hangout.
think that it was both Bettye's later experiences and my specific questions which enabled her to both express the normality of segregation and recognize it as exclusive. In this context, the statement that when it came to music "it didn't make any difference what color they were" is a radical one.

Initially, her love life seemed to go exactly as it was supposed to go.

I came to Memphis when I was seventeen to visit my sister who lived here. And I met this handsome man who just was incredibly beautiful and handsome and older than I, and we had a fabulous romance and we married. All the family was saying, well what does she know. What does she know. And you know they're still saying that! (laughs and laughs)

The story of their meeting reveals the importance of family connections, both between Memphis and Decaturville and within Memphis:

LH: Where did you meet him?

BB: (deadpan) At lunch.

LH: You met him at lunch?!

BB: At a family restaurant, near where my sister lived, and people went there for lunch that lived in the neighborhood, and the man who owned the place was a friend, and he introduced me to him, and he asked me out to dinner, and that was that.

What is left out of these stories but became clear later is that Bettye, voluptuous and blonde and flirty and smart, had also started working as a model. But she stopped working when she got married, they bought a new house in a new North Memphis development (her husband's drycleaning business was beginning to take off),

...And we had three lovely children. And at that time my dream was to have a white house with a baby, pushing it in a basket, little stroller. And I had that, and it was lovely, it lasted eight years, eight wonderful years.
But Bettye wanted to go back to work, one way or another. And she did go back to work, and she tried to explain this to her husband, but he couldn't understand it.

...when I started modeling, my husband resented me being, doing anything professionally. And so he just said, 'stop modeling or we will get divorced.' And I thought he was kidding but he wasn't and then—we got a divorce! And it was very shocking to me even. Because my family were devastated, because you didn't do that in those days. And how do you think, you know, you're going to be able to work and take care of house and job at the same time—that was totally unheard of. And I had a very good husband, very good father to the children. And so that was helpful, for me to work and he had the children on the weekends, in the summers. And so that was very, very helpful to me. At that time it was unheard of. They had no child care like they do now. I had a maid live in. And so I knew that I had to hustle, and work. So I called Sam Phillips. Cold. 

This is one of the amazing turns in Bettye's story. When the desire to work became the necessity for work, she thought big and called the most powerful person she knew about.

At this point, Sam Phillips was already known for discovering Elvis and Jerry Lee Lewis and Johnny Cash and other white musicians (and for less successfully recording black musicians before that), but he was perhaps even better known around town as an investor and entrepreneur. Besides his own Sun Recording Services, a recording studio, he had invested in Kemmons Wilson's fledgling Holiday Inns and a radio station. In looking for a

---

5From other conversations, I know that this maid was white.

6Well, I called him up. It was, I had been modelling. My girlfriend and I had just gotten a house together to share—she had a little boy and I had three. At that time, women didn't work. We were doing, at that time, modelling, the agency was doing real well, that we were working for, and we were making good money. But then it died off, and the agency, the lady that had the agency left, closed her doors—she was tired of it. Fell in love, I think, and got married, but that left us without work. And so, I called Sam. I said, there's this guy Sam Phillips, he has this all-girl radio station.
gimmick, an edge, for this station, he apparently considered all-black programming, but by the time he got the paperwork underway both WDIA and disk jockey Dewey Phillips (on WHBQ) had cornered that idea. His second idea was to create a station with only women as disc jockeys and sales staff—WHER, "a thousand beautiful watts."7 It may have started out as a joke, but it offered Bettye and other women real work. Of course, Bettye had her own reasons for calling Sam.

I knew he had started the all-girl station. I wasn’t calling about a job at the station, I wanted to open a business of my very own in the Peabody Hotel. And have very unusual designer clothes for men. And have models to be the salesgirls and give the man a martini when he walked in. I was ahead of my time....But Sam listened to my idea and he very cordially and very patiently took me to his office, which was next door at the Ferguson’s Cafe....And Sam told my friend and I, who was also a model, that he would think about the deal and get back with me. Well, he called me two days later and offered me a job, at the radio station. And he asked me would I come up to the station and he would take me, up to the studio rather. And he would take to me over to WHER and introduce me to Dotty Abbott who was the manager. So I did, and I’ll never forget how huge this blue, iridescent blue Eldorado convertible was, with the top down, in 1957. And he drove me over to WHER and it was like walking into a fantasy land. Everything was pink and purple. And I loved the girls at that time that worked there.... So it was fun, it was like going to a party every day.

One of the effects of Bettye’s glamor for me is that Sam Phillips, an internationally famous man, gains extra interest from being associated with Bettye. Bettye, being more practical and having less of a sense of her own power (especially at that time) doesn’t quite see it.

7Thanks go to Charlie McGovern and his interns for ferreting this information out of the FCC archives.
this way.

You know, when I first met him I thought, Oh my gosh, you know, he was very handsome. And he listened to me. And you know no one listened to, I was barely a woman then, but no one listened! You're female, they're just not listening. So he listened, and that is something that I will always appreciate.

She emphasizes that the work at the station was for real, not only being on the air but also selling advertising, which was actually her first job at the station.

I mean though you weren't a prima donna at the station; we were our own engineers. We had to go take an engineer's test to get our license....And it was fun, it was fun playing the music.

To play the music would probably be, to me, what a performer feels. You have your fans out there and they listen to you every day. And they call you up and they think you're playing the music especially for them. And it was--we would do our own logs, we typed up, we did you know our own engineering like I said, log in the music, log in the commercials and-- we were warned to do the commercials on time and to log them on time.

On top of learning a new job, Bettye had to deal with sexism, which she characteristically both makes a joke of, partly at her own expense, and turned to her own advantage as a saleswoman.

We messed up a lot, I mean we messed up, unbelievable. Sometimes we would get a call saying someone had run over a telephone pole [laughing] because one of the girls had made such a fabulous mistake in the news. So--We took it in our stride and we knew we were new at it, and so we didn't allow that to--today it might be quite different, but then it was, it was hard when you would go out to sell and you'd be sitting in an advertising agency. And everybody in there are TV salesmen and radio salesmen in their shirt and ties and you're the
only woman in there with a briefcase. And they look at you like you were dead meat. But the head of the advertising agency would always be a southern gentleman and said let the lady come in first. They may not buy anything but the lady didn't have to wait as long.

Here, vividly, are the two sides of sexism: a sales representative regarded as "dead meat" because she is a woman, but getting into the door first because the client, a southern gentleman, lets ladies go first.

When she did get on the air, Bettye was playing some music she liked and some she didn't. It was pop music rather than the rock & roll and r & b that were revolutionizing local radio at the time, which meant it was actually much more typical of radio offerings in the city.

We played easy listening, which was listed, categorized that at that time, I don't know if it still is or not in Billboard, the trades. We played a lot of--I remember Frankie Laine, I didn't care for him that much but I did play "Mule Train" a lot because the firemen at the station would call me at the fire station and request that song....I remember how I used to play that on Sunday afternoon and for a request. And we played--my favorites were people like, like I said, like Dinah Washington... Nat King Cole...

Thus her favorite music on the station was still made by African-Americans, although she herself doesn't identify them racially. She didn't listen to her own station when she wasn't working, though.

I mean I would have to admit when I left the station I turned on to rock and roll. Because we didn't play rock and roll at the station. I enjoyed the music we played, but I liked to get the rock and roll when I left the station so I turned over to Dewey Phillips perhaps.

When she was working, she paid some attention to what her listeners requested--the firemen asking for "Mule Train," for example--but she adopted or at least claims an
entirely personal method of deciding which records to play.

Oh, you would program show to how your love affair was going at the time. If you were having—if everything was good, you played the love songs. And if everything was bad, you played the sad songs. And if you had seen your fella that day—there was one particular song I would play, "Guess who I saw today?" And I'd play that [laughing]. And so all the girls knew how your affair was going, you didn't have to tell each other about it, you programmed your music [laughing]. And that was fun, that was fun. Expressing, you know, your anger or your—like I was dating my husband at that time, at one time. And he called up and said, "What are you doing today, besides driving men crazy?" And then I played "Oh you're driving me crazy." And I loved doing things like that, you know, like playing back what someone might have said to me.

Thus Bettye shows the interplay between three factors influencing what went out over the air on 1950s radio—listener requests and support, the official style of the station, and the disk jockey's personal tastes. Although it wasn't her favorite kind of music, the love found, love in trouble, love lost pop songs on WHER's playlist harmonized well enough with her life that Bettye could turn even disk jockeying into another form of flirtation. Put another way, she found a way to make a particular style of femininity work for her both personally and financially, earning respect in a place that would just have easily dismissed or ridiculed her.

One of the people Bettye went out with because she was working at the station was Elvis Presley. She had become quite a public figure, not only continuing modelling but also appearing at parades and fairs and supermarket openings to represent the station. She was also trying her hand at songwriting. All of this comes together in her story about her first date with Elvis, in which she very subtly makes the point to the Smithsonian
interviewers that she was a person to be reckoned with herself at that point, although Elvis did add some glory. As with my reaction to her story about calling Sam Phillips, with this story I can't help feeling that Elvis himself gains interest through proximity to Bettye.

I met him in 1957, the fall of '57. I had to gone to work at that time for WHER, the all-girl radio station which was very very popular at that time. Because at that time there wasn't any women in radio to speak of at all. And we were getting a lot of attention from around the world actually, even though we were only "1000 beautiful watts." And I did a television commercial on a local station for Dewey Phillips who had a TV show, locally, and I did a commercial for Honeysuckle Corn Meal. I had to take some corn sticks out on the camera and talk about Honeysuckle Corn Meal. And Elvis called to find out who I was. And when I got back to the station, the girls said, "Elvis has called you." And I was scared to death because I thought I was going to get fired because I had done a television commercial. Because my boss, Dotty Abbot--TV was a no-no, at that time. So, I thought they were, you know, just pulling me, my chain. They said--so the phone rings and they says it's him. I picked the phone up and said, "Hello" and he said "B-B-B-Bettye." And that familiar voice, I did know it was him for sure. He had, at this time, he had just finished making his first movie. And he was known worldwide at that time. And he asked me what I--he invited me to come to his house that evening. And I had written a song, my first song I had ever written was being recorded that night at Sun. Well to me that was the most top priority of my life, to be at the station, I mean at the studio, recording studio, 706 Union, when my song was being recorded by a man by the name of Buddy Blake on the Sun label. So I told Elvis I couldn't make it. A couple of the girls fell on the floor, and he kind of laughed and he said, "Well, you won't be there all night will you?"

And I said, "Oh no, we finish at 11:30."

He said, "Well could I pick you up? I'll bring friends with us, we'll be escorted, at 11:30."

And I said, "No, that would be too late." I had to be at work at 8:30 in the morning, I didn't
know Elvis's hours at that time. So he said, "Well, I'll bring you back whenever you're ready." And so he came, with his entourage. And Dewey Phillips, who had a radio show which ended at midnight, called and asked me to come on up to the station, Elvis was picking us up there. So a friend was with me, a girlfriend, Brenda....and we went up to the station and--I was very tired. I had worked all day, I had gone to the station and I went in and got in a lounge chair and fell asleep. And I woke up and Elvis was standing over me with his entourage, and Dewey saying, "Here is this birdbrain. All the women in the world would like to have a date with Presley and she's sleeping." So I looked up and smiled and Elvis looked at me and smiled and he said, "Do you like hamburgers?" And he pulled me up and shook hands with me and I said, "Yes. I love hamburgers."

He said, "With onions?"

And I said, "Yes."

Bettye's initial impression of Elvis was that he was "greasy," but this encounter with him proved her wrong. She ended up terming him "a gentleman." Similarly, she was worried about going to a local nightclub, the Plantation Inn.

I had told my girlfriend the day before, not to go to the Plantation Inn, that wasn't a nice place. But I was all wrong, I mean it was. After I went the first time I enjoyed it immensely. And I went back just about every night that I could go.

The Plantation Inn, across the river in Arkansas, featured some of the best black bands in the city; all of the patrons were white. It is hard to tell whether Bettye's worry was racially inflected, the way her worry about Elvis seems to be about class, or whether it was the intensity of live music itself that seemed alarming. When asked what clubs she frequented, Bettye pointed to radio as more crucial to her everyday experience of music in the 1950s.
The Hippodrome was one. And they had places that we went to hear the music on the radio, the drive-ins? Oh, there was some fabulous drive-ins like the Fortunes Jungle Garden, and the Pig and Whistle. Everybody would drive up in their convertibles and turn Dewey on and order your onion rings and your cokes and have a, you know, a party there in the parking lot at the drive in. The clubs--I didn't go to any clubs to speak of, I did go to the Hippodrome, other than when I went over across the bridge to the Plantation Inn.

Thus both driving and listening to the radio, often criticized as atomizing expressions of individualism, also could form the basis of a social community, turning a parking lot into a club. On the other hand, it was a community built on exclusion. Joan Russell, another white woman I interviewed, pointed out to me that all the carhops at the drive-ins were black men, contrary to movie stereotypes of sexy young white women on rollerskates.

The image of the drive-in was of wholesome good fun, without the danger implicit at the club. Part of this worry could be that alcohol was known to flow more freely in Arkansas, but it seems more than possible that the greater agency of black musicians and the more explicit sexuality of live music, gave the club its bad reputation. As with Elvis, this explanation leaves unresolved how Bettye came to decide that her worry was unfounded. "Oh, Bettye, it's more fun!" cried her roommate. Was it fun precisely for the reasons that created the worry? Or in rebuttal of them?

This racial question is also interwoven with the technical question of mobility. At another point, I asked Bettye how she got around. "Oh, everybody drove," she said. "You pretty much had to." Thus Bettye's geography and sense of what was normal differs radically from Ruby's--is this a question of race or of class, or perhaps of the strange conjunction of these in the concentration of black establishments in the Beale
neighborhood? At any rate, young white Memphians lived in an active car culture, which
didn't necessarily preclude walking (as I found out from other informants) a great deal;
meanwhile, young black Memphians walked, rode the streetcar, or took cabs. Gloria
Wade-Gayles adds complexity to this puzzle, remembering how she so dreaded the hateful
gazes of white streetcar passengers and the humiliations inflicted by drivers and seating
patterns that she nearly always walked.

So Bettye not only started frequenting the Plantation Inn, she actually fell in love
with and married the owners' son. This involved not only a quantum leap in class--
suddenly she was living among people with clothing budgets, black maids, marital spats
resulting in trips to Miami, and so forth--but a move across the river to a big house in
West Memphis. In short order, she was actually working at the club.

Well, I would oversee the door, which, to get in was two-fifty, then, a person, and sometimes
we'd have like maybe a thousand to two thousand people. And then I'd oversee the cash
register for the waiters who were, or the person who was taking care of the money, I'd have
to go and get it, and count it, and see that everything was straight there, and then someone
would say, "You can't let so-and-so in the Plantation Inn tonight because he was here last
week and he started a fight." And it would be maybe one of my best friends. And I would
have to tell him that. And he's still my best friend! (laughs) A very nice man, who's been
very successful.

She also ended up looking after her husband's jukebox routes: he paid her by simply giving
her the money for a clothing allowance.

My husband had several jukeboxes. He had a drive-in restaurant, the club the Plantation,
plus he had jukeboxes in other restaurants in West Memphis. And he would ask me to go
over and buy the little 45s to go on the jukeboxes. And I'd say, "What do I buy?" And he'd
say, "Look in the charts, and see what's at the top ten, and get them, and then you listen to see what you like." So I'd go over to Pop Tunes and buy the juke-, the records for the jukeboxes, for him, a lot. And I enjoyed that.

This is further evidence of the personal nature of the connection between what musicians recorded and what listeners got to hear on the jukebox, and an indication of the circular nature of the process. The "top ten" charts compiled by the Poplar Tunes employees reflected sales and local play, and using it as a guide only confirmed that those records would be played more. Nonetheless, the jukebox operator still had to do a tremendous amount of work to stock the boxes and collect the money.

Bettye's father-in-law, Morris Berger, and her husband, Louis Jack, also did a certain amount of work in hiring the bands for the clubs. They cultivated networks of black musicians on Beale Street—mostly working through Willie Mitchell and Ben Branch, the most influential local bandleaders—and visited clubs often. This is how Bettye came to go to the Hippodrome, where she felt welcome but also very conscious of her whiteness.

BB: I used to come over here, to Memphis with my husband, and I'd say (exasperated) "Where are we going??"—always, always business—he would say "We're going to see a man named Ben Branch. He's black, and he knows about every musician from here to Chicago." So we went down on Beale, which was totally unheard of then, but with him I felt, it seemed like he could communicate with everybody. But he really couldn't that much, it was just that he was paying, he could make some money. I didn't like the way he treated, I didn't agree with the way he treated people.
LH: Was he condescending??

BB: Yeah. Yeah. So we went upstairs to this black club, and Ben Branch, he did know every musician. And he's lovely, he's gone down in history [as a civil rights leader]. And anyway, that was an experience, for me...

Bettye also became more aware of racial exclusion working at the club, where black waiters could be singers and vice versa, and the black musicians had to take their breaks in the kitchen or outside since fraternizing with the white audience was out of the question. Bettye describes this now with disbelief and sorrow, but also points out that at the time it was how things worked.

Despite the segregation of the audience from the musicians, Bettye got to know the musicians by working at the club; working as a jukebox operator, she got to know local tastes. And the dancers coming in to the Plantation Inn often wanted to replicate the experience back home: they wanted to hire the band. Somehow, Bettye became the broker between these interests, the booking agent for the Plantation Inn bands and for others as well.

While at the Plantation, we had a lot of college kids that would come to Plantation Inn, from Ole Miss, Arkansas State, and even the University of Arkansas, which is three hundred and something miles. And they would want to book our band. We may have had two or three different bands now. But we had one singer, that if anyone went over there and saw him, they never ever forgot him. His name was Charles, Charlie [Turner]. The colleges in the meantime would want to book the band and Charlie into maybe their sorority or fraternity, and that's how I started.

CM: And you started your own agency after awhile?
BB: Yeah, it was some years after that. I went back to radio, after I got divorced, came back to Memphis, and I worked at the station for awhile, and then I still was booking, I ran into people who wanted to book something and then I would book it....[I joined another agency first,] And they were booking, he was booking them all over the southern part and of course Texas, and I asked him one day, "Why don't you book colleges?" and he says, "Why don't you book colleges." So I went over to Arkansas State and called on them directly. And from then on I booked their college, all of their concerts.

This work led her to work closely with numerous big-name musicians, both black and white, including Charlie Rich, Al Green, and Rufus and Carla Thomas. Eventually she also became the manager for Ivory Joe Hunter, a black pianist from Texas whose music (his most famous song being "Since I Met You Baby") embodies crossover, his songs scoring hits in pop, country, and r & b from the 1940s on. He and Bettye became close friends—kindred spirits this time, not flirting or romance—and he left her his music when he died.

This friendship brought her great joy; it also brought her back up against the murky racism of her family.

BB: I know later on, one of the most crushing and hurting things that happened to me about that was—I had a show booked up at the University of Tennessee, in Martin, Tennessee, and was up near my mom and dad's house. I had, I was going to the show, and I had a couple of the artists with me, which Ivory Joe was one of them. And then I had the girl singer I was telling you about, Vaneece, and then somebody else, and I asked—my mom was one of the best country cooks in the world. And so I asked my mom and dad, they'd heard me talk about Ivory Joe, and of course they knew, dad knew some of his music, but I asked if we could come by and eat. And they said Sure, come on. And they loved it. But Daddy said later, I'd rather you not invite them again. I said, Daddy, why? I said, You met them. He said, Oh, I like them! I said, Then why? He said, Because of the neighbors. And that was that important
to him. And I never could understand that, when my mother use to say "Why did you stand
out there on the porch. Did that boy kiss you. Did you know that Mrs What's-her-name was
looking at you through the door over there?" And it is so good to have freedom and not just
give a damn.

LH: That reputation thing again.

BB: Yeah. And I said, Daddy—I cried. I literally literally cried, because Ivory Joe would tell
everybody, "I went to Bettye's mother and daddy's house, and her mother cooked fried
chicken, she cooked rolls, she cooked biscuits, she cooked cornbread"—and she did! And she
had a roast, and

LH: A feast!

BB: Yeah!

LH: And it really meant a lot to him that he'd been invited into your home.

BB: Yeah!

LH: Wow, that's heartbreaking.

BB: It broke my heart. He never did know, but then again I knew.

Although this all happened well after the 1950s, I am telling it because it indicates how far
from her upbringing Bettye had travelled in having a real friendship with a black man, and
how close she still was in her understanding of what friends do for each other. And Ivory
Joe clearly understood exactly how extraordinary and lovely her family's invitation was,
because with it they crossed a line from talking to socializing, or at least formally
acknowledged that crossing. In this telling, Bettye's joining of race and sexuality as
something the neighbors are (overly) interested in, and her rejection of the neighbors right
to say--her celebration of freedom--are for me linked to her discoveries that Elvis and the
Plantation Inn were fun. The fun really was dangerous, but not to Bettye.
LAURA HELPER

I turn to my own experience, as I find it impossible to address questions of race and urban experience without being explicit about my own positioning, and also because my experiences confront these issues in the most fundamental ways.

Anthropologists have lives before we ever go to the field, and, presumably, lives after, although ethnographies often avoid addressing the relation between these experiences and the questions we ask. As I write this dissertation and reflect upon my own fieldwork, I find that I have written my way back to the moment that I truly began to move through the terrain I now map in these chapters. Issues of race, pollution, and the city were literally forced onto my attention before my 1994 arrival in Memphis, the place I usually specify as "the field", and before I went to the Smithsonian in late 1993. At the beginning of September, 1992, a week into the school year in which I planned to write my qualifying papers on audiences, musicology, and race, a stranger broke into my apartment as I lay asleep one morning. He raped me, and left with my stereo. I am white; this rapist was black. At the time, of course, the field was far from my consciousness; I was concerned with survival. But in healing myself and bringing myself back into everyday life and work, I had to learn how to feel safe again, and it seemed obvious from the beginning that I had to figure out if race mattered here.

Even as I waited for a friend and the police to arrive that morning, I knew that statistically my experience was unusual, that rapists are rarely strangers and that white women are rarely attacked by black men. I knew, in short, that "the black rapist" was a
racist myth. Yet here I was, or rather, there he went. Intellectually I knew one set of things, but in life and with my body all I knew at first was sheer terror of everything, and no sense of the true order of things. So along with my deep feeling that I knew nothing about being safe, I had to reconcile my social knowledge with my personal experience. I am not saying that it mattered to me that he was black, but that I couldn't tell if it mattered. I understood from the beginning that the crucial issue was that this person had hurt me. But because I had only one black male friend and no colleagues or acquaintances--because this was practically my only encounter with a black man--I had to find out whether I thought black men in general would hurt me, and figure out then how to proceed.

It is important to say here that I never felt polluted by the rape or by the perpetrator. Terrified, yes, and fundamentally at risk for a very long time; and in the immediate aftermath, for the first time in my memory, I could neither read nor listen to music. For a long time I thought I had lost my work, and literally could not think about what that meant. Language itself was fully inadequate to describe anything that had happened, especially the fact that I was alive. The word "rape" itself, so inadequate for the experience, finally came to stand for loss—of safety, of trust, of, literally, my own space. Through work and music and friends and therapy, I healed these losses, although I would never say that I am the same person I was before, or that the rape meant nothing.

But pollution, shame, dishonor, or self-blame, all of these supposedly natural and all-too-common reactions to such an experience remained foreign to me. Looking back, I can see that I had inadvertently taken a crucial first step in confronting the myth and
reality of "the" black rapist. Feelings of pollution would have played right into the myth, which stereotypes white women as pure and fragile, pollutable, as much as it names black men as dirty and violent. Writing about it now feels to me like another confrontation of this dual myth. In the years since the attack, I have found that a number of women have explored the strange position of white women in this myth, and a number of white women themselves have written about their experiences in order to rethink both their own positioning and that of black men. On Beale Street I read a marker commemorating an African-American journalist I had vaguely heard of, Ida B. Wells: the marker said she had been run out of Memphis in the 1910s for speaking out against the lynching of black men, and I assumed that the lynchings came on the heels of accusations of rape. I learned later that she argued that the white women being defended had often been in consensual relationships with the black men in question; that white men in fact raped black women and even children and the law ignored it; and that in any case lynching was an unspeakable, illegal, unconstitutional, immoral, and inappropriate punishment for rape.8

8She also argued that even lynchers alleged rape only about a third of the time, the other attacks coming explicitly when white men perceived that black men were gaining too much power economically. Grant (1975) claims the number of lynchings having nothing to do with accusations of rape rose as high as eighty percent. He also writes that

The mythology that characterized the Black man as docile, submissive, and Christlike before and during the Civil War and then converted him into a ravening lecher by the 1890s had no difficulty accounting for the change. According to the ruling whites of the New South, the culprit was that source of all evils, Reconstruction. It had encouraged Black aspirations, had given Blacks a sense of political power, and had encouraged pretensions toward social equality.” The New South’s creed held that these Black pretensions had fortunately been thwarted by the return of democrats to power and that disappointed Blacks then took their frustrations out on white women. (1975: 10)

These two statements deconstruct the automatic equation of black men with violence, both by naming the issue as one of power and by being historically specific about the linkage.
(1969) This all made sense to me, but I wondered what happened to those white women who actually had suffered attacks. I read Gloria Wade-Gayle's memoir of growing up in Memphis in the 1940s and 1950s in one of the Negro housing projects. Among other things, she remembers the white men who would drive slowly through her neighborhood, looking for sex with black women. (1993) A friend sent me to Lillian Smith's *Killers of the Dream* (1994 [1949]), a mapping of the complex links between sexuality, racism, and violence in the south. Here I also read about how white middleclass churchwomen organized the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching in 1930:

> The lady insurrectionists gathered together in one of our southern cities. They primly called themselves church women but churches were forgotten by everybody when they spoke their revolutionary words. They said calmly that they were not afraid of being raped; as for their sacredness, they could take care of it themselves; they did not need the chivalry of a lynching to protect them and did not want it. Not only that, they continued, but they would personally do everything in their power to keep any Negro from being lynched and furthermore, they squeaked bravely, they had plenty of power.

> They had more than they knew. They had the power of spiritual blackmail over a large part of the white south....No one, of thousands of white men, had any notion how much or how little each woman knew about his private goings-on. Some who had never been guilty in act began to equate adolescent fantasies with reality, and there was confusion everywhere....Of course the demagogues would have loved to call them "Communists" or "bolsheviks," but how could they? The women were too prim and neat and sweet and ladylike and churchly in their activities, and too many of them were the wives of the most powerful men in town. Indeed, the ladies themselves hated the word "radical" and were quick to turn against anyone who dared go further than they in this housecleaning of Dixie.

This mention of communists reminded me not only of the language I was encountering in
Michael Honey's book on Memphis labor but also of my fragmentary knowledge of the trial of the Scottsboro Boys, nine young black men incarcerated in the 1930s for allegedly raping two white women. Communists had been among the few white people who initially and consistently spoke up for the young men, who were getting far from a fair trial. This reminded me, too, that the plot of one of my favorite books in the world, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, turns on the innocence of a black man accused of rape. I went back and looked it up: when the little girl Scout asks her gentle father Atticus what rape is, he answers that it is "unlawful carnal knowledge," which I didn't get and I assume Scout didn't either. Yet Atticus makes it clear to both Scout and the reader that the rape survivor is also a victim, not of the accused rapist but of poverty, of her violent father, and of a social system that cares about her only if she fills this particular fantasy role. (Lee 1960)⁹

I also read Alice Walker's story, "Advancing Luna--And Ida B. Wells" (1981), about a friendship between two women, one black, one white, both civil rights workers in Mississippi in the early 1960s; years later, the black narrator finds out that a black man had raped her friend. Her friend had said nothing at the time, knowing that local whites would have lynched the attacker. Although the story presents her dilemma in stark and chilling terms--and although this is the first acknowledgment I know of that sometimes, in fact,  

⁹As I write, I realize that the victim's father, who also later nearly kills Scout and her brother, holds another stock place in explanations of racism in the south: the narrative that blames poor white people for all violence and racism. Another expression of this is Will Percy's defense of paternalist aristocracy (and attack on populist poor whites) to anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker, in Mississippi in the 1930s to conduct research on race relations in a small town in the Mississippi Delta. (Powdermaker 1993) Last year, a New York Times film critic reviewing the movie version of John Grisham's *A Time To Kill* noted that with the end of the cold war the working class southern racist has become a new stock villain in American movies.
black men do rape—the story presents Luna as complicit in her own victimization.

In contrast, anthropologist Micaela de Leonardo, writing in the Village Voice, deployed a narrative about her own experience of rape in a larger argument against the idea of “the black underclass.” Like the white southern churchwomen, she transforms victimhood into authority. Here the stakes are different, both because this rape was not an alleged one and because lynching is not a prevalent social practice now. This strategy of speaking out resonated with my own complex feelings: that I would, somehow, be safer if more people knew what had happened; my general absence of a sense of pollution; my dawning awareness that I had to be careful about what I said because the race of rapists does matter to other people. Although I did call the police, and I did face a lineup, I also felt a certain sense of relief that they never caught the attacker. I wanted the attack to not have happened, I wanted the attacker to understand that he hurt me, I wanted him to never ever do this again to anyone (my only regret about this person going free was the haunting fear that he might hurt someone else), but I also never believed that a black man would learn any of those things in the Texas prison system. Similarly, I recognize that writing here about these complex issues may be healing for me but also dangerous for black men. But given the choice between Luna's silence in Alice Walker's story and the strategic speech of Micaela di Leonardo, I choose to speak out, to offer my hard-won insights in the context of other women’s experiences in order to map more precisely the real and the powerfully illusory connections between race and gender and the city.

The attack itself, in combination with the general absence of other encounters of any kind with black men led me to extreme caution as I ventured back into my life. Thus,
as I moved gingerly into the (relatively) public spaces of Houston, with a fierce and protective friend at my side at all times like a guard dog, I would hold my breath and look, really look, at every man of color whom I saw. This was not a conscious strategy. It was what I had to do. I looked for two things: for reassurance that "this one" would not hurt me, and to see the specificity of this particular person's identity. "Seeing specificity" meant ascertaining that this man was not actually the same person as the attacker, but it also meant thinking about who he really might be instead, looking at him as a specific human being. These goals were connected. I had talked to the actual rapist as a human being so that he would, maybe, be able to perceive me as one too and then stop hurting me.

Afterward, in the same way, I intensified my everyday interest in people's lives into a search for a radical specificity of knowledge that would affirm, or possibly create, my safety in each situation.

I worried about being racist: that I was treating all these black men as potential attackers, that this was hurtful and wrong, and that my looking might only oppose us further. But I came to realize that my new gaze differed fundamentally from the not looking that I had done before. I had grown up learning the importance of not catching the eye of strangers, especially of male strangers, especially of black male strangers. It was never clear exactly why one should avoid these gazes, but thinking about it now I remember a fear that people might entangle you in their lives, ask something of you, invade your space and occupy your time. All of these felt like violence; fear of physical violence lurked beneath. Once confronted with a real attack, however, I recognized how far it was from everyday encounters, and how little averting my gaze could have ever
protected me. Further, I immediately recognized myself in Toni Morrison's description of those who avoid noticing potentially debilitating differences, her identification of how much work this avoidance takes, and her naming it as another kind of violence. One response to this latter perception might have been a discounting of my own immediate experience in order to privilege structural ongoing violence against black people; another would have been to argue that Morrison's insights were less important than my own. Instead, the healing of one kind of trauma, aimed against me, turned out to bring me to challenge the other, in which I was more complicit. Not looking and not getting involved had always fit uncertainly with the teaching that everyone was equal, human, the same. Facing this contradiction, I was able to draw on the humanism of my upbringing, and the Quaker/Protestant honoring of the individual, while reworking the practice of seeing everyone as identical.

In the process of not not looking, I learned a tremendous amount about paying attention to my own feelings of safety, to my own embodied sense of cities and space. I learned to honor the times I (and other women) felt viscerally unsafe, and also to question where the fear came from. A fundamental lesson I took from the attack was that if someone wants to hurt you, there isn't much you can do to stop them. Put another way, there was no behavior that could guarantee to keep me safe anywhere. I had been attacked in my own house, when I was asleep: learning self-defense or dressing differently or not walking alone at night were all irrelevant changes in behavior. (If I had had a gun, he would have used it against me. Besides I would have had to be willing to use it, which I was not.) One could argue that extremity of my experience makes it fundamentally
different from domestic violence or from date rape or from attacks in the street; but my experience made utterly clear to me that a person has to do a certain amount of work to hurt someone, and that there is nothing anyone can do to "deserve" being hurt, or to "invite" attack.

Therefore, it seemed to me, the whole category of "reasonable" behavior is a contingent and personal one, and feeling safe was up to me. Over months and months of looking, of learning to breathe and be present while moving in public, of successfully going out without my guard-dog friends, I came to realize that I did not in fact have to relearn everything about being safe. I found that, if anything, I had been keeping myself away from some places unnecessarily. Micaela di Leonardo, writing about how she came to understand her own rape experience as male violence rather than black male violence, argues for better attention to the ways in which white women are far more vulnerable to white men we know than to black strangers. I agree, and add that it behooves us to attend to the ways in which white women, perhaps all women, may actually have access to whole urban areas now emotionally and physically off limits. I have to say that, even with this revelation, I was too scared to walk Memphis to construct a more grounded understanding of my interlocutors' lives. But I raged against this limitation, and—with the help of Bettye and Ruby's stories of moving around the city, which took on a dream-like quality to me in their difference from my own experience\(^\text{10}\)—I began to imagine what it

\(^{10}\text{I have to remind myself that neither of them had unlimited movement in the city either. Bettye never went to Beale Street or black neighborhoods by herself, and, despite Ruby's cheerfulness about mobility, she basically describes moving through black areas. Other black women could go into white neighborhoods safely because they worked there as maids or cooks or babysitters, but they had to sit in the backs of streetcars or even (as a}
might be like to be able to move more freely.

Both this rage and this new ability to imagine came from another reaction to the rape: In the days and months after the rape, I felt not only terrified but also, confusingly, vivid. I felt an exhilaration, a brightness to things, that was more an onrushing engagement with living than a mere gratitude to be alive. I sought help in understanding and dealing with this vividness, because it unnerved me. I worried that it made me more vulnerable. I went to Barbara Conable, not only a healer and a poet but also the mother of my best friend from junior high school. She told me in her considered, wise way that this was strength and encouraged me to embrace it. Acknowledging that in the assault itself, such strength would have been irrelevant—I had been asleep—she also noted that those who move with confidence and presence in public may well be safer from attack. She also helped me to honor my sudden deep fears, my flights from embodied experience, as healing counterpoints to the vividness, as strategic retreats rather than as permanent defeats. And, having known me for at least half my life, she was able to give me specific vivid stories to remind me of my embodied younger self.

Not long after these amazing, affirming encounters, Kathryn Milun, an advisor and friend, gave me a copy of Audre Lorde's essay "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic As Power" (1984). Here, the poet redefines the erotic broadly as a commitment to vivid embodied experience. (I emphasize that for me this vividness has to do with survival of trauma, that I am in no way trying to claim rape itself as erotic.) I read with deep recognition her claim

working class white man told me in an interview) in the back seats of their employers' cars. They could go to white parks only if they accompanied a white child, so that mobility came at the price of social invisibility.
for the erotic as "a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings...an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once having experienced it, we know we can aspire. For having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect, we can require no less of ourselves." The erotic is true knowledge, information, power, "the open and fearless underlining of my capacity for joy." The word she keeps coming back to is the one I find myself repeating in this chapter: "deep."

Most importantly in my healing, Audre Lorde defines the erotic in terms of passionate action: "The erotic is not only a question of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing." The subsequent "internal requirement toward excellence" serves as a guide, a gauge for living: "Once we know the extent to which are capable of feeling that sense of satisfaction and completion, we can then observe which of our various life endeavors bring us closest to this fullness." This makes deep sense for me now; it leapt off the page for me in affirmation when I first read it. It spoke my new engagement with the world. It spoke truth. I also, stunningly, recognized my younger self in these formulations. At crucial decisions in my life—what job to look for after college, what to study in graduate school, what to focus on in my dissertation—I have asked myself, What would I do anyway? meaning, what do I do regardless of time and money and other people's ideas and other external pressures? Where is my passion? The answers, briefly, came down to the interconnected endeavors of engaging with books, engaging with other people, engaging with questions of history, and engaging with music.

Economically privileged to choose my own work and nearly required by my family to have
interesting work, I chose the anthropology of American culture because it offered connection with other people and thus with my deepest sense of myself. Talking to other people about music in their lives seemed a fine way to spend my dissertation years. That this quickly carried me into deep encounters with questions of race and racism only confirmed my suspicion that music is a profound way of knowing about the world. Certainly this has always been true in my life. So these two poets, connected to me by complex golden networks of friendship, affirmed my new strengths in part by connecting them with my previous self:

And Bettye confirms this sense of music as fundamentally joyful, of eroticism as about more than simply sex. The Smithsonian interviewers asked her about the sexuality of rock & roll:

I just know that to me, what the music meant to me and the feelings that I had, was just very nice—freedom, that’s what it meant to me. And enjoyable. And the other part I think comes naturally…. I love the feel of the music, and that’s why I think that got everybody off on it is the feel. And it made you feel like you wanted to dance, you know, or love.

CONCLUSION

These life histories reveal very different ways that music and race can be configured in women's urban lives. Not only the details of these lives but the choices each narrator made in narrating them offer information about the strategies available to differently placed women. That is, Ruby's turn away from issues of gender and Bettye's turn away issues of race and my own looking at intersections of these are all particular and
contingent strategies rather than essential identities. For example, Bettye was married for much of the 1950s and a young mother throughout the decade. Her professional work with live music and with African-American musicians did start in the late 1950s, but largely happened in the years beyond those this project covers. Further, she did nearly all her professional work in male-dominated areas. For all of these reasons, her discourse veers much more than does Ruby's towards the struggle to balance private and public work, towards gender rather than race. Moreover, it seems likely, though paradoxical, that her more distant engagement with racial issues is in itself a matter of race, or, more specifically, of whiteness. On the other hand, her very real friendships with black musicians and others and her struggles with her family's racism are grounded in her own experiences of discrimination and unfairness.

I do not want to counter the myths of black rapists and dangerous cities by asserting that black men never rape or that all parts of the city are safe (for women or anyone). Rather, I urge my readers to radically rethink these blanket statements, to test boundaries, and to turn to specificity.
Chapter Five:
The Mobility of Working Class White Boys

I give this chapter over to an interview with Budgie Linder, who I initially met through his wife, Mary Ann, who has worked at Poplar Tunes since 1955. I had interviewed her at the record store one Saturday morning, and then she had driven me around her North Memphis neighborhood (see Chapter 6), but it turned out to be a fairly quick drive because every place that she has ever lived has been taken by urban renewal. She pointed out a number of sites that she said her husband would have stories about and, after we had exhausted the vacant lots and freeway vistas of her disappeared past, she invited me to come talk to her husband as well.

This is most of the extraordinary conversation we had that Saturday afternoon, with Mary Ann contributing once in awhile. I also have many hours of tape, many pages of transcription, too much for any reader who is not very familiar with the city, from when Budgie drove me around. He took me not only through North Memphis, where he had lived, but all over town. It took hours. It was an intense and wonderful day, and late enough in my fieldwork that it not only taught me things but confirmed others as well. I include it here mostly as it is for a number of reasons. First, I want to honor the connections that Budgie makes here: between racial boundaries and neighborhood boundaries, between "ebbing and flowing around the city" and attending Catholic school, and so on. Further, as with Bettye and Ruby, I mean his stories to offer descriptions of specific social practices (where you went dancing, what you wore, who you were friends...
were), of the dynamics of social discourses (what the rules were, how you negotiated your way around, how things are talked about), and also the interactions between these, how one person enacts a whole series of potential networks. The city presented here is not the overview or the map, but a dance through a very particular landscape.

Is Budgie typical of "working-class white boys"? Yes and no. Certainly this conversation is very much like those I had with others in his clique, especially in the sheer number of different jobs they worked to be able to go dancing and in their central concern with dancing. And certainly I met a number of guys who were not in this clique and did not dance quite so seriously but still had a lot of jobs and a lot of mobility. One quality of these stories that makes it very hard to judge what it rare and what is typical is that the storyteller is always one of about three white people in the black club. Surely this is true, and yet I kept meeting new white men who grew up going to black clubs alone who didn't know any of the other ones who did this, and surely this is true too. Each of them has a slightly different story, and yet they put in motion a similar set of dynamics.

On the other hand, Budgie's memories of his particular routes through the city are so specific, and he has a dry, funny delivery of his stories that reminds me more of the men in my own family than of anyone I met in Memphis. And his class and racial positioning are not typical at all of the people I talked to, but more like someone out of a Peter Taylor story. His maternal grandfather was a skilled carpenter on riverboats—he built the Memphis house that Budgie grew up in—and his father's family ran a lumberyard in Arkansas. (It was when Budgie mentioned coming in on the trucks with the black drivers to Beale Street that I knew we would have a lot to talk about, but even so he truly
surprised me.) At some point this business went "belly up," however, and the family moved into Memphis when Budgie was a teenager. So he knew both comfort and the loss of comfort, although he also knew people he thought were poor, something he never thought of himself. He also dated some girls who had more (a car, for example), but saw the girls of St. Agnes as too snobby, out of his league. Of the other "working class" men I talked to, several had connections with small neighborhood businesses (at one point when we were driving, Budgie started riffing on the kinds of small concerns that used to dot the neighborhoods—and then he made it clear that he was actually being specific, that he actually knew the sons or daughters of proprietors of every kind of business he had named). Some had parents who worked in factories, as Mary Ann's father and uncles did, and for some people I just never knew what their parents did.

Most of the people he named in the interviews were Italian-American, as is Mary Ann, although both he and Mary Ann and just about everyone else I talked to in Memphis insisted that there is no "Italian neighborhood." Budgie himself is German, but apparently being Catholic was more crucial in his social contacts, as he says in a number of different ways. This plus the equation of immigrants with the working class would be partly why he knew so many Italians. A number of the men I interviewed were Jewish, and this as much as their actual social class seemed to position them as outsiders to what Budgie calls "the mainstream." One of the striking things about Budgie, though, is that he never feels to be outside: rather, he is right in the midst of the current and (to mix metaphors along with him) dancing to his own tune.
So yes, to follow Pierre Bourdieu, it is the working class white boys who listen to black music, who rove around the city, who wear bright shirts and pegged pants and dance beautifully in moccasins. At least some of them. Middle-class white boys wore white shirts and khaki pants with loafers, which meant that they couldn't dance very well or weren't interested in it, and they listened to pop songs by white bands, or, if adventurous, jazz. As for stories about being ready to fight (but smart enough not to)\textsuperscript{1} and dating girls, on the one hand, and paying attention to clothes and knowing how to dance, these seem to me like a classic combination of working class masculine attributes. But these summaries don't do justice to the richness and complexity of experiences of particular people in particular places, or the strange conjunctures that spark people to change, to go one way instead of another. Nor do they take into account the constraints of class: that working-class white boys might be doing precisely what the rest of the world thinks they will end up doing, which is to say ignoring their homework, getting into trouble, living in the present and perhaps too much in their bodies. All of which also sounds a lot like the

\textsuperscript{1}See Conaway (1993) for much more on middle and upper class white masculinities in Memphis in this period, and how he and his relatively wealthy friends viewed the boys from Humes and Catholic. In a review in the Commercial Appeal, columnist/memoirist Paul Koppel lauds Conaway for exploring an issue rarely touched in books about Memphis and the South, the constant possibility of violence, not among inner-city blacks or the "hoods" of Humes and Memphis Tech but among middle class and upper middle class white kids. Whether the scene was the Cotton Club or the Plantation Inn (the notorious "P.I.") in West Memphis or a suburban golf course after dates had been dropped home, white boys would eradicate slights and insults through physical combat. Part of it had to do with alcohol, but part emerged from a code of profligate masculinity bred in a Delta milieu combining the honor and machismo of the frontier with the languor and courtliness of the plantation parlor....Conaway describes the sister of one of his friends as having "that flat, drawn gaze of southern debutantes who have seen more than enough of the behavior of the sort of men they must marry." (May 30, 1993)
dominant views of black people, in Memphis and elsewhere.

But as with Bettye and Ruby, Budgie speaks of a joyous engagement with life, an embodiment that is the opposite of polluted. I don’t want to romanticize this, or locate it in some mythical working-class ability to be embodied or to express collectiveness rather than individuality. But I also don’t want to dismiss it as simple appropriation of black styles. One of the stories I hear repeatedly goes something like this: we white guys went to a black club, they thought we were there to make trouble but when they saw that we were there because we loved the music there were no problems, it was all fine. Now certainly one could hear this as self-serving smoothing over of racial uncomfortableness, and I think that these situations were probably more uncomfortable than my interlocutors usually want to admit. But I do think there is something in this story, a way in which people’s mutual focus on music and mutual love for the music allows for at least a racial truce if not harmony. Some of these white male storytellers go on to express various levels of distance from black people—not understanding "them," balking at seeing a black man and a white woman in a car together, talking about blacks "knowing their place," and so on. I know that historian Pete Daniel, researching a book on the South in the 1950s, hears much more of this than I do, perhaps because he is a better interviewer, perhaps because he is a white man from the South himself, perhaps because he asks the right questions. (He can, for example, actually connect some of the white kids listening to black music with those violently resisting integration in Little Rock.) But like some of these storytellers, Budgie speaks of countless lovely interactions with specific black people: on his paper route (in Memphis it's called throwing papers) through a black housing project, on Beale Street
with his father's employees, playing football on the field by the waterworks. The confusing and painful part—for them far more so even than for me, listening—is trying to sort out one's own complicity with racist structures that formed so much of the "givenness" of life in Memphis in the 1950s. For a lot of the white Memphians I talked to, the sense of an embodied connection with black music (erotic in Audre Lorde's sense) both baffles them in this sorting out (how could this feeling possibly be racist?) and gives them real reasons to question what racism might be (since clearly it opposes this sense of connection). Budgie does less of this sorting out here than some of my other interlocutors, but he certainly conveys the rich grounding out of which such questioning comes.

LH:....Ok, now we're talking to Budgie Linder, and it's still Saturday the 19th.

Let me get--Mary Ann kept taking these turns and flinging my tape recorder onto the floor (laughing) but it survived. So, wait, go back to, you coming into Memphis BL: Yeah, we came back to Memphis to go to school. We would for the most part stay here in Memphis during the school week, and go home on some weekends, or the holidays, and of course summer vacations we'd go back to Arkansas. That was up until the early fifties. Then we moved to Memphis, from then we stayed there, all during high school.

L: You came over for school before that? There weren't any Catholic high schools there?

B: Well, there wasn't one, there was only a boarding school--my brothers and I would go
to it, but my sister, she had to go to parochial school too, and there were no facilities for girls. So we came in to Memphis....I don't know, what area are you wanting to go at, I don't know...

L: Well, more of what you were saying about listening to the radio and [coming in on the lumber trucks?] [Budgie's family ran a lumber company in Arkansas, and every Saturday drivers would bring loads of lumber into Memphis.]

B: Yeah, when I was in the fifth grade up, I decided I would ride the truck in, and I would go with the black driver. And that's the only drivers we had, but...I would go in, I was always fascinated with the big machinery, whatever, and so I got to ride, consequently, when they'd come to town, that was their chance to kick up their heels, so to speak, and I would tag along. They would take me in, the people that run the joints up and down Beale. They never bothered me, and I liked to go! I could hear the music (laughing). They took care of me. And later in high school, a friend of mine, his parents ran the Hippodrome, a black entertainment center down on Beale Street, and they would have the big, big-name black entertainers--Illinois Jacquet, Louis Armstrong., the Drifters, the Clovers, a lot of the black groups and singers...

Mary Ann: Weren't a lot of the patrons white, though.

B: Yes, they would have entertainment, they would have, try to have one show for the whites, but what I would do, myself and a couple of others, we would wait tables, we would take the reservations. And escort the people to their tables.

L: How old were you?

B: I was sixteen.
L: Yeah! (laughing)

B: But--there was no drinking, see, if you went anywhere, you had to brown bag it. You could buy set-ups, but naturally we just brought our own cokes. We would do otherwise, later, but while we were there, so as not to get the proprietor into trouble, Mr Brian, we would behave ourselves.

L: So you went to both the black shows and the white shows? [B. is nodding.] Did people dance?

B: There wasn't a whole lot of dancing there, at the black shows they danced more but at the white shows they didn't, very much, no, huh-uh, not, sat at the tables, they listened, and sometimes they would have a small area where they could get up and dance. Under the old laws, under the Memphis laws they had a special license for dancing. If they caught you dancing--you had to have a special license, which was very expensive. That kept down the number of dance halls, so to speak, you know, a public place. But you had to have a dance hall license to do it. Still, he had, but a lot of the whites wouldn't dance, no, they would listen.

L: So all that list of people, that's where you heard them all, at the Hippodrome?

B: Them, and more. Yes. I heard a lot--Illinois Jacquet, Joe Turner, a lot of your big black names.

L: And had you, did you buy records first and know about them from records in jukeboxes, or did you know about them from performances and then would go

B: It was listening on the radio was where I became familiar with them.

MA: the radio
B: and then, I would go around to some of the operators, jukebox operators, what they would do, it was a lot cheaper, I think for a dime I could buy a used record as opposed to paying seventy five cents or a dollar, for a record album.

MA: Fifty or sixty cents!

B: They would come in, and they would change their jukebox, and the records that they pulled off, the 45s that they pulled off, they would sell. And so I would go down quite frequently to a couple of em there on North Main, and go through all their used records and buy them, and that meant I could obtain more records.

L: What was the first record you ever bought?

B: I have no idea, I don't know.

L: Do you remember what your first favorite band was?

B: Oh, my first favorite band was, I think, Glenn Miller, and the big bands, yep. I used to work a lot of part time jobs, and when I was in the ninth grade, I was still too young to drive, but I was still making enough money, where I could carry my date, we could go up to the Plantation or the Peabody. It was cheap, I mean, it was about two bucks to get in, see. It wasn't that much. And we would drink cokes. But a couple of the boys that I run around with were several years older—Sammy Lobianco, and also Angelo DiSalvo, who's dead now, but them and a couple others, they also liked the big band music, so that's what we would do, we would go down and hear Ray Anthony, Jane Garber, or whoever, I don't know. A lot of the big bands when they would come. It would really impress your date, you know, to take her to the Peabody Roof, see, and actually you could get by for 8 to 9 dollars. Which was, that was an expensive date back then.
L: I was going to say, that's a lot of money!

B: but at that time, I had several different jobs and I made good money.

L: What were your jobs?

B: I worked at grocery stores, I threw papers, the morning route, I worked at the movie theater--and then plus run errands, whatever for different neighbors. So I was always picking up a few bucks here and there.

L: An enterprising young man.

B: That's right.

L: Weren't they broadcasting from the Peabody Roof?

B: They used to, on the radio, yes, uh-huh.

L: What station?

B: That was WREC, they were in the basement, and I guess they would run their wires up to the Plantation roof, the Skyway.

L: I think that was one of Sam Phillips's early jobs, was to

B: to announce for them

L: to run the machinery

B: to do the engineer work. I don't know, I never knew him, I wasn't familiar with him at all.

L: So what year did you, you graduated in 55, right??

B: I got out in 54--I say "get out," but "graduate."

L: (laughing)

B: Like getting out of prison, I guess, is what most people I run around with--what year
did you get out? I got out in 55, I got out in 52, whatever, instead of graduating.

Nonetheless, I got out--I graduated in nineteen fifty four.

L: And which school did you go to?

B: I went to Catholic High School, for boys.

L: For boys?

B: Yes, uh-huh, it was boys only then, and then the other parochial school for boys was Christian Brothers' College. Now they still had the different parish schools for the girls, there was about five or six of those.

L: What junior high did you go to?

B: I went to Sacred Heart, which is at Cleveland and Jefferson, up until the 8th grade. And before that I went to Morris School for Boys, over in Searcy Arkansas. It's closed now. The Franciscan brothers, it was a boarding school.

L: What grocery stores did you work for?

B: I worked for Dominic Coda, Mr. Strong who had a Kroger store down at Overton Park and Cleveland. It's tore down, it was right next to the apartments where she lived [Mary Ann], that the freeway took. Seems like every place she's lived, is tore down.

L: (laughing)--yeah, I think the planning people, they look at city directories, say Where's that Mary Ann living?

B: Gone, that's right, that place is gone, every school she's ever gone is closed.

MA: We drove by Holy Names, drove by Humes

L: they were cleaning up over there, had a bunch of people out, scrubbing

B: cleaning, really, uh huh, that's good. That was a fun place....
L: I'm sorry, I interrupted you--which stores you were working at?

B: I worked at different grocery stores there in the neighborhood stores. I delivered, I started driving the delivery vehicle, was a used World War Two jeep. And I'd sit on a Co'-Cola case. I didn't have a driver's license, but I'd learned to drive in Arkansas, so when it come time to go to work, "we need somebody to drive", and I'd say "I can drive." So I did a test drive for Mr. Coda, the man that owned it, he said, "OK," so I would deliver groceries all around the neighborhood in North Memphis.

L: People didn't necessarily go to the grocery store and take their stuff home?

B: No, huh-uh, no, they, a lot of people would call, and they would--it was more service-oriented, and they would take a particular grocery order and then deliver it to the house. I would go, and we would tell em, 8 dollar, whatever it was, I would carry the change, and I would collect the grocery bill. And that was my job. Delivering and collecting.

L: And did you get tips also?

B: Oh yeah! Yeah, uh-huh. Yeah, they'd give you some tips--it wasn't that great, but, maybe a nickel, a dime, a quarter, whatever like that. On the holidays, if they were a little tipsy, whatever, sometimes they'd give you a buck!

MA: They had charge accounts then, too, in stores, and people would come in. They're old mom and pop stores, you didn't have a supermarket.

B: That's what they were. They were neighborhood stores....Did that. I would throw papers, and work for a grocery store, and then I started working at the Crosstown Movie Theater when that opened. It's now, Jehovah Witnesses have a church--

L: Yeah, it's the great big theater on Crosstown
B: --when it was brand new it was part of the MA Lightman chain, the Malco chain of movie houses.

L: So it was connected to the one over at Main and Beale.

B: Yes, uh-huh, yes, that was the parent theater there, what's now the Orpheum was the Malco. But yeah, I stayed down there, I would work, I don't know, six months worked fulltime there, and after that I would just work certain nights or when I was needed. Pick up. I always kept an ace in the hole there, because that way I could attend the movies free. Get my date in, whatever, like that. And that was additional money in the hole, so, that's what I did. Plus I go passes to go downtown to the Malco, or to the Memphian, or the other theaters he owned throughout town. That was a courtesy, they would let each other's employees in. So I always got to go to the movies--that was an expense I didn't have. I could spend my money elsewhere--say, going to the Peabody! to go dancing.

L: This is great, because I was asking Mary Ann about the economics of dating, and she said "the boy paid."

B: That's right--the boys paid everything.

L: Yeah, I was trying to figure out how the boys could afford it!

B: It was how enterprising you were, and how much you wanted to date--and I liked girls.

So I dated frequently! (laughing)

L: Did you, was dancing usually part of a date?

B: Not always, but a good portion of the time it was. There were several of us, we were some of the best dancers in Memphis! we really were. There was Freddie, excellent dancer, Sammy Lobianco--Sammy, he put on a demonstration, what was that professional
dancer that had a studio here, had the old man

LH: Arthur Murray? himself?

B: yes, uh-huh, and he put on a demonstration for the bop and whatever. Sammy put on a demonstration for him and his wife.

L: That's so great. Showing Arthur Murray how to dance.

B: How it was done here. You could, there were various subtle moves that you could differentiate the different neighborhoods. People who lived in the Hollywood, or the Treadwell section of town, way out east or to the north, down where we were, in north Memphis, or the folks in South Memphis, everybody danced just a shade different. And you could tell the certain moves, the way they did it. But Sam, and Ange, and I, and another boy who's dead, George Dandridge, Bobby Parks, Henry Martin... We would go to dances all over. We would go, that was one of the advantages of going to parochial school, we had friends that came from all parts of town, even out in the county. And they let us know when a big dance was coming or whatever, and we would go way out in so-called Bartlett, now it's right in the city—we would go to Millington, we went to Millington for dances. So we danced all over. And didn't have any major problems. Cause a lot of em, you know, think they wanted to protect their so-called "territory" [sarcastic], but we flowed in and out everywhere. We got along.

L: Did you go over to South Memphis?

B: Oh yeah, uh-huh.

L: Seems like a really big division between North and South Memphis.

B: Yes, yes it was, it was. I had, one of my best friends, John Haffey, Dave Campodonico,
they both lived, one lived right down the street from the Royal Theater, where Willie Mitchell has his recording studio, see, right there at Trigg and Thomas, not Trigg and Thomas, but Trigg and Lauderdale. But he lived at Cambridge and Lauderdale, right next to St Thomas Church. And we went there—we would go to South's Ice, which was a hangout, an after-hours hangout, such as the White House, over at Humes, at Manassas and Jackson. You tell her about that? (to MA) the White House?

MA: I didn't tell her about the White House, mainly because Tommy

B: Tommy, Tommy Williams used to hang out there all the time

MA: Good friend of mine

B: White House cafe

MA: It's on the corner of Jackson and, uh

B: and Manassas, across the street from Humes

MA: Well, Tommy said that right after he got out of—he joined the Marines, when he graduated. He was a year behind Elvis at Humes. When he graduated he went to the Marines. He said, Well, one time I came home on leave, and one of the first places he headed for was the White House Cafe. Well, there was, he said, Elvis, and Bobby Parks, and there was 3 or four or em in there, Elvis and three buddies. And he said, "I don't care what anybody says, these are the three fellows that Elvis hung out with." There's a picture of em in, in his annual, and he says, Those were Elvis's friends. See when I went in there, that's who was in there.

B: The Memphis Mafia, it got, so-called, started after Elvis got big. When he acquired a status from his music, well, people wanted to be associated with him, and prior to that,
they didn't.

MA: Kids that played with him and knew him, saw him at the dances--they never made
over him like that,

B: yeah

MA: and even when he got famous they still don't. They won't make a point to tell you
that Elvis, I knew Elvis when, or whatever.

* * * * *

B: Pete Schirer who owns Max out here on Poplar near Germantown--he used to work
down there at the Lansky Brothers [Men's Clothing Shop, on Beale one block in from
Main]². They taught him how to sell the clothes, they taught him all their tricks, selling and
merchandising. Anytime we really wanted something, something that was really hot, well,
usually Lansky was about the place that would handle it

LH: When did you start shopping there, early fifties?

B: early fifties, yeah, um hum, fifty two, fifty three

L: and did you have a sense, did you think of it as a store on Beale and so it was a black
shop, or was it just that it was

B: It was a store that had the type clothes that we liked to wear. And it so happened that
blacks and whites went in there. I never, I never (laughing) thought about it, you know, in

² This is where all the black gospel groups and the r & b bands bought their performing
outfits, and a lot of ordinary people shopped there too--including Elvis and other working
class white boys from North Memphis.
L: Cause it gets presented that way sometimes, people crossing over into a black neighborhood, buying black styles--but you didn't feel like that.

B: More, the people that we ran with, we danced our own tune. It didn't make any difference what others thought. The main thing I'm talking about, mainstream people. We did what pleased us.

LH: So what--there are two different questions I want to ask you: I wanted to go back to the dancing thing again,

B: ok

L: which was where did you learn how to dance?

B: First time I ever danced in public was at St Thomas High School, at a CYO [Catholic Youth Organization] dance, on a Sunday night. I think I was in the 9th grade, I was a freshman. I'd been in school once or twice to dance, and I danced down there.

L: But how'd you know how to do it?

B: I just got up and tried!

MA: You just did!

B: That's what you did! You got up and you learned, and you know, everybody else was crying but I picked it up pretty easy, and I enjoyed it, and after that, well, we got to where we would practice, later, when we were getting adept at things. And somebody would come out with a new step or something like that, well, we'd practice it.

L: And how did you practice?

B: Well, if there wasn't a girl there, Sam and I'd dance together! And we still dance very similar to each other, to a way. I never did like to dance with Angelo, he was too fat! big
fat boy. (laughing) But Royce Parti, I know I danced with him.

MA Royce was a good dancer.

L: Was it hard to learn how to follow instead of lead?

B: Well that was one of the things about being a good dancer, you were light on your feet, and you could go either way, see, you could do it. And it made you a sharper dancer. See, the women do everything men do, but they do it in high heels and backwards! (laughing) that's what they say, so! But it made you lighter on your feet and you could dance better.

L: Yeah that's the thing that strikes me about the bop, is that some of these guys are really big, and they look incredibly graceful.

B: Well it's the way you move. You learn to shift your weight, see.

L: And it also I think because it's foot focused rather than hip focused

B: Um-hm.

L: So did it start off with something more like the jitterbug and then evolve into the bop?

B: It did. Bop was a very slow type of fast dance. It was a fast dance, but originally when it first came out it was very slow and it gradually evolved into a faster beat, whatever.

L: And did you feel like you guys were part of the, evolving it that way?

B: Definitely. The people at Holy Names had about the best dancers, because they played the best music.

L to MA: that was you! (laughing) (See Chapter Six.)

B: They would always cut it off--the moderator, he would cut it off sharply at eleven o'clock when everybody was still having a great time. That way, they looked forward to coming the following week. They said, hey we didn't get enough. They would want more.
So that's the way, he used a little psychology and he would stop it at eleven. Most places
would let you dance until 12, the high school dances that we had. But sometimes we'd,
depending on what football games that they played on Thursday or Friday night, whatever,
and then others would have dances on Saturday. So we got to dance Thursday, Friday,
and Saturday, and Saturday afternoon we had tea dances down at the Elks' Club, right
across from Catholic High on Adams and Third.

L: What's a tea dance?

B: In the afternoon. The Elks, Fraternal Order of the Elks or whatever

MA: ...to six... I thought the Legion had tea dances.

B: Well they did for awhile, but the Elks is where we went, mainly. To give the kids
somewhere to go, and keep em out of trouble, well they would have dances between one
and four on Saturdays. And the days that I wasn't working, I'd be down at the tea dances.

L: So did they give you tea?

B: No! no, that was the name, that was the term. They called it a tea dance because it was
an afternoon dance, as opposed to the normal evening dance. But they had tea dances
down there on Saturdays.

L: Did they play different music in the different places?

B: Yes. Some, you'd get out east, they would play the records where a white artist had
made a cover over a black hit, they would play that. But now at Holy Names, we usually
got the original artists. And at the Elks' Club, the same way down there, we got it there.

L: You got the original.

B: Yeah. And usually, at the different high schools, we already tried, because we were
there and we would bring the dancers, we would try to tell em, (under his breath) "Hey. Get the good records. Don't be dumb." (laughing) No, but a lot of places, they would rent a jukebox, and you would specify on the jukebox different records that you would want, see.

L: Oh! I didn't realize that you could do that.

B: Yes, uh huh. You would rent the juke boxes, Pop Tunes rented em for awhile

MA: If you'd rent em, you could tell em which, what music you want on there.

B: But you would rent the jukebox for the dance, and you would tell them, you know, put some good records on there. So that's what we were trying to do, we were trying to influence it, to get the records we wanted to dance to as opposed to the covers.

L: Were there ever black bands where you were dancing?

B: Occasionally we would have the bands, but for the most part, they played the so-called white music. They played, it was a stiffer type music,

L: more vertical?

B: Yes, it was a stiffer, it wasn't as danceable.

L: And was it pop or was it hillbilly?

B: It wasn't hillbilly, I think it was more, more pop, is what it was. But it was very, to us, stilted. It wasn't loose, loose flowing music. It was a kind of inhibited (laughing).

L: And what about the Peabody dances?

B: They had the big bands. They had the actual big bands. They had the quality, that was quality bands.

L: Were they white or black, or both?
B: They were white, the white bands.

L: But they were the good bands.

B: Yes, uh-huh. I don't think I ever was down there when they had a black band, that I know of. I guess I've seen a dozen different big bands through there--Ray McKinney, like I say, Ray Anthony was one of my favorites, a big trumpet man, and I tried to get down there for him, quite often, whenever he would come through. They had a regular circuit they travelled on.

L: So you would see the black big bands out at the Hippodrome.

B: Yeah, um hum. Or out on Thomas, at [trying to think of the name] Curl's, Curry's Tropicana! Yeah. Pete, Pete Schirer, his buddy Joe Jones, who's a judge now, anyhow, Joe's father was an attorney, and he represented Mr. Curry, the black owner. But Mr. Curry would allow Joe to come in and bring quote us, his friends. So we would go to the black shows out there as well!

L: Wow

B: So, and it was a supper club, was what it was.

L: A what?

B: A supper club, where they would have dining and dancing. It was a, the type of nightclub that you see in the movies

MA: like the Stork Club

B: during the forties and the thirties, where you could go and have a steak or whatever like that, and dance to a band afterwards, see. You would have a dinner and dance, so it was a supper club. And they called it Curry's Tropicana Club.
L: This sounds like it was big band stuff.

B: Yeah, uh-huh, it was, earlier then, they would have a lot of the black entertainers out there. Too many to mention, really—I don't remember a lot of 'em. I liked their music.

L: And when you went to the Hippodrome or the Tropicana, did you dance? or were you mostly paying attention to the

B: Most of the time it was, we didn't dance. Most of the time. Sometimes down at the Hippodrome we did, but at the Tropicana, no. Cause it was strictly—they would let us come in, I guess as an honor to Mr. Jones, Mr. Curry would let us come in, and he would have a table set up for us and that's where we sat.

L: Did they feed you dinner?

L: Well, we'd buy a hamburger or a coke, we bought, cause it was enough to be let in. And they would treat us like kings. And we would do that. That's where I saw the Midnighters. Hank Ballard and the Midnighters. I got to see them out there. That's the first time.

L: That's when they had a hit, too!

B: Oh, they had many, many hits, but they were stole from, you know. That was Pete's and our favorite group, was the Midnighters. That's when he got Joe Jones to get his daddy to call and get us in, or whatever like that.

L: So—the dances, the tea dances and the high school dances were all kids, but then like the Hippodrome and the Peabody and Tropicana were grown ups

B: Yes, they were, and I don't know—to look at it from this side, my age today, I say, ooh,
look at the punk! (laughing) But, you know, I was a bigshot, you know, and we were. We were there, not so much to try to impress those people, but we were there to have a ball. And we did. We didn't put up any, we didn't put up any stuff, or give anybody any hassle or anything. We were there to have a good time, and that's the way it was.

L: Did you pick up any of the dance steps from the grownups?

B: Sure! Sure! You always did. You always learned something. You'd see Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire, when they would dance--that was... (breathes appreciatively) I still sit back and enjoy that, even to this day. Because it was grace and fluid motion, that was all.... (sits and thinks about it)

L: Do you guys still go dancing?

B: Occasionally, when we get the time.

L: ....um, there's something wayyy back that I wanted to ask you...Oh right, I went in the dancing direction, but I also wanted to go in the clothes direction

B: Ok.

L: And ask you what kind of stuff you were buying. What were you wearing?

B: All right, pegged trousers. They were the ones that come down and the cuffs were pegged, in other words taken up. They were small and the pants were larger.

L: Baggy up here?

B: Not really baggy, but they were tapered in the leg, they had more or less tight ankles, and then it came out to a, I don't know, about a 16, 14 or 16 inch, 18 inch pants, like a normal trouser. But the cuffs were just cut back. Uh, the shirts--gabardine shirts were a
biggie. You know, solid color.

L: Not white?

B: No, huh uh, they varied--I had some dark shirts, I had pastel, even a couple chartreuse shirts.

L: oooh.

B: Green. We had one English teacher that we did that--bright colors hurt his eyes. And he was on the east side of the building, there at Catholic High. We were the second period. And at that time the sun came in right in your classroom pretty good. When we found out that bright colors hurt his eyes, we all went and bought chartreuse shirts! The whole class! And we would sit in there, and there's this man wearing shades, trying to teach us and read--and he could barely see anyhow. He had Co'-cola bottles for glasses, they were very thick. And then he had to put on sunglasses on top of em! When he got hard on us, that's when everybody'd say, "Hey. Get your shirts. Mine's kind of faded. Monday have a new bright shirt, you know, either red or yellow, green"--but we would wear these loud chartreuse colors.

L: I've heard all kinds of explanation for fashion changes, but I never heard "well there was this teacher we wanted to bug!"

B: But...suede shoes, they were always big, you know, with the dancers. I didn't like rubber soles or rubber heels.

L: Leather?

B: Yes, for the dancing. And moccasins. I liked to wear just regular moccasins, Indian moccasins. And the girls that liked to dance, they wore ballerina slippers! They were very
light and very thin, but--I still, when I go dancing, I still carry my moccasins. And they
ewore out and wore out, and I've got, I think, 2 or 3 different pieces of leather I've put on
the insides, you know--the tops are about the only things solid, on em!

L: Did the saddle oxfords have leather soles?

MA: No, they were, saddle oxfords--well they might have had leather back then, but
mostly it was rubber. Penny loafers, they were leather soled.

B: The loafers, the girls wore those, or the ballerinas dancing shoes. They didn't wear the
two-toned shoes, the real dancers didn't. The ones that jumped up and down, they wore
their oxfords to the dances.

L: The ones that jumped up and down?!

B: Yeah (laughing)!!

L: When they were dancing or when they saw Elvis?

B: Well, when I say jumped up and down--they didn't really dance. They were out there
literally jumping up and down....You would look, if you went to a strange place, and you
didn't know if a girl danced or not, whatever, you would try to watch and see, but--you'd
look at her shoes! And if she had on dancing shoes, you'd ask her to dance, and you pretty
well knew it. But if she wore her oxfords, saddle oxfords? For the most part, she wasn't a
dancer.

B: The clothes--a lot of people, you know, I had a lot of used clothes, that were given to
me. But my going out clothes, they were the ones I tried to buy. You dressed up, as
opposed to dressing down, today. You would go out, and you would wear your good
clothes. And you usually--maybe that's why we didn't have any problems. Because when
you wore your good clothes, you didn't get into trouble. Because you didn't want to tear
em up.

L: Yeah (laughing)

B: I'm, I'm serious, here.

L: No, (apologizing) I imagine you spent a lot of money on em.

B: That's right. And--you know, I've come home and changed clothes, and gone back!

L: So that you could fight?

B: Yes! But I wouldn't do it with my good clothes on, see. (laughing)

L: What would you fight over?

B: Well. I usually didn't start it. If it was started with me, then I would go back and say, all
right, I'm coming back.

L: What kind of issues? Turf stuff?

B: Well, usually, yeah, somebody coming in, you know, you're going into a strange area.

And that was why I mentioned awhile ago that it was beneficial to go to parochial school,
that you had friends from all different parts of town, that--you didn't go into some areas,
and go to dancing with the different girls, but--That guy there, he's from North Memphis!
see. But if you knew several people from that particular neighborhood that you were in,
they usually, they would pass over, would say He's all right, he's with so and so, see. And
you would go from there.

MA: Most of the fights, I think, occurred in West Memphis, too, didn't they?

B: Yes. There was a lot over there.

L: Because of the alcohol over there?
B: I think so, yeah, uh huh. But now, I only had one incident over there. But if you were looking for trouble, you could find it, all night every night. Cause there was always somebody willing to take you up. But I never, I never looked for it, I didn't want it. I tried to avoid it, but if I was faced with it, well, I did my best.

L: Did North Memphis have a reputation, then?

B: North Memphis was pretty rough. It was pretty rough.

L: Rougher than South Memphis? Cause South Memphis also has a reputation.

B: Yeah, well, uh, they did. I'd say, between North Memphis and--Humes, and Tech, and Southside, I guess that was your roughhouses of the city. And Catholic High. Catholic got everybody that nobody else would take. That and Tech (laughing)

L: Why?

B: It was just rough.

L: Ok, (deliberately being dumb) cause Catholic people would send their kids there and their kids were incorrigible?

B: No, no, the Catholics, the good Catholics, sent their children to parochial school because the church told 'em you'd go to hell if you didn't, see. And they had a lot of discipline, see, they had a lot of discipline, and consequently, a lot of your non-Catholic people that were having trouble with a child or whatever, that was causing problems in the public school. They'd say, send him out there and let the good priests and the brothers straighten him out! So, that's where we ended getting them...I'd say Humes, and Southside, were about the roughest. That and Fort Pickering. Fort Pickering is right up against the river there, and--I forget the little parish church that used to be over there.
MA: You're not talking about Saint Paul's?

B: Church of the Nativity. The Church the Nativity, used to be up there, parochial. There again, see, I had friends in parochial school there, see, in Fort Pickering. I knew the ones in South Memphis, North Memphis, the ones out near Messick, Treadwell, out East

MA: Catholic schools got students from all over!

B: See, we got students from all over the county, yeah. And consequently, you got, after you'd go to a place a time or two, you'd get introduced to a couple people, and like I say, we never wanted any trouble, but you know, we didn't necessarily run from it.

L: But it made, so there were fewer strangers going into it

B: That's right. And so we ebbed and flowed in all neighborhoods.

L: That's pretty extraordinary....So--were you driving to a lot of these places?

B: Later, yes! uh-huh. Yes, I used to walk. Like, when I was talking about the first dance that I ever went to, was at St Thomas, I lived over here at Overton Park and Waldran. And I would walk down to St. Thomas, see. I would save my money, cause then I wasn't making that much. Rather than ride the bus, down and back, I could walk. I'd walk a block, run a block, walk a block, run a block. And

L: Didn't you get your dance clothes all sweaty?

B: No. Huh-uh, not usually, cause it's in the evening, see? And a lot of the times if St. Thomas was gonna have a dance, what I would do, I would carry my clothes to school with me, and I would go home with one of my buddies, in that part of town, and I'd change down there. But if it was on a Saturday, when I got off work, if I couldn't catch a ride? Normally I'd do that.
L: Walk and run. What route did you take?

B: I'd go Waldran, to Union, down to Pauline, and over to Camilla, to Lamar, then down to Lauderdale and straight down Lauderdale.

L: That's amazing! That's a long way.

B: Yeah. But we used to do it all, all the time. From Humes and that area over there, North Memphis, we walked out to the zoo all the time, the Overton Park zoo right down the street from the house here. On Sunday afternoon, when we didn't have anything to do, you and your date, you would just get out and go walk! And you would walk to the zoo... and nobody worried about anything. You worried more about a stray dog now and then than you did anything...(Laughs) But if somebody gave you problems, you remembered it, and you'd come back, and you'd find him. Because usually everybody hung out on certain streets or corners. And you knew where the areas were that were gonna give you problems, or whatever. If you wanted to avoid a problem that time you did, and if you was in the mood you'd go challenge him, see, necessarily. You were ugly to him. And "I'm here, now. Be ugly now." So, that way you headed it off. But usually you could, if you didn't let him walk over you, everybody would back off. Now, you'd pick on the ones they'd let you pick on, see.

* * * * * * *

B: ...But there were barriers there, that were invisible, but there was barriers that 99% of the people didn't cross. For instance, if you had a maid that worked for you, the man was going to deliver that maid home. Pick her up and go to her home. She rode in the back of the car. The back. She wouldn't ride in the front seat. It was a subtle thing, but that was
something that just wasn't done. That they wouldn't ride side by side. Not so much that,
but to show that there was no impropriety.

L: Right.

B: That's what I'm saying--that there were more invisible barriers than there were visible.

MA: You know when I was talking to you the other day, about where my grandmother
lived--right next door to her there was a black family

B: yeah

MA: Right next door. I would go over and visit them, and go in their home, and they'd fix,
made homemade ice cream and serve me. But they didn't come in my grandmother's
house.

I mean, if they came in there, it was to say something--they didn't come in and socialize.

L: Ok--they didn't come in and eat ice cream at your grandmother's

MA: Right.

B: When you were a child--children are different, see.

MA: Six or seven or eight years old at the time

B: The adults may have been mean to each other, but the adults weren't mean to the
children. Either side. I mean, it's like, when I would come in with our drivers, over there.

Everybody, they all, took care of me, uh, as if I were their own! And the same way, if a
black child was to come with the driver, to come into--he would be taken care of, too. So.

They weren't cruel, to each other's children, as they would be, say, to another adult. Say
hey, you know, you don't do this, whatever.....

L: So adolescence is this funny in-between phase
B: That's when they start separating, that's what I said earlier.

L: But it was still possible for you to go, for example

B: there's a bleedover

L: to the clubs, and people are fine with that.

B: Yes, uh-huh. But then as an adult, then it became harder to do. That's right. That was unspoken, but that was the way things were. Like you say, in the clubs there were boundaries that we wouldn't cross.

L: You would never dance with a black woman.

B: No. Because we weren't allowed, that wasn't allowed. That would have been a broach of manners, that would have been bad manners. For them as well as for us. So certain areas--it wasn't written, and it wasn't visible, but there were barriers, that ??. You could see somebody dance, and "that girl can move," or whatever. And you [watched], but you knew, that's the rule.

L: Right. Right.....What about when you were throwing papers in Dixie Homes?

B: No problems.

L: Cause you were a little kid, right?

B: Well, I was, no, I was in the 8th grade, going into the 9th grade. I had no problems at all. I had deadbeats, that didn't want to pay the paper bill, but I had whites the same way. You know, it didn't make any difference--money's green!

L: I wasn't asking to see if you had problems, but to see what kind of, was it purely a business relationship, or?

B: Oh! No, they were very nice. If it was hot or whatever, some of them said Here, they
would hand you a glass of tea, you know, out the door, or something such as that, you know. And during the winter, whatever, "Better come on in here and get warm!" you know—"no, I've got just a couple more to go, I'll be all right," whatever. Or collecting, they would say, "You be careful" you know, whatever. They would admonish you to do this and do that, because safety. And you would go from there—and at Christmastime, not from all of them, but they'd give me little gifts, you know. And the same way on my white routes.

L: Um-hmm.

B: The people that lived in Dixie Homes, at that time for the most part, in all housing projects throughout the city, to my knowledge and my experience and how I remember, they were people there that were down on their luck, maybe, or in transition. They may have been going to school, or out of a job, or one of em had gotten sick, something--it was a transition period. It wasn't like today, generation after generation being supplanted back in. So the people there, they were good people, and maybe, like I say, down on their luck! It was a temporary thing. They were on their way up.

L: Yeah, we were talking about that too,

MA: That's right—whether it was an apartment or a home, they kept it up.

B: It was a transition—they were nice, and the housing people, they used come in. They would go around and inspect. See, they would--the kids didn't kick the screens out the way they do today because they would tell them, see, if you're gonna do that, you're gonna move. And so, I don't know, today--Things have changed. But that's a long way from dancing. (laughing a little)
L: I was going to ask if that's another place that you heard music, especially in the summertime, people playing their radios

B: Well, not loud or anything like that, but, now, along Poplar Avenue, right down there, there were several joints that I went in, and further down on Lane Avenue, and on Ayers, there were a couple of cafes. They used to call them cafes, but they were beer joints, you know. And I would throw papers, and you know, I would take a paper in there, and some of em, I would stop for a hamburger. You know. And I would have to eat in the kitchen! I couldn't eat out with the customers. (chuckles) See. So generally they would, a couple of places over there on the far side of the route, they would have me a hamburger, and a coke, waiting when I would come in. So I would eat back in the kitchen and the customers would eat out front, now. And same way if a black come into a white cafe, he had to eat in the kitchen, he didn't eat out in the front, see. So, I would go through, you know, leave my paper at the counter and then go back to the kitchen and eat there at the table, and then go on out, go back to my business.

L: So did any of the rules, etc feel like constraints to you, or more that's the way things were?

B: That was it. You didn't think of it. It's like if you've got a wart on your hand, you grow up with it, it's always there. You know, you look at it on the back of your hand, it's been there. It might be an ugly thing, but its been there, and so you've gotten around it. Eventually you might get rid of it, you know, but...

MA: Wasn't there a beer joint right across from you on Waldran?

B: Yeah. Yeah, I washed dishes there. I used to wash dishes.
L: Was that another black place?

B: No, that was a white joint, there, a white joint.... I would relieve this buddy of mine, Calvin Smith, who used to wash dishes there. And the nights that he wanted off, to go someplace, a lot of times, well, I would sub for him. Whenever I wanted extra money, do this do that, whatever. You know, if they wanted something painted, I would paint. Make a little, was what it was. Make money, we generally would do it.

L: I had to sit Freddie down at one point and say, now, tell me what you did in order. Because every time I asked him a question he would say, oh yeah, when I was working at this other place...laughs

B: Oh yeah, Freddie hustled--we all hustled. We all hustled. Freddie did. Freddie is several years younger than me, and--he's about 6 years younger, so anyhow, F always wanted to tag along. I didn't even think about it, but F's about fifteen goin' to the joints in West Memphis, see. And, you know, he'd always say, (in urgent voice) "take me with ya"--and we never even thought about it, cause F was tall for his age, then, see. He wasn't as big around as that, but he was tall. And shoot, Sandy'd carry him right along with him, and he'd say, Yeah, they'd take me everywhere, teach me everything I know. Yeah. Freddie was a mess.

L: (surprised into laughter) --Yeah and then he ended up a policeman, right

B: yeah, and then he and I, we had an apartment together, see.

F: What were you doing when he was a policeman?

B: He wanted, his aunt was a secretary for the police commissioner. And Freddie got out of school or whatever, and she wanted us both to go to Washington and work for the
fingerprint bureau, the FBI, see. The fingerprint department. I didn't want that, you know, didn't want to go to Washington, DC, I was having too much fun here!! So, but then later, I came back and I was working construction, and Freddie joined the police force when he turned 21. I was a couple years older, and I said, saw there was an opening and I went to work for Greyhound. So I went to work, driving the bus for Greyhound Lines, and he went on the police force. And I worked a couple years in Evansville, Indiana, St Louis, through the Midwest. When I came back to Memphis, he was looking for an apartment and I needed a place to stay, and so they were building some brand new apartments over on Bellevue, here in Midtown. Chateau Apartments. Between Poplar and Madison, see, up in that area there, further up from Central. And they were building some brand new apartments there, they were nice places, very nice. So we got us a nice 2-room apartment, 2 bedroom apartment. So that's where we lived then, and we had that for a couple of years. And then he married Doris, and they got a place of their own.

L: We went by there.

B: There on Poplar and Decatur? Well right across the street there was where my paper route was. That was the border, right there, those apartments there, that was a bunch of old big two story houses and those apartments. Yeah, those are the apartments he moved in down there.

L: How much was rent?

B: I think about 130 or something, it wasn't that big. Calvin Smith, this boy I told you, I subbed for him washing dishes at the joint across the street from the house there—he and I together we had the largest route in the city of Memphis. Three hundred and two Sunday
customers. We used to get the police department to spot our papers for us.

L: What's that?

B: Well, what they do, the police on the beat would come by the paper station, where they would dump our papers, and we would stack them in the squad cars, the bundles of papers on Sunday, and he would drop four bundles at this corner, four bundles at this corner, four bundles at this corner, and they would spot em through our route. And that way, about the time we run down, we needed to resupply, there would be our bundles, and we would go from there. And the police department used to do that for us. And we would maybe help them if we saw something on the route, so that--they were some nice guys. They used to do that--they weren't told not to, but I'm sure that if they got caught or something, they'd have hauled our ass (laughing)--there would have been somebody that didn't get their papers that day! But that never occurred, so we used to do pretty well like that....

* * * * *

L: So tell me about west Memphis.

B: Oh, over at the, Danny's, the Plantation Inn, the Cotton Club

L: Did you go to all those places??

B: I didn't like the Cotton Club--it was too rough. Rednecks went there, basically. And your better dancers went to Danny's Club. And the Plantation Inn, was the--stilted, so to speak. Louis Jack's place. There they played to a more refined crowd.

L: oh ok--I thought they had the hot black bands there.

B: Well they used to--they had a good band, it was an excellent band. What was--the Veltones, what was his name? He used to come over to Pete's and he would help us, we
had formed a little group and anyhow, he'd come over and he coached us for awhile.

And--Sammy, and Pete, and myself.

L: Really?!

B: We just sang--Veltones, I can't think of his name. Pooky! Little thin fellow. Anyhow, he'd come over and coached us on different steps and moves, and like this, and

MA: When was the Manhattan Club, when Willie, Willie Mitchell

B: Willie played at Danny's. See, Willie played at Danny's. That's where I met Willie was over there. And he had a singer, Billy Taylor, and he did great, I think he later took off from cancer, but that's where I first met Willie, when he played over there, and it was cotton fields on either side of the club! and it was the hot spot. Your best dancers were there.

L: Willie Mitchell's band?

B: Yes, they always, Willie was their featured band. Occasionally they would have a dance act that come in, do a tap dance or something like that, you know, just occasional this and that. Then the judge came in and padlocked West Memphis. It was a girl that got murdered down under the bridge or something. I don't know the details. Yeah, that was later. What happened was--like I said the Cotton Club was a rough place. I think that's where they had been, the girl was underage and had been to the Cotton Club or something. I seldom ever went to the Cotton Club. I'd go to Pancho's and eat a lot of time, might have stopped in at the Plantation, but I always ended up, we'd always go to Danny's. And when they padlocked it, Willie came over and I don't know if he played up in Millington--later I think it was Billy Hill who opened the Manhattan Club out on South
Bellevue, Elvis Presley Boulevard. And that became the place to go, from there on. By that time, I had stopped going to a lot of joints, whatever, and I was driving, so I wasn't as able to partake as freely as I used to. I had to curb a lot of that! And then I left to go out of town. And by the time I come back, most of your dancing had ceased to be, per se.

L: And when was that?

B: Sixty four-- I got back in 64. That's when the British Invasion came, and music had changed, and the younger people they liked to listen, as opposed to get up and dance, see, and so it was a big shift. Pretty good number of years, we never went dancing or anything. Didn't dance at all. And Sammy come over here, had always wanted to have a fifties reunion....

L: What was the point where it stopped being jitterbug and started being bop?

B: '51, '52--music changed. Black music started to be more prevalent--Ruth Brown, "Mama, Don't Treat Your Daughter Mean." Music started to become more earthy, and as it became earthier the dance changed. The jitterbug looked funny to the slower r & b beat. The bop is a slower, more sensuous dance, like "dirty dancing" to a degree. I got booted out over at Sacred Heart for that--and my aunt was one of the chaperones! I was doing the dirty boogie as we called it.

L: Were you too close?

B: Yeah, it was a sensuous thing, and we were dancing, we really were!! They were a little more strict there. Holy Names...we all drank some, but at Holy Names it was such a kick that we didn't drink because we didn't want to mess it up. Didn't drink and didn't fight--it would get you tossed out and you wanted to stay--that's where the good dancers were.
People coming in from other areas did, like we did when we went to theirs (laughs), but for us it was safe haven.

MA: You'd keep separate on the dance floor—you'd dance together, but then you'd go back to your own sides.

L: Would the dance floor clear between songs?

B: Yeah.

L: Were there gangs?

B: It was more a neighborhood thing. Lamar Terrace—I crossed with them once, but after that I didn't have any problems. There was a resolution through a parochial school buddy, so I got a chance to explain. Part of the advantage of parochial education! Saved my butt once again! [lists names of girls he and Sammy dated at Lamar Terrace.] We flowed. Sometimes we had some problems but there was always someone there that one of us knew, who could reach in and pull us out before we got over our heads....All's well that ends well. Somebody else might have been less fortunate...

* * * * *

B: No one ever told us we were poor! We didn't know it til later, reading the papers.

L: Were there others who were visibly poor to you?

B: Yes! There'd be others you'd go home with but you wouldn't eat there because you knew they didn't have it....We knew where we could crash, get a baloney sandwich. Coke was a treat—people didn't keep it in the fridge like now. They were a nickel... We were well off before the business went belly up, but we didn't think of it in those terms—I had
friends who lived out east, lived in the north part of town, the Hollywood section, all sections of the city, all strata so to speak. And dating--Pat O'Hara, the daughter of Pat O'Hara who built all the Holiday Inns --I never knew that. She would pick me up in her car, she lived in a big house, but so what? The distinction didn't make any difference.
Chapter Six:
The Plantation Inn

In this chapter, I compare two sites where blacks and whites encountered each other in 1950s Memphis: first, a nightclub called the Plantation Inn, which was actually just across the river in Arkansas, and second, the city streets through which the club's audiences and musicians moved in their daily lives. Throughout I am concerned with movement. How did black and white people, men and women, working-class and middle-class people, move inside the Plantation Inn? What were the rules of movement on the street? How did individuals from different social locations move to music, move across the city, move across racial boundaries, move in racial encounters? In Chapter Three, I was concerned more with the official discourse of segregation, while in Chapter Four I turned my attention to how three women negotiated race, music, and the city in general. Chapter Five focused on one young man's story to elucidate more of these issues through the questions of masculinity and class. Here I pursue my interests in erotics and specificity by exploring cross-racial encounters between a variety of Memphians in two fairly different milieux.

The Plantation Inn was a club just across the Mississippi River from Memphis, where the hippest white audiences used to dance to the hottest black bands. From 1946 to 1965, from eight in the evening to four in the morning, every night of the week, the Plantation Inn was the place to be. Great dancers and tight bands inspired each other to transcendent performances out here. The PI is best known now as one of the wellsprings of soul music: it brought together, in the late 1950s, a generation of young black and
white musicians who went on to create the legendary sounds of Stax Studio. The black musicians played on stage; the white musicians hung out in the club or, if underage or too drunk, by the loudspeaker in the parking lot. On breaks they struck up conversations, traded riffs, formed friendships and finally working relationships. Yet black musicians were never allowed into the club as customers, nor could their black friends and fans ever come here to hear them play. Were these experiences of racial distance and interaction unique to musicians or typical of the movements available to everyday listeners, or at least to those who went dancing at the Plantation Inn?

Bobby Manuel, a young white musician who hung out at the Plantation Inn in its later years, talks about a Memphis rhythm, how every player in town would lay the groove just behind the beat, so that there was a certain level of confusion when Memphis musicians tried to play with musicians from other cities. The Plantation Inn was one place where this rhythm really cooked. Now, every musician interviewed for the Smithsonian exhibit could talk extensively about "the Memphis sound," but each of them identified it in a different genre—rockabilly, jazz, r & b. They did agree that a creative anarchy was audible across genres, that any Memphis sound got its energy from each player going in his own direction but in the context of the whole group and the whole sound, in a call and response of mutual inspiration. (Nashville studio musicians who, regimented, "had to read music," stand as the horrible other end of the spectrum.) They also identified a powerful minimalism, an ethic that "less is more," which means that there is room for different voices. So even though the PI sound was cutting edge rhythm and blues—groove-based,
with horns punctuating a melodic vocal line—it was recognizably exciting to audiences also listening to "white" music. Certainly the difference from much "white" music may have also enticed white listeners—the swinging rhythm absent from country, horns instead of strings—but most of the white people I talked to did not reject the Hit Parade or the Grand Ol' Opry for r & b. Rather, they added r & b into the mix, listening to more music, not less, as did their black counterparts.

And all the music—from big bands¹, black vocal groups in tight harmonies, small r & b combos, Italian crooners, early white rockabilly bands, and so on—made you want to dance. A white middle-class woman from the Central High School class of 1958, who frequented the PI, told me that

[there was] a lot of energy put into listening to the music, dancing—you had to dance to it, because this was not music you sat still and listened to. You had to move, so therefore dancing became a real part of that period. (M. Griffith 1994)

Typically, the white kids who knew about black music and loved to dance to it, heard it first on radio and records, and then sought out live performances. Here I was incredibly lucky to be introduced to Mary Ann Linder, who has worked at the Poplar Tunes record store since 1955 and who graduated from Holy Name High School in 1956. The person who introduced us was arguing that the Memphis bop was invented by the Italian Catholic girls at that school, where, he claimed, lenient priests allowed them to listen to black

¹Big bands toured less and less after the war, but those that did travel came through Memphis, centrally located on the way to Chicago and New Orleans on the north south axis and on the way to Houston and Kansas City to the southwest. Smaller combos also came through. Local big bandleaders included Jimmie Lunceford, Willie Mitchell, and Phineas Newborn, Senior.
music. As Mary Ann explained, these stories are actually connected: fabulous, innovated
dancing did happen at those weekly dances in the Holy Name basement cafeteria, in large
part because Mary Ann herself supplied them with the latest records from Poplar Tunes.

Two of my friends came over here and got them from me. We had a jukebox at school, and

once a week they'd come over here and buy 'em and we'd have them at the dance that night.

Rarely does a researcher get to meet the literal connection between a mass media
institution and the audiences it addresses! Even more, Mary Ann was the first employee at
Pop Tunes (her brothers banked with the owners, who, like them, were Italian). She not
only sold the records to entrepreneurs and individuals, she made charts, like the Billboard
charts, of their relative popularity. The disk jockeys, jukebox operators, and recording
company men who congregated at Pop Tunes hungered for these charts. They were the
only remotely objective regional measuring device available to them, and the only
information on records fared overall.

There was some science to Mary Ann's methods: "Entirely what I sold, that's what
went on the charts." But she would also include songs that she thought would be hits:

I recommended what I heard on the radio. "You need to cover this on your route—it's gonna
be good!"

Thus Mary Ann's experienced voice joined with the worn records on the jukeboxes, the
order lists of the box owners, the request lines at the radio stations, and the sales figures
themselves to tell independent entrepreneurs what audiences wanted to hear.

And the young white audience, of which Mary Ann was very much a part, wanted
to hear music by black groups: Mary Ann's friends chose songs by "the Drifters, the
Clovers, the Charms; Big Joe Turner, Ray Charles...", all of them black artists. How did they know about these groups? Those who went to the Catholic Youth Organization dances at the parish girls' schools heard the records Mary Ann sent over from the store, as I said. But the primary outlet for new music—black r & b, but also white country and the new hybrid rock & roll—was radio. Numerous individual radio shows featured live blues or country performances; more importantly, there was WDIA with its all-Negro programming, and over at WHBQ, a white DJ named Dewey Phillips who played country and r & b and r & r records deep into the night. Across the river in Arkansas, KWEM broadcast blues, hillbilly, and both white and black gospel music.

Mary Ann knew about WDIA, the black station, but was in school and at work during its broadcasting hours; she listened to the Arkansas station once in awhile. But every night she'd tune into Dewey Phillips's Red Hot & Blue, because who knew what Dewey would play or do next? No one else talked like this on the radio. Wake up! he says.

[play cd here] There was an undeniable energy here.

Mary Ann argues that no one in her crowd was trying to be rebellious in listening to this dj or this music, and no one was choosing racially on purpose:

They didn't care about who made the record, they were more concerned about whether you could dance to it—as far as who made it, they couldn't care less. Probably, kids don't care today...—as long as it's a good beat.

This was the key: for Mary Ann and her friends, music was primarily for dancing. In fact, they loved a lot of Hit Parade songs and big band numbers by white artists for the same reason, in contradiction to those who would argue that white fans in this period were rebelling against the square music of their parents' generation. Girls taught each other to
dance, and they taught boys to dance; they picked up steps from each other, from Fred
Astaire movies, or even from their parents. Once in awhile the boys would bring back
something they'd learned from watching black couples dance at the Rainbow Room on
Beale or at Curry's Club Tropicana. Mary Ann and her friends danced at Catholic Youth
Organization events at Holy Names or Little Flower nearly every weekend, they danced at
each other's houses, they danced at the American Legion downtown, and they even
danced at the drive-in restaurants. They'd just get out of the car and bop in the parking lot
if the right song came on the radio.

I don't think [Dewey] started out playing for dancing per se, it was just that kids liked the
best.

But whether or not Mary Ann and her friends chose this music on racial grounds,
their love for black music was nonetheless inevitably racial. First of all, Dewey Phillips had
been hired specifically to nab WDIA's black audiences after dark, when that station went
off the air. WDIA's "experiment" with black programming had proved wildly successful,
and WHBQ was looking to capture this newly discovered Negro market. They called the
show "Red Hot and Blue" and initially hired an announcer who also acted in local
productions of Shakespeare. He played records by smoother black artists like Nat King
Cole and the Ink Spots, and his formal style apparently failed to capture any new audience
at all. When the station took a chance and hired the lunatic Dewey away from a downtown
department store's record department, they garnered not only the nighttime black
audiences but a huge and loyal following of white teenagers as well. Radio put black
culture where anyone could tune in. Incredibly, listening to this music became a public,
communal practice for young whites of all classes. Mary Ann would drive into K's drive-in
restaurant with her friends, and all the cars would have their radios tuned to Dewey; "dragging" Main or Union, they could hear echoes of their own radio.

Their listening choice was inevitably racial because of Memphis's social geography as well. The drive-ins, for example, were white hangouts not only because of legal segregation but also because even working-class whites had access to cars in ways that blacks didn't; and the carhops who worked there were always black. Later in high school, Mary Ann's crowd started to frequent the Plantation Inn across the river in Arkansas.

The music at the PI—exclusively from black bands, including the Veltones, a vocal quartet, Phineas Newborn Orchestra (a big band), and Ben Branch and the Largos with "just unbelievable" horns and rhythm, among others—had such an "undeniable groove" (Manuel 1994) that people still talk about the club's particular rhythm. Bettye Berger, the owners' daughter-in-law, says

BB: I remember one particular song, "Little Bitty Pretty One",

LH: Yeah?

BB: a little uptempo thing, and the rhythm from the floor, and the people, would just get sort of involved.... The rhythm from their bodies, moving, the place was big, and it was like it was in the walls—you'd go in the next day and still feel it. And there isn't anyone that you can ask who's been over to the Plantation Inn, that will ever forget it.

Everybody enjoyed dancing. They'd do tangos then, and they'd do the samba, and they'd do the bop, you know, it was just a, just a wonderful time. It seems like you don't see that anymore, unless you go down to the islands, or down to New Orleans or something—you know. To see people dance, to me it's just so beautiful! It's something you took for granted, people getting, you know, out there and getting with that rhythm. And that rhythm was happening. (Berger 1994)
The dancers worked with that swing, that pulse. You used your whole body, leaning into the music. Here at the Plantation Inn, dancers perfected the dance they had been practicing at high school dances and at home: the bop, a slower version of the jitterbug, without the throwing and with a lot more rhythm in the hips and knees. On faster dances, partners stood a little apart, holding hands almost as if they were walking down the street, but facing each other and doing their own version of the step in synch with each other. On the slower numbers, couples went back into the dance frame to hold each other quite closely, matching each others' steps exactly and erotically.

That rhythm drove people to dance their shoes off, to literally ruin their clothes in the delirium of the moment.

BB: One of the things I'll never forget was the high school girls. That would come in after a prom with their beautiful formal on. And their beautiful corsage. And their little hair fixed just perfectly, beauty shop, you know, everything in place. And their white gloves. And I've seen em leaving with their hose in their hands, their shoes in their hands, the corsages, you know,

LH: ripped off

BB: yeah! and perspired, and probably smooched, and you know, just had a great old time

LH: totally danced out

BB: yeah! just worn out, completely.

LH: Oh, I want to go!

BB: Yeah, get that energy back. And they'd have the little bop sessions, where they would make a ring, and two boppers would get in and they'd break in? And the best boppers would just get right down, on the floor. And my husband was one of the best....

Nor were dancing and smooching (etcetera) the only activities: The boys especially also
fought with each other, to the extent that the club put on extra security for prom nights.

People would get drunk and crazy, says Bettye:

Before the evening would be up, you'd have maybe two students to get into a fight, maybe
one of the football players—they were all revved up, for a little blood. So sometimes that
would happen, and we had to make sure they didn't do [that] and empty the house, cause that
could cost you a lot of money, so we had plenty of bodyguards or I guess you'd say security
for that, and if something happened, they'd just take em by the arm and led them away.

LH: "Really, you want to go now."

BB: "Please go, get out of here." ....So, then, yeah, the typical night was, everybody was
dancing, dancing, dancing, having a good time, and I looked up one night—you'd never know
what to expect—and here comes this guy out of the restroom with a commode top around his
neck. (laughing) a college....I thought, oh my God, I thought I'd seen everything!! And he
had just taken the, he was so happy, he took the commode top off and came out wearing it!
round his neck!

And on their side, the musicians kept moving, sometimes in extraordinary ways.

Waiter Charlie Turner would go up on stage to sing, and he would literally climb the walls
with microphone in hand; the Veltones, like the Temptations later on, moved in elegant
synchrony (Berger, V. Griffith, Bryant). Calvin Newborn, a black guitarist who regularly
played the club (first with his father's big band and later with his own smaller combo), was
dancing too:²

²Malone (1996) tracks a genealogy of singing dancers, dancing singers, singing and
dancing musicians, and so on—even mentioning a few other singing waiters, such that it
seems to be a performance sub-genre—arguing that the flow of music and movement
across specific "genres" is a hallmark of African-American style. She also notes the history
of black musicians playing command performances for whites-only audiences.
flying. I would get about six feet in the air playing the guitar. As a matter of fact, I used to think I could fly. I felt like I could make myself as light as I wanted to. Even today I dream that I'm walking down the street and spread my arms and just take off and fly. (Gordon 1995: 51)

Dancing at the club was an interplay between all these dancers, their interdependence. The dancers on the floor grooved on the band's rhythm, but then the band thrived on the boppers' energy. Bobby Manuel evokes this:

I don't care what you're playing, man, if people aren't moving from it and then they're not feeling a thing then something's not happening, they're not hearing it. Or... they're sick, I don't know....[But] when you see people rocking and then dancing out there and people moving to it and feeling the same things, you know, you're giving, you know you KNOW you're communicating and that's part of it, man, who could stand to sit in a room with, I just, I don't know, people just looking, looking and looking and looking.... You have to have that feedback. Man, that's why you do it. (Manuel 1993)

And in turn, completing the circle, a central goal of the band was to get people to dance.²

Memphis audiences were musically sophisticated and demanding, so Memphis bands had to know a lot to move them. Black horn player Fred Ford explains:

When I was coming up in the forties you had to play everything. Even the radio stations played some of everything. You heard Goodman, you heard Basie, you heard Artie Shaw, you heard Lunceford, Ellington, Guy Lombardo. You heard country music. Different tastes from different people. You couldn't go in and play blues all night or jazz all night or ballads and love songs all night. You had to be very talented and you had to have an open mind.

---

²Again, Malone (1996) offers more on this groove, naming it as specifically African-American.
(Gordon 1995: 51)

One of Ford's basic points here is that the musicians were skilled, intelligent performers, rather than vehicles for emotions or primitives moved by "natural" impulses—a point made often in response to various racist claims about black bodies and minds, but not yet irrelevant, unfortunately. Connected to this, it is crucial to emphasize that, despite all the interdependence and mutual grooving, or maybe even because of it, the black musicians never actually danced with the white audiences—they might climb the walls but they rarely ventured onto the dance floor—and no black patrons ever made it through the door. The dynamic interactions between the people on the stage and the people on the dance floor happened almost entirely through sound, particularly through the power of the beat, and through vision and kinetic energy. The one group of white listeners at the Plantation Inn who went further and talked to the musicians, and who eventually built friendships and working partnerships with them, were avid young musicians like Bobby Manuel and Steve Cropper.

Meanwhile, dancing was a social marker for the dancers, carrying a lot of power within their white world. Mary Griffith, the middle-class woman who got her education at Central High School and the Plantation Inn, emphasized that

you could tell where a kid went to school by how he danced. It was different from different sections of town....It was subtle—-you could dance with each other without any problem, it was just certain little hand pushes, or turns....When you would slowdance, to a ballad, the Humes guys knew how to, there was a turn, a step—they would turn you backwards instead of forwards, and that was really exciting. (M. Griffith 1994)

In fact, Mary ended up marrying Virgil, who attended working-class Humes, where the
boys knew how to slowdance (and thought the Central girls were "snooty"). You can still hear Virgil's commitment to dancing as he explains how he finally learned that distinctive turn.

It was a little dip step, it was, what's the word you use with ballet? Graceful. It was a step, it was a graceful skip step that I spent a year trying to perfect, I mean I really did. You concentrated on it. Cause I could look at guys, at my high school, that danced the slow dance with girls, and I figured that anybody can slow dance, anybody can slow dance. But this step really set the good dancers apart from the, just guys who were out there....I watched and I watched and I couldn't figure it out. And I was dancing with a girl....and we were slow dancing, and I kept watching those other guys, and I could not figure out how to do it. Well, come to find out, I was turnin' to the right! And you know I just had it backwards in my mind, and she said, "Why are you always turning to the right, Virgil? Why don't you turn to the left?" And I turned to the left and boom, there it was. All I had to do was turn to the left and I had that step and it was there forever.

So the white dancers did at least understanding dancing as (joyous) work, not as only natural, effortless. It marked the gaining of kinetic knowledge, and it gave you power.

"Bop could transform a person," another working class white man told me. "I knew a guy in high school, just the sorriest, least popular person....And then he learned how to bop, and then he had to beat 'em off with a stick! He was so graceful and so stylish and so cool."

(Raiteri, conversation.)

So dancing well could help you transcend you neighborhood or class or clique identity. Give all this, it is not so surprising that some young men and young women spent a lot of time on their dancing.

None of the people who told me about he bop and showed me how they did it
seemed to know that black dancers also did a bop, which I know not from black Memphians but from books on social dance (Hazzard-Gordon 1990) and African-American movement and music (Malone 1996). All of the white dancers learned to dance from other white dancers, usually girls, at record parties or dances sponsored by the Catholics or after school, watching Dance Party, a local television show. Some picked up steps from their parents and from watching dancers in the movies; as Chapter 5 shows, a handful of working class white boys actually went to black clubs and watched the dancers there, too. One North Memphis man said that he had see a version of the bop on a military base in North Carolina in the late forties, and speculated that the white sailors at the Millington Naval Base north of Memphis had brought the dance to town, and that it originated on the West Coast. Another, Bobby Sanders, said that he had picked up the dance in Florida when he travelled there for a figure-skating competition, but most agreed that the dance was a mélange of other dances and that dancers constantly improved and improvised on the basic form. But the connection between black and white versions of the bop remains an open question in my research.

At any rate, it was worth it to venture across the river to the Plantation Inn to bop. A neon sign blazed through the darkness: HAVING FUN WITH MORRIS, it read. It was clear from the horns and the beat, which you could hear even from the gravel parking lot, that having fun was exactly what was going on.

And Morris was there in his blazing white suit. I mean, that was about the first thing you saw.... (Farely 1993)

This was owner Morris Berger, the man responsible for booking the fabulous bands
through his extensive network of contacts on Beale Street. After being greeted by Morris, a customer would move on into the dark club, where black waiters would bring you Coca-Cola and ice "set-ups" for the liquor you carried in since you couldn't buy it there. Forty years later, Mary Griffith still gets dreamy remembering the room:

The dance floor...they had one of those w—like glass...it was waxed, you would slide...Now that you think about it probably wasn't very big, but you could get a lot of people crammed onto it. And the little stage, you know, and the singers.... (M. Griffith 1994)

The Plantation Inn may have been just far enough outside Memphis that these black musicians and white dancers could get away with this groove. As I described above, the club was across the river from Memphis, so that it was after you left Memphis, Tennessee, behind—and it was west of the city's racial geography, where the further east you go, the bigger the houses are, and the more thoroughly segregated the neighborhoods. But it was also located between towns, so that it you hit it before you got to little West Memphis, Arkansas. So starting in Memphis and driving west, then, white Memphians would go through an increasingly mixed racial environment until they hit the thriving public space of downtown and then the big metal bridge across the river, and then everything was suddenly a lot more country:

You'd go to the Harahan bridge, go across there, 2 lanes all the way across. And you got off that and it was still 2 lanes. All the way across. And the Plantation Inn was the first symbol of civilization that you came to for about three or four miles. (Farelly 1994)

On the other side, the PI was on the industrial and racial edge of West Memphis, Arkansas. Police were more lenient there, although harder on cars with Tennessee plates; underage kids could get liquor more easily; and, just out of the reach of censor Lloyd
Binford, dirty movies and burlesque shows played here regularly. Robert Gordon talked to Wayne Jackson, the white trumpet player in the Memphis Horns, about the geography of West Memphis:

"West Memphis is where everybody came to party back then. The sailors from Millington [Naval Base] would all come across the bridge. And Eighth Street, in quote Colored Town unquote, was big gambling. So all the black people would come over there too, gambling along Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth Street in little old dives and honky tonsks, drinking rotgut whiskey. West Memphis was wild. (Gordon 1995)"

"Everybody" in this case seems to be everybody else besides middle-class and working-class whites from Memphis, from whose perspective all this activity really would be out of the ordinary. For them, the other two nightclubs out there were Danny's and the Cotton Club, both white clubs, carried fearsome reputations for toughness. Even though the PI certainly had its share of drunken brawls, most of its dancers regarded these other bars as Arkansas places and far too scary to patronize. Besides, as far as they knew, only the PI featured black dance bands.

Who were these white Memphis audiences, and where exactly did they come from? Along with the sailors, patrons included college students from Memphis State (but rarely from conservative Southwestern University); some of the Memphis country-club crowd--those whom Bettye termed "the blue bloods"; kids in or just graduated from middle-class Central or Treadwell high schools, or (having saved up their money) from working-class Humes or Messick. Bettye Berger also remembers a more worldly clientele, including the socialites from Memphis, the people who might be here doing a play, I think, before my time, I think Eva Gabor came over, and I remember once Jack Lemmon came over. And it
seems like when someone would come in to the city of Memphis, someone would tell them to go across the river, because there was some action over there, some great dancing.

Underage kids sneaking out, young adults not yet married, college students learning a profession, and wealthy outsiders looking for a good time, and prom night revelers—all of these patrons shared a liminal status themselves. None of them were outside conventional roles, but all were in or putting themselves into social positions which let them range more freely. And of course they could move more freely because they were white. Many works on this period describe a bitter paradox: black musicians can move uninhibitedly on stage but, as I shall explore, not at all freely offstage, while white audiences who can move everywhere in the city cannot dance. The latter half of this equation did not hold true at the Plantation Inn, however. Although I do not know whether the musicians thought the dancers there were graceful compared to their own friends, I have no doubt that these were impressive dancers. The difference between my account and others is not one of accuracy versus stereotype, but a class issue. Although many of the dancers at the PI were from middleclass backgrounds, many of them were not, and it seems that class crossover (even mixing) happened here. I read this in part from the club's reputation—Bettye says that she thought it was a dangerous place before she actually went there (see Chapter

---

4See McMichael for a discussion of how awareness of this paradox can inform white jazz listeners' politics outside music. See Malone (1996) for more on historical antecedents for white stiffness. I take issue with her implication that authentic movement has always been black, however.

5Newspapers from Memphis State University indicate that typical college students sponsored white big bands and crooners well into the fifties (one frat-party band dressed up for a Confederate theme in Klan robes). This lasted roughly until Elvis became famous nationally (1956), after which they paid more attention to rock and roll.
Four), while Budgie, who went to Danny's in West Memphis with the "best dancers," characterized the PI as "stilted" (see Chapter Five). These are statements about propriety and sexiness, respectively, and their different class feeling-tones. And I would argue that comments like these also show that working-class white people get marked socially because of their association with black music (by choice) and black people (in neighborhoods, at work). Like blacks, they appear to upper and middleclass whites as dirty (remember Bettye's worry about Elvis's greasiness) but also enticingly connected to good times. Hip middleclass people get some of their cultural capital from hanging out in limited ways with these folks. Whether because of the flip side of racism--if black people are more sexual, than white people must be prudes or respectable, one—or because of actual social practices which make white people think they have to repress themselves, it is extraordinarily difficult to see white movements outside this duality. Working class white people appear either as wanna-be black people, or imperfect white people.

To understand the interracial dynamics of this positioning, I will turn now to the complicated neighborhoods around two white high schools, Humes and Central.

Central is in midtown Memphis, and Humes in nearby North Memphis, and they served the same geographic areas as, respectively, Booker T. Washington and Manassas High Schools, which were for black students. Both neighborhoods, if you can call them that with such internal divisions, were segregated by street. Everyone knew where the boundaries were, and they still know them today. In Chapter One, I quote Larry Moore's description of the neighborhood of his childhood, as he explains to me the dynamics of this

---

6Ralph Ellison calls this repression "the price of the ticket" (quoted in McMichael 1996).
geography of segregation: the part of town from which he drew these lessons was
midtown, part of the same area I describe here. Describing the streets he walked daily, he
gave grounded explications of encounters in the context of separation, the rhythms of
everyday life, and racial and class relations as much as of silence and separation. Mary Ann
Linder lived within walking distance of both her Catholic girls' school and of Poplar
Tunes, in an area that was racially mixed in the sense that whites and blacks lived adjacent
to each other. She grew up rollerskating with black children, eating at their houses, and
even going on a regular basis to the black Catholic church next door to her house. But
blacks couldn't live just anywhere—in this area, Concord Street was "the black street", and
it "had been black forever." Further, "they" had "their" schools and churches. Even though
Mary Ann's family attended St. Anthony's every day, they still considered it the black
Catholic church, as indeed did the Catholic hierarchy itself. Of course the schools were
segregated as well, Catholic as well as public.7

Similarly, Virgil Griffiths, the white dancer from Humes, could explain the
"unspoken dividing lines" from his side, even without a street map in front of him, with
startling specificity:

7 As Mary Ann points out, her school was segregated by gender as well. Mary Ann also
shows us that the apparently simple category of whiteness was itself complicated. Her
family was Italian and Catholic in a largely Scots-Irish, German Protestant city. Italian and
Irish Catholic kids formed a sort of subset of the white community, mostly because of the
parochial schools; Greeks and Jews were also more likely to be of the merchant or
working-class community in North Memphis, and thus more in contact with actual black
people. Mary Ann's father and uncles worked at the Tennessee Brewery, her mother at
Sims Bag Company and Montesi's grocery store. Honey (1993) shows how segregated
wage scales and segregation within unions precluded black and white workers from
sharing "working class culture" (or forcefully representing themselves to management, for
that matter.)
I lived on Ayer street between Jackson and Chelsea. And Keel was the dividing line. Anything...south of Keel was black, north of Keel was white. Except for three houses. There were three houses across the street that were black...That was the only overlap. They were elderly couples, and that was why it was tolerated. There were no black kids, no young black men or black me, [more ironically] no "uppity niggers," no wild parties—they knew how to stay in their own place. But then three blocks down the street there was a street called Orphanage...It was white...and then back the other direction towards Jackson, like two blocks of blacks and then whites. And on the corner...there would be a street this way and a street that way [showing a right angle with his hands], and this is a black house and this is a white house. But you'd better not sell that house to a black—that whole block'd go black.

That was understood. (V. Griffiths 1994)

The inhabitants of these neighborhoods had to negotiate these boundaries on a daily basis, and there were particular codes of behavior. Morse Gist, a jukebox operator (quoted in Chapter Two) and the son of a music store owner in the rural area surrounding Memphis, remembers going into a black neighborhood in the 1930s:

blacks had to, as a child I can remember, they stepped off the sidewalk when I walked down that way, they, if the sidewalk were crowded, they would step into the street, the elderly people and so forth, to let me through, or by.

One of the striking things to me about this sentence is the way that the language itself echoes the bodily experiences of the child: the crowdedness of the sidewalk (the repetition of "they"), the difficulty of knowing or naming where his body is supposed to go ("to let me through, or by"), even the almost-physical confusion about whether black people had a choice about all this or not (they "had to", but there is no verb, and when there is a verb, the "had to" is dropped so all we hear is that "they stepped," and where is the power in
"they let me"

Another working-class white man, talking about the 1950s, describes how blacks would be able to walk on the sidewalks on their own streets, but would "know to" move into the street as they came around the corner into a "white" section.

I was never mean to them. I wasn't friends, but I didn't bother them, either. As long as they didn't get out of line, he says, you didn't have any reason to.

This statement points up the violence of racial boundaries, and therefore their unnaturalness. They had to be reasserted, maintained, and policed not only by whites but by blacks themselves. Ironically, one of the privileges of white "understanding" is precisely the luxury of not having to attend to the rules except when they are broken. It was the black walkers who had to manage their actions and their bodies to stay safe.

Again, Virgil:

They came by, see, they went to Manassas High School, down at Firestone and Manassas, and we [Humes] were at Jackson and Manassas. But all the black kids who lived south of us, of Humes High School, had to go to Manassas. So they all walked past Humes High School to get to their school. They had another ten, twelve blocks to walk after they passed Humes. There were always conflicts between those kids. Close to fights--just about always insults, sometimes close to fights. The fact of the matter is, I believe an awful lot of kids used to walk all the way down to Thomas Street, and walk down Thomas Street to Firestone to avoid Humes.

Compounding the issue of how to move and where to go in these encounters was the problem of speech, especially of honorifics. This is where Mr. Gist, growing up in the 1930s, got confused:

They always referred to me, and I thought that was very, I was always puzzled because the,
the elderly black folks always called me mister, or master, or some term as that. Now I
wasn't allowed to call them mister. Now I had to call every person, every white person that
was older, I had to refer to them as mister or missus or so forth. But the black people, I had
to call, I had to refer to either on a first name basis, or I remember "uncle" or "auntie," if you
didn't know their names, that was a term that was used, no matter who they were, which was
acceptable.
This arbitrariness was, of course, painfully clear to the black people in these situations.
David Porter, who grew up in Memphis in the 1950s and played at the Plantation Inn as a
high school student (he later became a songwriter at Stax, where he co-wrote such classics
as "Soul Man"), describes his struggle to comprehend these linguistic power relations in
similarly but markedly different terms.

I knew as a youngster that I had a very very serious problem saying yes sir and no sir to
white people....If there's an elderly person, whether he be black or white, I'd say yes sir or no
sir. But when I was coming up, there were youngsters who were saying yes sir and no sir to
teenagers, and I did not, I knew there was confusion, I didn't understand how and why that
was happening. (Porter 1992)

Porter also speaks eloquently about the complexity of encountering a white person
on the street, the series of decisions and literally physical adjustments he would have to
make in particular situations in a kind of perversion of the mutuality of dancing.

You don't really know how to, you didn't really know how to carry yourself in that situation
until the other individual revealed to you where they were coming from. If there was a
friendly ambience about them, then you were able to let yourself come down a little bit, not
be so guarded. If there wasn't, then you didn't say anything, and you kept the wall up, and you
could sense and feel the aggression that was inside of the individual wanting to come out
towards you.
Porter describes a process of reading his situation, a dynamic, active knowledge very
different from the static of "knowing your place." This process of kinetic interpretation
reveals that social place is the opposite of natural, that the "rules" about it depend on the
whim of individual white people in the context of a social structure privileging white labor,
white bodies, and white understandings.

When faced with physical aggression in a particular moment, Porter, incredibly,
fought back.

I sang at two or three different clubs at night, and I worked at a grocery store. And my
experience was--the pride thing, to give you an example of how the pride was instilled in me
and how the change was taking place--I was workin' in the produce department. And a guy,
ever will forget him, his name was Birchard. He believed in kicking at all of the blacks that
worked there. If you walked by, he'd kick you and they would laugh, and, and move. Henry
kicked at me, I picked his leg up in the air, and said, You ever raise your leg up at me again,
I'll kill you. That was, that was a kind of craziness, if you want to call it, because I was the
one who was in jeopardy and danger at that time [laughing] and that was the kind of attitude
that was coming up in my little group, during my era. It was another kind of attitude that was
evolving and developing.

This "craziness" is born of long years of bodily control in the face of ridiculous but very
real dangers, and points to the possibility that the intelligent, witty, musical, stylish,
 wonderful craziness onstage at the Plantation Inn might be born of the same pressures.
Unfortunately, both kinds of breaking out from restraints could easily be seen by whites as
"natural" exuberance or aggression.

Porter told this story of fighting back in order to communicate to the Smithsonian
researchers and their audience the radical shift in possibilities that occurred after the
1950s, and I relate it here for the same purpose. Nonetheless, his movement occurred in
the context of deep segregation, when the only place where black people could walk and
breathe freely was Beale Street. Although individual musicians could go into clubs across
the color line, no club was patronized by both black and white Memphians. Meanwhile,
schools, restaurants, parks, museums, the library, and the zoo were utterly segregated,
while streetcars, neighborhood, and almost any place employing black Memphians (as
maids, janitors, waiters, porters, laborers, stevedores, etc), all of these places were
characterized by the social separation but physical juxtaposition of the races.

The closest thing to integration in this period was radio. Although for the most
part it echoed this separation/juxtaposition—WDIA broadcast black voices, the other
stations mostly did not—the exceptions offered fruitful confusion. Peter Guralnick riffs on
the diversity of radio offerings:

Memphis radio in 1950 was an Aladdin’s lam of musical vistas and styles. Late at night Elvis
could have listened—along with most of he other kids in [Lauderdale] Courts and half of
Memphis, it seemed—to Daddy-o-Dewey, Dewey Phillips, broadcasting from the Gayoso on
WHBQ....In the morning there was Bob Neal’s wake-up show on WMPS, hillbilly music and
compone humor in a relaxed Arthur Godfrey style of presentation, and at 12:30 pm Neal
offered 30 minutes of [white] gospel with the Blackwood Brothers....If you changed your dial
to WDIA, you could hear not only local blues star B.B. King, deejaying and playing his own
music live on the air, but also such genuine personalities as Professor Nat D. Williams,
history teacher at Booker T. Washington High School, columnist for Memphis’s Negro
newspaper, The World, and longtime master of ceremonies at the Palace Theater’s Amateur
Night....Not to mention the [black] Spirit of Memphis quartet, who had their own 15 minute
program and made even the Carnation Milk jingle reverberate with feeling. On Sunday night
the sermons of the Reverend W. Herbert Brewster, author of Negro spiritual classics, were broadcast live from the East Trigg Baptist Church, with his famed soloist, Queen C. Anderson, taking the interludes....And this doesn't even begin to take into account Howlin' Wolf and Sonny Boy Williams's broadcasts from West Memphis, Arkansas, just across the river, Sleepy-Eyed John's hillbilly parade on WHM, all the regular showcases for popular tunes of the day, the big band broadcasts from the Peabody Skyway, and of course, the Opry broadcasts on Saturday night. Here was an education of a sort, and of a quality, virtually unimaginable today and, in an age and a place that were strictly segregated in every respect, an education that was colorblind (Guralnick 1994: 38-39).

Paul Burlison, of rockabilly's Johnny Burnette Trio, remembers sitting in with Howlin' Wolf on blues broadcasts from KWAM from West Memphis, a practice that started because the shows came on back to back and the musicians literally ran into each other in the doorway. Scotty Moore, Elvis's guitarist, has similar memories of the color line becoming less important in the recording or broadcast studio. Significantly, the one element missing in these types of recording is the visual evidence of physical presence. Somehow, since audiences could not see them, and the music brought them together, this kind of collaboration became another strange inconsistency in the web of restricted behavior.

On the one hand, nearly every white person I interviewed immediately responded to my linking of "race relations" with "music" in my descriptions of my project—indeed, few interviews occurred without such recognition. On other hand, even with this awareness and my questions on top of it, none of them connected their experiences of black musicians in the Plantation Inn with their encounters with neighborhood black
Memphians. Nor did anyone volunteer that the Plantation Inn was a segregated institution: when I asked them if black Memphians had ever been able to go dancing there, their most common responses were either a sort of puzzled "no," as if they had never asked this question, or a very matter of fact no," as if the answer was obvious. "To a large extent they really were invisible to us," says another middle-class white woman now. "They really had to make themselves visible" by drastic means such as the civil rights movement and the 1968 sanitation workers strike. (Russell) Again, the burden of consciousness and movement falls on black Memphians.

So some white dancers at the Plantation Inn were almost willfully unaware of racial realities for the musicians or their neighbors. Others, mostly musicians, honored and followed the music, and sometimes found themselves rebelling against dominant culture. The black musicians were certainly aware of racial truths in the city and the club, but it seems that music offered them, too, a break from racial tension and a space in which they could move a little more freely. With everyone's intense involvement of the music, all of these attitudes resulted in what Peter Guralnick has called "a passionate and whole-hearted commitment to the moment." So the Plantation Inn offered a good time—a night there was felt by the whites especially to be entertainment and not politics. And precisely because their actions never explicitly acknowledged race, because it was just music, it was entirely possible for the whites involved to continue not only in a kind of racial unconsciousness but also in other, everyday racist beliefs and practices. The movements of the musicians, for all their wildness, could seem perfectly consistent with white ideas about knowing your place and not getting out of line. Thus all of the movements in the
Plantation Inn—of dancers, of musicians, between the two groups, between the roles of fan and musician, between what counted as black and what as white—all of these movements were neither a dance of pure resistance to racial norms nor a simply racist exploitation of blacks by whites. Rather, blacks and whites in this site differentially avoided segregation and confronted it, gaining some kinds of knowledge and ignoring others, dancing with and sometimes against local boundaries. The Plantation Inn, in all its liminality and influence, was squarely within the contradictory racial geography of 1950s Memphis.
Bibliography

Anzaldúa, Gloria

Anzaldúa, Gloria, and Cherrie Moraga, editors

Appleby, David, Allison Graham, and Steven John Ross.
1993  At the River I Stand. Documentary Film. San Fransisco: California Newsreel.

Augé, Marc

Baker, Houston A.

Baker, Lee D.

Beifuss, Joan Turner.
1989  At the River I Stand: Memphis, the 1968 Strike, and Martin Luther King. Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing.

Benjamin, Walter

Berger, Bettye
1994  Interview with Laura Helper.

Berry, Chuck
Blackside, Inc.

Borchert, James

Bourdieu, Pierre

Cantor, Louis

Cantwell, Robert

Caro, Robert A.

Certeau, Michel de

Chauncey, George

Conaway, James

Cook, Susan C.

Daniel, Pete

Davis, Gerald L.


Davis, Mike


Dawson, Jim, and Steve Propes

1992  *What Was the First Rock 'n' Roll Record?* Boston: Faber and Faber.

De Lauretis, Teresa


Denisoff, Serge


Deutsch, Sarah


Dollard, John

1957  *Caste and Class in a Southern Town.* Garden City: Doubleday.

Douglas, Ann


Doyle, Bertram Wilbur.


Ennis, Philip H.

Erenberg, Lewis

Escott, Colin, and Martin Hawkins.

Farely, Bob
1994  Interview with Laura Helper.

Ferris, William

Fiske, John
1989  *Reading Popular Culture*. Boston: Unwin Hyman

Fontana, D.J.

Frankenberg, Ruth.

Frith, Simon

Foucault, Michel.

Gates, Jr., Henry Louis

George, Nelson

Gilbert, James Burkhart
Gillett, Charlie

Gilloch, Graeme

Gist, Morse

Gilroy, Paul

Gordon, Robert
1995 *It Came From Memphis.* Boston: Faber and Faber.

Graebner, William.

Greene, Victor

Gregory, Steven and Roger Sanjek, editors.

Griffiths, Mary and Virgil.
1994 Interview with Laura Helper.

Grossberg, Lawrence

Guralnick, Peter

Haley, Alex.
Hall, Perry A.

Hall, Stuart and Tony Jefferson, editors.

Haraway, Donna

Harding, Ruby
1994 Interview with Laura Helper.

Hartigan, John, Jr.

Harvey, David

Hazzard-Gordon, Katrina

Hebdige, Dick

Helper, Rose

Herenton, Willie Wilbert
Hiss, Tony

Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger

Home Owners' Loan Corporation

Honey, Michael K.
1993  *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.

Howes, David

Jackson, John A.

Jackson, Peter A.

Jackson, Kenneth T.

Johnson, Eugene, and Robert D. Russell, Jr.

Kaplan, Amy
Keil, Charles  

Keil, Charles, and Steve Feld  

Keil, Charles, Angeliki Keil, and Dick Blau  

Kelley, Robin D. G.  

Laurin, Melton A.  

Lee, Harper  

Lefebvre, Henri  

Lieberman, Robbie.  

Linder, Budgie  
1994  Interview with Laura Helper.

Linder, Mary Ann  
1994  Interview with Laura Helper.

Lipsitz, George  


Lobianco, Sam
1994 Interview with Laura Helper.

Lorde, Audre

Lornell, Kip

Lott, Eric

Mailer, Norman

Manuel, Bobby
1994 Interview with Laura Helper.

Malone, Bill C.

Malone, Jacqui

Marcus, Greil

McClary, Susan

McKee, Margaret and Fred Chisenhall
1993 *Beale Black & Blue: Life and Music on Black America's Main Street.*
Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

McKenzie, Ewan

McRobbie, Angela
1991 Feminism and Youth Culture: From 'Jackie' to 'Just Seventeen.'
Basingstoke: Macmillan Education.

McRobbie, Angela, and Mica Nava, editors
1984 Gender and Generation. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan

Mitchell, Willie

Mohl, Raymond

Moody, Anne.
1968 Coming of Age in Mississippi. New York: Dell Publishing.

Moore, Henrietta L.

Moore, Larry
1994 Interview with Laura Helper

Moore, Scotty

Morrison, Toni.
Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Newborn, Calvin

Novarese, John.

Otis, Johnny

Oxford University Press

Patchett, Ann.

Palmer, Robert

Pearson, Nathan W.

Peretti, Burton W.

Phillips, Sam

Porter, David

Powdermaker, Hortense.

Raichelson, Richard M.

Randle, William McKinley.

Riley, Billy Lee

Roediger, David.

Roll, Bobby

Rosaldo, Renato

Ross, Andrew

Sammons, George

Saxton, Alexander

Seeger, Anthony
1997  "Ethnomusicology and Music Law," in *Borrowed Power: Essays on*

Schuller, Gunther

Scott, Joan Wallach

Sigafoos, Robert Alan

Silver, Christopher and John V. Moeser

Silvester, Peter

Smith, Lillian Eugenia

Soja, Edward W.

Southern, David W.

Stewart, Jim

Taylor, Peter Hillsman
1985 The Old Forest and Other Stories. Garden City: Dial Press.
Taylor, J.M.

Titon, Jeff Todd

Tucker, David M.

United States Commission on Civil Rights
1963 "Hearings before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Memphis, 1962."

Wade-Gayles, Gloria

Walker, Alice

Wells-Barnett, Ida B.

Whisnant, David

Winkler, Cathy, with Renata McMullen and Kate Wininger

Wolfe, Charles, and Kip Lornell

Wray, Matt and Annalee Newitz, editors