Metropolitan Historical Commission
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3000 Granny White Pike
Nashville, Tennessee 37204-2901

TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY AND THE METROPOLITAN NASHVILLE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

39th Annual

Nashville Conference On African-American History and Culture

"A Journey from Enslavement to Liberation"

Friday, February 14, 2020
8:30-4:00 pm

Tennessee State University
Avon Williams Campus
330 10th Avenue North
Nashville, TN 37203

Please Join Us!

On Friday, February 14, 2020 join Tennessee State University's College of Liberal Arts and the Metropolitan Historical Commission for a celebration of the contributions of African Americans to Nashville and Tennessee history. For thirty-nine years, this award-winning conference has brought together historians, students, educators, community leaders and others interested in African American history and culture.

The theme of this year's conference is "A Journey from Enslavement to Liberation." Brigette Jones will speak about the enslaved experience at Belle Meade Plantation, while Dr. Angela Sutton will highlight the recent inclusion of Fort Negley as a UNESCO Site of Memory in the trans-Atlantic slave route, and Tina Cahalan Jones will discuss using U.S. Colored Troops' records for genealogical research. With 2020 as the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment, Linda Wynn will examine the dual struggles African American women faced in the quest for suffrage. Lt. Col. Sharon Presley will focus on the challenges faced by TSU graduates serving as Tuskegee Airmen, fighting for freedom abroad while being denied freedoms at home in the Jim Crow South. After lunch, Frist Art Museum curator Katie Delmez will explain the process of bringing the Murals of North Nashville exhibit to the Frist, and Fisk librarian Brandon Owens, Sr. will discuss the educational legacy of the colored Carnegie libraries in Nashville.

Entertainment this year will be provided by the Tennessee State University Jazz Collegians, directed by James Sexton.

Conference Registration

Nashville Conference On African-American History and Culture

February 14, 2020

Registration Levels:
Students- $20
Pre-registration (through January 31, 2020) $30
Registration (February 1 through day-of conference)- $35

No cash or checks will be accepted on the day of the conference—please pre-register or plan to pay by card.

You can also register on-line! https://events.eventzilla.net/e/39th-annual-nashville-conference-on-african-american-history-and-culture-2138751379

Make checks payable to:
TSU Foundation: TSU/MHC Conference

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Metro Historical Commission
3000 Granny White Pike
Nashville, Tennessee 37204

Name

Address

City, State, Zip

Email Address (for confirmation)

Phone

Questions? Call us at 615-862-7970

Preregistration is strongly encouraged.

Registration cannot be taken over the phone.

Preliminary Program

9:00 am — **Welcome and Opening Remarks**
Tim Walker, MHC Executive Director
Linda T. Wynn, Conference Co-Chair

9:20 am — **Tennessee Slavery: Perspectives, Parallels, and Psychology in Relation to the Belle Meade Plantation**
Brigette J. Jones, Belle Meade Plantation Museum

9:45 am — **Fort Negley in an Atlantic Context: The UNESCO Slave Route**
Angela Sutton, Ph.D., Vanderbilt University

10:10 am — **"Fighting to be Free:" Researching Williamson County's U.S. Colored Troops Veterans**
Tina Cahalan Jones, African American Heritage Society of Williamson County

10:30 am — **BREAK**

10:55 am — **Winged Victory: Tennessee State University's Tuskegee Airmen**
Lt. Col. Sharon Presley, Tennessee State University

11:20 am — **Women's Suffrage: A Two-Fold Struggle as Women and African American Women**
Linda T. Wynn, Tennessee Historical Commission and Fisk University

11:45 am — **Remarks by Ms. Brenda Haywood, Deputy Mayor of Community Engagement and Dr. Alisa Mosey, Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs at Tennessee State University**

Noon — **Lunch (provided)**

1:30 pm — **Musical Performance by the TSU Jazz Collegians**
James Sexton, Director

2:05 pm — **Bringing the Murals of North Nashville to the Frist**
Katie Delmez, Frist Art Museum

2:30 pm — **The Colored Carnegie Libraries of Nashville, Tennessee, 1908-1949**
Brandon Owens, Sr., Fisk University

2:55 pm — **Musical Performance by the TSU Jazz Collegians**
James Sexton, Director

3:30 pm — **Closing Remarks**
Reavis L. Mitchell, D.A.
Conference Co-Chair

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Conference Co-Chairs

Reavis L. Mitchell, Jr.
Fisk University

Linda T. Wynn
Tennessee Historical Commission/Fisk University

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NASHVILLE CONFERENCE ON African-American HISTORY AND CULTURE

"A JOURNEY FROM ENSLAVEMENT TO LIBERATION"

Friday, February 14, 2020 Tennessee State University, Avon Williams Campus

8:30 am	Registration begins
9:00 am	Welcome and Opening Remarks Mr. Tim Walker, Executive Director, Metropolitan Historical Commission Prof. Linda Wynn, Conference Co-Chair
9:20 am	"Tennessee Slavery: Perspectives, Parallels, and Psychology in Relation to the Belle Meade Plantation" Brigette J. Jones, Belle Meade Plantation Museum and Winery
9:45 am	"Fort Negley in an Atlantic Context: The UNESCO Slave Route" Angela C. Sutton, Ph.D., Vanderbilt University
10:10 am	"Fighting to Be Free: Researching Williamson County's U.S. Colored Troop Veterans" Tina Cahalan Jones, African American Heritage Society of Williamson County
10:30 am	BREAK
10:55 am	"Winged Victory: Tennessee State University's Tuskegee Airmen" Lt. Col. Sharon C. Presley, Tennessee State University
11:20 am	"Women's Suffrage: A Two-Fold Struggle as Women and African American Women" Linda T. Wynn, Tennessee Historical Commission and Fisk University
11:45 am	Remarks by Ms. Brenda Haywood, Deputy Mayor of Community Engagement and Dr. Alisa Mosey, Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs at Tennessee State University
12:00 pm	LUNCH
1:30 pm	Musical Performance by the TSU Jazz Collegians James Sexton, Director
2:05 pm	"Bringing the Murals of North Nashville to the Frist" Katie Delmez, Frist Art Museum
2:30 pm	"The Colored Carnegie Libraries of Nashville, Tennessee, 1908-1949" Brandon Owens, Sr., Fisk University
2:55 pm	Musical Performance by the TSU Jazz Collegians James Sexton, Director
3:30 pm	Closing Remarks Dr. Reavis Mitchell, D.A. Conference Co-Chair

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Learotha Williams, Jr., *Tennessee State University*

Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee

LEST WE FORGET: REMEMBERING AFRICAN AMERICANS DURING THE 1960s IN NASHVILLE

In 1960, Nashville's African American community and the city in general, experienced events that changed the timbre of race relations in the Athens of the South. In many ways, Nashville and its contributions to the overall narrative of the Civil Rights Movement are barely recognized. Nashville student leaders, whose fearless resolve allowed them to travel throughout the South to wage war on racial discrimination, with the exception of a few are scarcely mentioned in the Modern Civil Rights storyline. Their seeds of courage, faith, determination, and resolve, were planted, watered, and nourished in the ethos of the nonviolent, direct-protest classes they attended at Clark Memorial United Church under the Reverend James Lawson, Jr., a graduate student at Vanderbilt's School of Divinity who came to Nashville at the urging of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In the dorm rooms of the city's Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and the Nashville Student Movement Office on 21st Avenue North and Jefferson Street, students at American Baptist Theological Seminary (now American Baptist College), Fisk University, Meharry Medical College, and Tennessee Agricultural & Industrial State University (now Tennessee State University) were leaders in challenging racial segregation at its core and helped construct the foundation of the freedom movement.

From staging some of the modern movement's earliest sit-ins, to helping to organize the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), to continuing the Freedom Rides, to participating in voter registration drives, to the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, to the Selma-to-Montgomery March for voting rights, Nashville student activists participated and in many cases were in the forefront as leaders. Nashville students met weekly during the months of September, October, and November of 1959. During those months, Lawson introduce the student activists to the philosophy of Jesus Christ, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, and Henry David Thoreau, among others. Lawson and others, the Reverend C. T. Vivian among them, gave the students a view of nonviolence by role-playing experiencing violence being perpetrated upon them. As Diane Nash, one of the student leaders noted, one of the movement's goals was to "be respectful of the opposition and try to keep issues geared towards desegregation, not get sidetracked."

On February 13, 1960, Nashville students launched their sit-in movement, when they gathered at Kress, Woolworth's, and McClellan stores at 12:40 p.m. in downtown Nashville. The students continued the sit-ins over the next three months, expanding their targets to include lunch counters at the Greyhound and Trailways bus terminals, W. T. Grant's, Walgreen's Drugstore, and major Nashville department stores, Cain-Sloan and Harvey's. The first violent response to the protests came on February 27, 1960, which Lawson called "big Saturday." Eighty-one protestors were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct. However, they all refused to pay fines and remained incarcerated as a continuation of their protest. The first phase of the Nashville Sit-in Movement continued until a resolution came to the forefront on May 10, 1960.

On April 19, 1960, lawyer Z. Alexander Looby's Meharry Boulevard home was destroyed by dynamite. Looby had gained prominence in 1946 when he, Maurice Weaver and Thurgood Marshall were hired by the National Association for the Advancement for Colored People to represent the African Americans charged with murder following a race riot in Columbia, Tennessee. During the sit-in demonstrations and civil rights marches of the 1960s, Looby and other black attorneys provided money and legal services for local college students arrested and jailed.

This publication is a project of the 2020 Nashville Conference on African American History and Culture. The author compiled the information. The Metropolitan Historical Commission edited and designed the materials.

The bombing of Looby's home caused a definitive moment for Nashville's Civil Rights Movement. It served as the catalyst for a silent march later that day when a diverse group of 3,000 people marched to City Hall where Mayor Ben West met them on the steps of the plaza. After questioning by Nash and Vivian, West stated that lunch counters should be desegregated. A watershed moment, this admission by West paved the way for the beginning of desegregated lunch counters making Nashville the first southern city to do so.

As regional desegregation sit-ins led by African American college students grew, Ella Josephine Baker, a student at Shaw University—an HBCU in Raleigh, North Carolina—persuaded the SCLC to invite southern university students to the South -wide Youth Leadership Conference at Shaw University on Easter weekend in 1960. This was a gathering of sit-in leaders to meet, assess their struggles, and explore the possibilities for future actions. At this meeting the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was formed. Baker saw the potential for a special type of leadership by the young sit-in leaders who were not yet prominent in the movement. She believed they could revitalize the Black Freedom Movement and take it in a new direction. To this end she worked to keep the students independent of the older, church-based leadership. While many of the student activists thought Nashville Student Movement leader Diane Nash would be elected as the first president of SNCC, it was her fellow student and colleague at Fisk University, Marion Berry who became the organization's first president. "Diane was a devoted leader...but she was the wrong sex," said John Lewis. "There was a desire to emphasize and showcase black manhood."

SNCC aided in the coordination of sit-ins and other acts of nonviolent civil disobedience throughout the South. In the fall of 1961, following the United States Supreme Court decision in *Boynton v. Virginia* (1960) ending racial segregation of public transportation and eating facilities within those locations, SNCC members confronted violent opposition as Freedom Riders on buses that carried integrated groups of passengers from Washington, D.C. and Nashville through the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. The first group of Freedom Riders, sponsored by the Congress Of Racial Equality (CORE) and traveling in two groups on Trailways and Greyhound buses, met unmerciful violence and CORE abandoned the rides. The Nashville Student Movement, under the direction of Nash and others, decided that "we can't let violence overcome nonviolence. We are coming into Birmingham to continue the Freedom Ride." Members of the Nashville Student Movement left Nashville on May 17 for Birmingham. Upon their arrival, Theophilus Eugene "Bull" Conner, city commissioner of public safety, ordered the new group of Freedom Riders taken to jail. The Riders were released the following day at the Alabama state line. Three days later, despite the governor's pledge of protection, approximately three hundred white segregationists attacked the new group of Freedom Riders, which included thirteen students from Tennessee A&I State University, four from American Baptist College, two each from Fisk University and George Peabody College, and one student from Atlanta's Spelman College, as well as John Seigenthaler, the U.S. Justice Department representative of the Kennedy administration, as they pulled into at a bus depot in Montgomery. The Riders remained indomitable and started out again four days after the Alabama assault. When the Riders arrived in Jackson, Mississippi, no fanatical white mobs awaited them. However, as they entered the whites-only waiting room, police immediately steered them into police vehicles and whisked them away to jail. On September 22, 1961, in response to the Freedom Rides and under pressure from Attorney General Robert Kennedy and others in the Kennedy administration, the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) promulgated regulations prohibiting racial segregation in train and bus terminals, effective on November 1, 1961. Nashville student activists continued to toil in the civil rights vineyard fighting for all to be treated with dignity and the rights as articulated in America's governing documents.

Lest you forget, the 60th Anniversary of the Nashville Sit-in Movement, the bombing of Z. Alexander Looby's home, the silent march in protest against white supremacists, the desegregation of Nashville lunch counters and other public accommodations, and the Freedom Rides, remember Nashville activists also played key roles in the 1963 March on Washington, the Birmingham campaign of 1963, their frontline leaders during the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964, and the struggle to gain voting rights in Selma, all events at the apogee of the modern struggle for civil and human rights. As the late historian and Fisk University alumnus John Hope Franklin said of them, they were "probably the most courageous and the most selfless" civil rights workers.

Linda T. Wynn

Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee

JOSIE E. WELLS, M.D.

Josie E. Wells, known by many of her contemporaries as the "Matron of Hubbard Hospital," was born on November 28, 1878, to John and Eliza Durant English in Mississippi, shortly after the end of Reconstruction. During the last decade of the nineteenth century, Wells moved to Nashville where she would—as a result of her work in the field of medicine, education, philanthropy, and the Colored Women's Club Movement – rise to become one of the most influential African American women in the history of Music City. Josie Wells flourished during a period in which Nashville's African American community groaned under the weight and restrictions placed upon their lives by Jim Crow, and she asserted and made a name for herself in areas historically dominated by men.

Wells graduated from Meharry Medical College in 1904, eleven years after Georgia E. L. Patton became the first woman to earn a degree from the institution. Wells' matriculation through the college differed from Patton's, however, as she was pregnant and gave birth to a daughter, Alma, the year before she earned her medical degree. The timing of Alma's birth may have contributed to Wells' concern for the plight of women and children throughout the remainder of her life. Her graduation also coincided with the rise of the Colored Women's Club Movement in the city. Although she was active in many of the clubs around Nashville, including the Phyllis Wheatley Club and Federation of Women's Clubs, the two that demanded most of her attention were the Day Home Club, operated by her close friend Nettie Langston Napier, and the Hubbard Hospital Club, the group she organized and led.

The Day Home Club was the creation of Nettie Langston Napier, the preservationist responsible for saving Frederick Douglass' Washington D.C. home and wife of arguably Nashville's most famous African American citizen, James C. Napier. The Day Home provided services for working mothers and their children. Josie Wells' participation in the Day Home Club allowed healthcare to be listed among the much-needed services provided for this group at little or no cost. Throughout its existence, the Day Home Club sought to serve Nashville's most underserved population. The Hubbard Hospital Club attempted to foster community investment in the new hospital after it opened in 1910. To accomplish this, Wells organized lavish gatherings at her 1205 Second Avenue South home and other homes around Nashville's African American community to bring attention to the hospital and its constant need of financial support. Indeed, for much of her life, Wells' name became synonymous with Hubbard Hospital.

Josie Wells' influence went beyond merely raising awareness of and seeking funding for the hospital. Indeed, she was influential in its day-to-day operations and the training of new doctors and nurses. Noted physician Charles V. Roman remembered that Wells had worked as both a nurse and physician which contributed to her having "her own ideas of how a hospital should be run." These ideas

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and her refusal to allow the hospital to receive what she deemed to be unfair treatment sometimes placed her at odds with other notable doctors on staff, including the venerable Robert F. Boyd and the brilliant surgeon, John T. Wilson. Nonetheless, she continued to work with these men in a professional manner despite their differences as demonstrated by her presence as the only woman physician during the free annual surgeries offered to the community by Meharry when Dr. Daniel Hale Williams visited Nashville. After the untimely death of Robert F. Boyd in 1912, she would assume a leadership role in the hospital and become Meharry's president, George W. Hubbard's, chief administrative advisor.

Without doubt, Wells' work at the hospital, Meharry Medical College, the Day Home Club, and her duties as a single parent required a great deal of her time. Nevertheless, she accomplished some of her most satisfying work in her private practice. Wells believed as more women earned medical degrees they would increasingly become the primary care physicians for women throughout America. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that when she finally opened up her first doctor's office—located at 411 Fourth Avenue North—her business card stated that she specialized in diseases affecting women and children. Wells' practice stood out as a result of her reputation as a physician who was willing to try the latest practices, such as diet, hygiene, and other preventative measures to improve her patients' health. The location of her office also made her stand out among her peers in the city. When she first opened her doors to the Nashville community, her Fourth Avenue address made her the only woman in the city to have an office in downtown Nashville.

Josie Wells' desire to explore and utilize new and alternative forms of therapy contributed to her involvement with Lottie Isabell Blake and the Rock City Sanitarium, a forerunner to Nashville's Riverside Hospital. The sanitarium boasted that it was not a hospital, but the institution described itself as being "a quiet health home that offered treatment for nervousness and other chronic diseases." Patients at the Sanitarium could receive electric therapy, massages, sprays, and hydrotherapy as treatment but "no drugs." Rest, relaxation, and recuperation were the guiding principles of the Rock City Sanitarium during Wells and Blake's tenure at the institution.

Nashville's African American community received the sad news of Dr. Josie Wells passing on the evening of March 20, 1921. With her passing, Meharry lost a visionary teacher and administrator, and the city lost one of its greatest advocates for universal and accessible healthcare for all its citizens regardless of their race or class. Wells was laid to rest under a magnolia tree in Nashville's Greenwood Cemetery with a headstone that reads: "Forgetful of self she gave her life for others."

Learotha Williams Jr.

Further Reading:

Charles Victor Roman, *Meharry Medical College: A History*. Nashville, Tenn.: Sunday School Publishing Board of the National Baptist Convention, Inc., 1934.

Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee

LYNCHING IN DAVIDSON COUNTY, TENNESSEE: 1892-1924

Between 1889 and 1968, more than 3,437 lynching of Blacks were documented in the United States. Public lynching was designed to inflect terror on people for generations. The first hanging of an African American in Nashville was in 1841 when an enslaved man was hanged for murdering his master. After the Supreme Court decision *Plessey v. Ferguson*, which established a "Jim Crow" system of separate but equal treatment in the country, racism increased. During the 1890s, lynchingS increased and reached its peak period. This decade became the period in which whites sought desperately and definitely to "put the Negro in his place." In Tennessee, between 1882 and 1951, forty-seven whites and two hundred and four blacks were lynched, both men and women. Lynching claimed 235 mostly black lives during the year 1892 alone. Never was a white lynched by a black Tennessean.

Four known lynchings took place in Davidson County between 1892 and 1924. At least three more took place before 1892. David Jones was taken from the county jail on First Avenue on March 25, 1872, hung from a lamp post in public square and shot. Joe Reed was also taken from the county jail, on April 30, 1875, suspended from the Woodland Street Bridge and shot. An unknown man, caught in the act of burglary on Fifth Avenue in Germantown on June 9, 1877, was taken from police custody by a mob to the overlooking by the Cumberland River, where he was allegedly shot and thrown into the river. Those involved claimed it was a hoax and that no one was killed. We have no way of knowing if there were other lynchings that were not reported in newspapers at the time.

The most well-known lynching in Nashville actually started in Goodlettsville, near the Sumner County line. Brothers Henry and Ephraim Grizzard, along with several others, were accused of robbing a home at gun point and later returning to rape two white girls in their mother's home. Although the girls failed to identify him, Henry allegedly confessed to the local sheriff. A mob soon formed, and Henry Gizzard was taken across Mansker's Creek into Sumner County where he was hung from a tree with a sign attached to his chest that read: "Death to anyone who cuts this body down before twelve o'clock tonight." The other accused men were taken to the Nashville jail. All were eventually cleared of charges, except for Ephraim. A huge mob of "well-to-do, respectable citizens" stormed the jail with a sledgehammer, unlocked the cell and took Eph outside. With no clear description of the accused, several inmates were attacked in the search for him. Eph had been dressed in a women's disguise, because the authorities had planned to sneak him out of town. Nevertheless, Eph was dragged to the Woodland Street Bridge where he was hanged and shot hundreds of times. Like his brother, a sign was placed on his chest, not to remove it from his body. Whites would pass by and jingle the rope in order to make the black man's body dance like a "lumber jack." The entire incident took less than half an

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hour, but made headlines in the Banner newspaper for days, justifying the lynching. Frederick Douglass joined Black Nashville leaders expressing shock and disgust of the events. Douglass spoke at Spruce Street Baptist Church denouncing the breakdown of "law in order" in Nashville. Yet no one was arrested, and no anti-lynching laws were passed by the United States Congress, despite the efforts of activist like Ide B. Wells and black Congressman George Henry White, who introduced a bill to make lynching a federal crime.

Another lynching in 1892 received far less national attention, though it was still reported in Nashville and was an example of whites taking the law into their own hands in an effort to keep African Americans in line. On December 14, 1892, Emma O'Bryan was allegedly attacked by an unknown man while he was working for her father at their house in Bellevue. After the attack, the man fled and Mrs. O'Bryan informed the girl's father, who gathered a mob of men who began searching for the man. They searched throughout the night and, according to a December 16 newspaper article, the unknown man was caught and hung, and his body cremated.

The final lynching in this time period was that of fifteen-year-old Samuel Smith on December 14, 1924. Lengthy details of the events leading up to the arrest and hanging of Sam where reported in the Nashville Banner. Sam's brother, Eugene Smith, had been injured in an altercation with a white rural merchant named Ike Eastwood, who was also wounded. Sheriff Bob Briley decided not to pursue the incident when Eastwood's injuries proved not to be serious while Eugene's would probably be fatal. Nevertheless, the young Samuel was arrested and charged with assault with a pistol with intent to commit murder, after seeking "help" from Eastwood's neighbor. A wounded Sam was taken to Nashville General Hospital where he was abducted by a masked mob of whites. Nurse Amy Weagle tried to hide the young man when the mob was searching for him. He was driven to a tree near the Davidson/ Williamson County line—on Old Burkitt Road—where he was stripped, hung from a tree, and shot at repeatedly. About thirty parked vehicles were reported at the scene of the crime. Prominent local citizens condemned the lynching and requested Governor Austin Peay and Sheriff Briley to identify and punish the perpetrators. The news articles reported "State Moves against Mob: criminal judge charge grand jury to investigate conspiracy." On December 15, 7,000 gathered to protest and collected $5,000 toward legal expenses and cash rewards to informants. The Chamber of Commerce retained the firm of Thomas & Cummings to prosecute. Yet, racism and maintaining the status quo prevailed, and not a single conviction was ever obtained in the lynching of young Samuel Smith.

On June 19, 2019, a historical marking commemorating the Grizzard brother's lynchings was placed near the Woodland Street Bridge. That same day, a marker was also dedicated further down First Avenue, near the site of the old jail, to commemorate the lynchings of David Jones and Joe Reed. In 2017, the Episcopal Diocese of Tennessee in collaboration with Lipscomb University's Christian Scholar formed the "Beloved Community: Commission on Racial Reconciliation." Their research on lynching resulted in 2019 pilgrimages to The National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama, which is dedicated to the legacy of lynching in the United States, as well as the placement of a marker for Nashville lynching victims on the grounds of St. Anselm Episcopal Church in North Nashville.

Gloria McKissack

Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee

"WHEN AND WHERE I ENTER": THE 19TH AMENDMENT AND AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN

In the summer of 1920, the state of Tennessee captured the attention of the nation, as those who favored women gaining the right of the franchise (suffragists) and those who opposed women gaining the right of the franchise (anti-suffragists) descended upon the Volunteer State to campaign for their respective positions. The Tennessee General Assembly was poised to consider ratifying the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, giving women the right to vote. Thirty-five of the thirty-six states needed had ratified the amendment. Eight states rejected the amendment and five states had taken no action. Most southern states rejected the woman's suffrage amendment because of the bigoted and racialist calculation that the entitlement would also include African American women. Anti-suffragists used this same reasoning in Tennessee. Suffragists considered Tennessee as their last and best chance for ratification before the presidential election of 1920. If Tennessee ratified the amendment, approximately 27 million women would be eligible to cast a ballot in the next presidential election. Governor Albert H. Roberts called a special session of the General Assembly on August 9, 1920 to consider the issue of women and the vote. However, the road to the 19th Amendment to the U. S. Constitution began long before its ratification. It was the culmination of almost a century of activism, agitation, and protest for woman's suffrage.

The right to vote had been an issue at variance with America's founding principles since its beginning when those who penned the lofty document wrote "We the People." It is impossible to commemorate the centennial of women's suffrage without looking at the sesquicentennial of the 15th Amendment to the United States Constitution, which was ratified February 3, 1870, giving African American men the vote, and its impact on both the pro and anti-suffragists. It is important to emphasize that from the beginning, African Americans, both women and men, were involved in the almost century-long struggle to gain the right of the franchise for women.

During the early 19th century, African Americans and white women organized around the abolition movement. Bostonian Maria Stewart, a pioneering African American activist and the first woman to speak before a mix-gendered audience, spoke out for both the rights of African Americans and women. On July 19–20, 1848, in Seneca Falls, New York at the first women's rights convention in the United States, Elizabeth Cady Stanton waged her discontent by rewording the most famous phrasing in the American political creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident. That all men and women are created equal." She further proposed a resolution that called for women's right of the franchise. One of the few men and the only African American to attend the Seneca Falls Convention, universal suffragist Frederick Douglass supported Stanton and her call to giving women the right to vote. He argued that "the ballot was the guarantor of all other rights, the key to liberty, and women must be bold." Formerly enslaved, Douglass described himself as a "Women's Rights Man." He knew first-hand the injustices superimposed upon the enslaved and understood that women, like free and enslaved African Americans, were all constrained by American law and custom. Douglass remained committed to women gaining the right to vote throughout his life even when consternation began to stir with the pending passage of the 15th Amendment that gave African American men the vote.

Three years after the Seneca Falls convention, on May 29, 1851, Sojourner Truth (formerly known as just Isabella or Isabella Baumfree), an abolitionist and formerly enslaved black woman, addressed a Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio. Her address has often been referred to as "Ain't I A Woman." However, this speech was written and published in 1863, twelve years after Truth gave the "Ain't I A Woman" speech, by a white abolitionist named Frances Dana Barker Gage. She not only changed all of Truth's words but represented her speaking in a stereotypical 'southern black slave accent', rather than Truth's distinctive upper New York State low-Dutch accent. The most authentic version of Sojourner Truth's, "Ain't I A Woman," speech was first published in 1851 by Truth's good

This publication is a project of the 2020 Nashville Conference on African American History and Culture. The author compiled the information. The Metropolitan Historical Commission edited and designed the materials.

friend the Rev. Marius Robinson in the Anti-Slavery Bugle and was titled, “On Woman’s Rights.”

The American Civil War disrupted the woman’s suffrage movement as many continued championing the abolition of enslavement. Once the war ended, and as talk of the 14th and 15th Amendments increased, many women hoped to be granted the same rights of citizenship that would be granted to those previously enslaved. The Fourteenth Amendment, Section 2 added the first mention of gender into the Constitution, which stipulated that all male citizens over twenty-one years of age should have access to the ballot. Simply stated, the 14th Amendment defined "Citizens" and "voters" exclusively as male. Later, Congress passed the 15th Amendment, which was ratified February 3, 1870. It granted African American men the right to vote and caused consternation among women who had sought the right of the franchise. Throughout the 19th century, the “woman question” was at the core of movements against enslavement and for civil rights. By the end of second decade of the 20th century, Nashville, the state of Tennessee, and woman’s suffrage captured center stage. Almost from the beginning, woman’s suffrage was entangled with the issue of race and this entanglement played out in Nashville, fifty-five years after the Civil War’s last battle. Despite racism being front and center in Nashville among both the suffragists and the anti-suffragists, African American women were among those who favored women having the right to vote.

Unlike white women activists, who often created their own institutions separate from men, African American women often organized within already existing institutions—churches, political organizations, mutual aid societies, and schools. The first convention of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW—founded in 1896) held its first convention in Nashville in 1897. Nettie Langston Napier (wife of J. C. Napier) served as treasurer of the national organization. Other members included Minnie Lou Crosthwaite, Dr. Josie E. Wells, Dr. Mattie E. Coleman, Juno Frankie Pierce, Hattie S. Jackson (wife of the Rev. G. L. Jackson), and Georgia Bradford Boyd (wife of Henry Allen Boyd). These women not only enjoyed local support but also through such organizations as the NACW and with African American communities in Tuskegee, Atlanta, and Washington, D.C. By 1919, as people in Tennessee worked for or against becoming the 36th state to ratify the 19th Amendment, the suffrage movement was mostly segregated, especially in the Jim Crow South. However, during a meeting of white women in Nashville, which Coleman was asked to attend, she offered support for the reforms of white activists and reminded them that “12,000 negro [sic] of the state are organized and are seeking a vocational school for their girls.”

African American women's clubs worked with white women’s clubs on several social issues, and these connections promoted an association in Nashville on women’s suffrage. African American worked with the white suffrage organizations to get out the vote in the 1919 municipal elections. During that year they helped to get 2,500 African American women to vote in the city's first election in which black women were eligible to vote. The chair of the Tennessee Equal Suffrage League, Catherine Kenny, was awed with Pierce’s organizational skills and invited her to address the first convention of the Tennessee League of Women Voters in the State Capitol’s lower chamber in May 1920. “What will the Negro women do with the vote?” the daughter of a free father and an enslaved mother, asked her audience. “We will stand by the white women…We are asking only one thing–a square deal…We want recognition in all forms of this government. We want a state vocational school and a child welfare department of the state, and more room in state schools.” The League adopted the school as part of its legislative agenda and lobbied extensively for its passage and realization. Through their actions, African American women echoed Anna Julia Cooper’s declaration “When and where I enter...then and there the whole Negro race enters with me.”

After the resolution passed the Tennessee State Senate, both suffragists and anti-suffragists desperately lobbied to secure votes in the House of Representatives where the vote was close. Representative Harry T. Burn of Niota changed his vote in support ratification, thereby breaking a tie in the House of Representatives and subsequently making history. The Tennessee General Assembly ratified the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution on August 18, 1920. Opponents worked to rescind the ratification vote on constitutional technicalities. Some anti-suffrage legislators even fled the state in an attempt to prevent a quorum in the General Assembly. Their efforts failed. On August 24, 1920, Governor Albert H. Roberts certified Tennessee’s ratification of the 19th Amendment. Two days later, U. S. Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby issued a proclamation that officially declared the ratification of the 19th Amendment and made it part of the United States Constitution. Tennessee provided the 36th and final state needed to ratify the amendment to the U.S. Constitution that gave women the right to vote.

The passage and ratification of the 19th Amendment did not guarantee African American the right of the franchise as racial segregation and Jim Crow laws prevented many African American women from voting. It would take the civil rights crusades of the 1960s before African American women realized full suffrage through the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

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